

RESEARCH STATEMENT

I first outline my research project in epistemology, then my project in philosophical theology. After this, I will explain what integrates these two projects.

In the 1980s, epistemology faced an impasse between traditional internalist approaches to the justification of belief and new externalist approaches. While internalists like BonJour held that justification is fixed by internal factors such as beliefs, experiences, and what is accessible to reflection, externalists like Armstrong and Dretske held that external factors such as reliability and causal relations to the environment also make a difference to justification. By 1988, Goldman suggested we have two independently interesting notions of justification, one amenable to internalist analysis and the other not. Fast forwarding to the present, the gulf between internalists and externalists is even wider. For the many externalists influenced by Williamsonian views, on which knowledge is an unanalyzable mental state in terms of which properties like justification are to be understood, it is doubtful whether there is anything interesting left about which internalism could be true. But internalists still hold that externalism is missing something important.

With my sympathies on the side of internalism, I seek to break up this impasse. A central component of my approach is a new argument for a kind of internalism about blameworthiness. Another is an account of the nature of belief, one which makes room for an analysis of justification of belief in terms of its relationship to blameworthiness. The overall result is a motivation for epistemic internalism which is driven by contemporary action theory and philosophy of mind while being, at the same time, a vindication of an idea arguably traceable to Descartes and Locke. This is the idea that justification is internal because it is to be analyzed in terms of its relationship to blameworthiness.

I present my argument for internalism about blameworthiness in “Blameworthiness, Control, and Consciousness *Or A Consciousness Requirement and an Argument For It*” (published in *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*). According to this argument, one is blameworthy only if she exercises control in a way distinctive of persons. But an exercise of control is a response to reasons, and a response to reasons is distinctive of persons only if one is conscious of the relevant reasons. This engagement with a core concern in action theory yields the upshot that whether it is blameworthy for one to do something is fixed by what one is conscious of at the time. And this means it is fixed by what is internal, in a sense of ‘what is internal’ which I clarify in my “Accessibilism Defined” (published in *Episteme*).

In “Belief and Activity” (in preparation), I develop an account on which belief is an exercise of control. More specifically, I develop a new account on which outright belief is irreducible to degrees of confidence, an account on which outright belief in p is grounded in an extended activity of organizing one’s attention in one’s reasoning as if p is true. This focus on the nature of belief, a central concern in the philosophy of mind, results in a picture on which outright belief can be as much an exercise of control as paradigmatic actions. And if this is right, we should expect the justification of outright belief to be amenable to analysis in terms of its relationship to blameworthiness.

How do the epistemological inquiries just described connect to philosophical theology? Well, my analysis of outright belief relies on the notion of a certain kind of *extended activity*. Among extended activities, some have only a single aspect: *balancing an egg on a spoon* may extend for hours, but it has no part at which the egg is not balanced on the spoon. Other extended activities, though, center on certain aspects but appear to include parts during they do not obtain. Writing a book centers on aspects like writing the next paragraph, but an author pausing to eat lunch *still* counts as writing a book at that time. Now, as believing *p* at a time does not require any conscious reasoning involving *p* at that time, it is, on my account, grounded in an activity akin to writing a book in that the aspects it centers on are not necessary conditions on its parts. And it occurred to me that the notion of an extended activity of precisely *this* kind could shed light on a puzzle traceable to church fathers like Origen and Augustine, a puzzle discussed to this day in pastoral and theological contexts.

This is the puzzle of why Paul commands us to “pray without ceasing” (1 Th. 5:17), given that doing so seems impossible. According to how I clarify the puzzle in “Do we need an account of prayer to address the problem for praying without ceasing?” (published in *Religious Studies*), an imperative is incorrect unless one ought to obey it. And one ought to do something only if one can do it. But, so the worry goes, we cannot pray without ceasing. Or, at least, given our limitations and other responsibilities, we cannot do so without there being adequately weighty reasons against doing so. If, though, praying is an extended activity of the kind identified – one centered on certain aspects, like speaking and listening to God, which are *not* necessary conditions on its parts – perhaps we *can* pray without ceasing, after all. If so, better understanding of such activities would shed light on what it takes to pray without ceasing.

But we cannot simply assume praying is an extended activity of this kind. Indeed, according to an account of prayer I develop in “What is Prayer that We Might Pray Without Ceasing?” (in preparation), prayer is, plausibly, *communication with God*. Perhaps communicating requires speaking or listening at the time, in which case the aspects praying centers on are also conditions on its parts. But, even so, praying without ceasing might still be feasible in view of the possibility that we can listen for another person in the *periphery* of our consciousness, to develop a suggestion from *The Way of a Pilgrim*. As I explore in “Praying Without Ceasing and Flow Experiences” (in preparation), though, whether this suggestion works depends on a certain question about what Csikszentmihalyi calls *flow* experiences, i.e., experiences of total absorption in an activity. This is the question of whether among flow experiences are desirable ones which monopolize conscious experience to the point that even peripheral listening for God is pushed out. And this question depends, among other things, on the structure of peripheral consciousness and the nature of well-being.

I was once asked what epistemology could possibly have to do with philosophical theology. I have described a vein I’m presently enjoying excavating. But surely this mine is rich. Jesus said, “this is eternal life, that they *know*” God (Jn. 17:3, italics mine). What is epistemology if it cannot illumine the *knowledge* at issue here? To do this, though, is *ipso facto* for philosophy to be done in the service of theology.