Research Statement

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I primarily work in *ethics* and *philosophy of religion*.

My research in **ethics** centers on theories of well-being and their impact. A theory of well-being is a theory of what is good *for* individuals, in other words, a theory of self-interest. Well-being is worth studying in its own right, but it also plays a pivotal role in normative ethics, theories of the good life, and philosophical discussions of the meaning of life. I am particularly interested in the distinction between subjective and objective theories of well-being and the relationship between theories of well-being and theories of the good life. I also have a developing interest in the effects of emerging technologies on human well-being.

I am currently developing a subjective theory of well-being that identifies faring well with self-fulfillment and pleasure. This view contrasts with the family of (broadly) Aristotelian theories—often called eudaimonism or perfectionism—that tie well-being to flourishing as the *kind* of thing one is. My theory, on the other hand, focuses on the flourishing of one’s *individual* or *particular* nature. I further argue that nature-fulfillment theories, even self-fulfillment ones, cannot satisfactorily explain the goodness of pleasure or badness of pain (see my [writing sample](https://chrislholland.com/writing-sample.html) for a defense of this claim). This leads me to identify well-being with self-fulfillment and pleasure, rather than self-fulfillment alone.

I am also interested in the relationship between theories of well-being and theories of the good life. Many philosophers, especially virtue ethicists, lump the two together, but they are at least conceptually distinct. Consider a wealthy antebellum slave owner who enjoys a rich home and social life but cares little about the harsh working conditions of their slaves. Pretheoretically, this looks like a case in which one increases their well-being at a cost to the overall goodness of their life—my work on well-being aims to preserve this intuition. If I want to live a good life—a life that is choice-worthy on the whole—I will likely have to make sacrifices to my own well-being.

Finally, I have explored the effects of emerging technologies on human well-being in my [Computer Ethics](https://chrislholland.com/phil3050x/) course. The course address-es a broad range of ethical issues related to digital technologies, but I am most interested in the future of automation. For example, tech companies such as OpenAI are interested in producing “highly autonomous systems that outperform humans at most economically valuable work” ([OpenAI Charter](https://openai.com/charter/)). I aim to assess the desirability of this outcome for human well-being in future work.

My research in **philosophy of religion** is divided between issues in Christian philosophical theology and issues in theism, broadly construed. Most Christian philosophers working on well-being advance objective theories, but my dissertation, “Well-being and Christian Theism,” proposes a subjective theory of well-being. Objective theories tend to alienate welfare subjects from their own good. I argue that my theory better addresses alienation concerns without compromising Christian doctrinal claims—most notably, that human persons are best off in union with God. (For more details, see my [dissertation summary](https://chrislholland.com/dissertation-summary.html) and [chapter 1 draft](https://chrislholland.com/dissertation-ch1-draft.html).) I also work on more traditional problems in philosophy of religion. Here, my work tends to focus on the problem of evil and the coherence of theism.