

My research is about what it means for agency to be *unified* or *integrated*, both at a time and over time. What does it mean for a person to be "whole," for the various facets of her agency—her desires, intentions, projects, and changing self-conception over time—to be integrated so that she is "one"? How should we understand integrity as an ideal for agency, given that even the most put together of us experience disunity and incoherence? Questions like these motivate my research, which spans ethics, philosophy of action, and social philosophy. The central insight of my research is that, as much as we (are right to) strive to integrate our agency and make ourselves coherent, integrity comes at a cost. A lot of what it means to be an agent—to be good at being a person—is finding ways to cope with these costs.

In the short term, I aim to publish the three papers outlined in my dissertation abstract:

1. PRACTICAL DEATH (Thesis: when an agent violates her core commitments, she experiences a cluster of psychological and physiological symptoms called "practical death" that threaten her autonomous agency. The phenomenon of practical death ought to inform our understanding of integrity.)
2. STARTING ANEW (Thesis: after a period of turmoil or depression, people often express a desire to "start anew" and pursue experiences that facilitate "practical restructuring." Like practical death, the experience of starting anew ought to inform our understanding of integrity.)
3. RESOLUTIONS AND NORMATIVE POWERS (Thesis: when an agent resolves to  $\phi$ , she incurs an additional reason to  $\phi$  over and above the reasons that led her to resolve to  $\phi$  in the first place.)

I am currently working on four papers that develop themes in ethics and agency explored in my dissertation, and two papers in aesthetics. Below are brief summaries of these papers.

#### ETHICS AND AGENCY

SELF-GOVERNANCE AND OTHER PEOPLE looks to psychology and sociology to show that an agent's capacity for self-governance is not simply a matter of her self-constitution, but of the strength of her social network. There is nothing new about the claim that strong social networks are required for human flourishing—it has long been known that social interaction is crucial for our mental and physical health. My interest, however, is specifically in how social networks shield us from forces that threaten to fracture our agency and thereby enable *self-governance*. I use case studies as a foundation for my discussion. One study considers how American soldiers in the Vietnam War who became addicted to heroin were overwhelmingly able to curb their

addictions upon returning home far more quickly than is typical for heroin addiction. The study suggests that in an important range of cases, one's susceptibility to addiction may be less matter of the addictiveness of drugs than the security of one's environment and the strength of one's social network. Contrary to the etymology of "integrity" (from the Latin *in-* meaning "not" and *tangere* meaning "to touch") which suggests that integrity is purely a matter of one's "untouched" self-constitution, the case studies I consider suggest that integrity is, in an important sense, a social matter. I conclude that protecting an agent's integrity and capacity for self-governance will frequently involve strengthening her relationships to others.

CAN CONSENT BE IRREVOCABLE? argues that morally valid consent (consent, that is, which succeeds in generating a moral permission) must be revocable; in other words, irrevocable consent—consent we try to give when we say, "I give you consent to  $\phi$ , *no matter what I say later*"—is never morally valid. I offer two arguments for this conclusion. On the argument from informed consent, irrevocable consent is never morally valid because it can never be sufficiently informed. While promising, the argument from informed consent obscures what is uniquely problematic about irrevocable consent because it reduces the invalidity of irrevocable consent to the invalidity of under-informed consent. Next, I turn to the argument from agential authority, on which irrevocable consent can never be morally valid because we do not have the diachronic agential authority to strip our future selves of the ability to revoke consent. On my view, when one's consent amounts to illicitly binding oneself to a future course of action—that is, when one's consent fails to take into account one's future self's "normative perspective"—that consent fails to generate a moral permission.

PROCRASTINATION AND SELF-MANAGEMENT provides a survey of different forms of procrastination and uses them as case studies for an account of self-management: the ability to unify one's agency and carry out one's plans in the face of temptation, shifting preferences, and other interruptions. I distinguish between three forms of procrastination, each characterized by a distinct form of instrumental reasoning. *Idle* procrastination involves failing to take the means to one's ends until it is too late to accomplish one's ends; *overactive* procrastination involves taking too many means to one's ends, such that accomplishing one's ends is impossible; and *productive* procrastination involves putting off taking steps to one's ends by working on other projects. I use my analyses of these forms of procrastination and the failures/successes of instrumental reasoning they represent to provide an account of self-management. On my view, self-management involves identifying a set of goals and commitments that represent what one cares about most to serve as a "manager" of one's actions over time. I connect my account of self-management to the deep-self view of moral responsibility, which likewise relies on the idea that a particular perspective can represent who one "truly is."

SAFE LOVE discusses a tension in the way we think about contingency and conditionality in our loving relationships. On one hand, contingency and conditions appear to be incompatible with love. Although no reasonable person thinks that true love must be *unconditional*, there is an intuition that true love must endure *most* conditions. For instance, it's hard to say that a parent

who disowns their child for being gay ever truly loved their child, or that a couple who breaks up when faced with a short period of long distance was ever truly in love. This suggests that there is a *safety condition on love*: an agent loves someone only if she could not have easily not loved them. On the other hand, there is an intuition that the contingency of our relationships—the fact that we love *this* person, out of all the millions of people we might otherwise have fallen in love with—makes our relationships all the more dear. The aim of this paper is to provide an account of our attitudes toward contingency and conditionality in our loving relationships that makes sense of these apparently conflicting judgments.

## AESTHETICS

In addition to papers in ethics and agency, I am working on a number of papers in aesthetics. I have a longstanding interest in aesthetics (I majored in architecture in college and have never been able to shake off my love for the arts!). Below are summaries of two of my aesthetics papers.

COUNTERFACTUAL REASONING IN ART CRITICISM provides an account of the explanatory mechanisms underlying evaluations of artworks that take as objects *hypothetical variations* of those works—evaluations, that is, such as "the effect of Kara Walker's sugar sphinx *A Subtlety* would completely change if it were made out of clay, plaster, or even some other substance like chocolate, rather than granulated sugar." I argue that counterfactual claims about artworks involve a special kind of comparative judgment between actual works and hypothetical works, where the hypothetical works are just like the actual ones in some but not all respects. Because counterfactual reasoning in art criticism involves aesthetic judgments about hypothetical artworks one has not actually perceived, it puts pressure on the *acquaintance principle*: a longstanding tenet in aesthetics on which aesthetic judgments must be made on the basis of a perceptual encounter with its object. I argue that accepting the validity of counterfactual reasoning in art criticism requires amending the acquaintance principle.

PRETENTIOUSNESS argues that pretentiousness ought not be analyzed in terms of *pretense*, but *accessibility*: pretentiousness involves a lack of concern for making one's work accessible to others. Many different forms of accessibility are relevant here. There is physical accessibility (e.g., painting as an art form tends to be considered more pretentious than film because it is harder to distribute and share), financial accessibility (e.g., art locked away in museums that charge a steep admissions fee is considered more pretentious than open art exhibits), and conceptual accessibility (e.g., avant-garde art is considered more pretentious than representational art because it is harder to understand). Thinking about pretentiousness in terms of accessibility explains why it is morally objectionable: pretentiousness is exclusionary, a mechanism used by an "initiated" group (in this case, the art-initiated) to hoard valuable experiences and insights (in this case, those afforded by artworks). When members of an initiated group are pretentious, they create barriers that prevent outsiders from enjoying the value of their activity. I conclude by discussing some reasons why fields such as art and philosophy appear to be especially susceptible to accusations of pretentiousness.