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Statement of Research
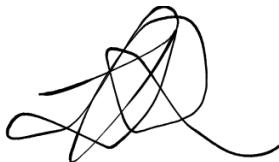
Keywords: belief; character; metaphilosophy.

My proposed research can be divided into two categories. The first is developing and applying a novel metaphilosophical approach on the methodology of philosophising, and applying this approach to puzzles philosophical debates. The second is research in the philosophy of mind on the nature of belief and its relationship to character traits and personality.

The first category concerns the development of a metaphilosophical methodology I call *receptivism*. This is the view that to do good philosophy, one ought to be receptive to what I call 'pre-formalized notions': propositions in simple language, uncommitted to only a particular formalisation, that have a truth-priority over the formalised notion. It is these pre-formalised notions that drive philosophical debate, thus, they must be addressed and one ought to be *receptive* to the truth of such notions if they are to do their due philosophical diligence. The general idea—inspired by Plato, Gödel, Carnap, Quine, Putnam—is that the correct approach to solving difficult philosophical problems is to engage with all the pre-formal notions that drive the debate. For instance, a chapter of my dissertation argues that traditional solutions to the problem of evil are misguided because they are framed around changing the premises of the contradiction without addressing the pre-formalised notions that motivate the problem. Another example is an idea defended by advocates of a B theory of time: the idea that past, present, and future all exist at once. Philosophers in this tradition have always considered it crucial that we explain why we perceive the flow of time. They are committed to accounting for the pre-formalised statement 'time seems to flow'. We would consider them remiss in their philosophical duties if they ignored this pre-formal notion. Receptivism is an experimental account that I will develop further, and has the potential to advance the philosophical dialectic in a number of fields. I have already partially tested the theory's application in several papers. These include application to the following subjects: physicalism (revise and resubmit with *Synthese*), belief (revise and resubmit with *Erkenntnis*), Kripke's modal argument and possibility-to-actuality (under review), how to solve a paradox (under review), forgiveness (under review), the problem of evil, and platonism and theism. My research would involve formalising and strengthening this methodology and applying to new philosophical debates.

Under the second category falls an interest in a research project that would involve a philosophical investigation of character traits and personality. Although much work has been done

in psychology on delineating character traits, and in moral and political psychology on how our beliefs, psychology, and character traits affect our behaviour, almost no research has focused on what personality and character traits *are*, nor what the philosophical implications of their characterisation is for philosophy of mind. What is their relationship to beliefs, dispositions, memories? Are character traits context-sensitive and malleable, or are they robust and unyielding? How do character traits inform our understanding of free will? How do character affect moral and ethical theories? These are the questions I seek to answer through a series of articles. In doing so, I will be engaging in novel research, but I will also be expanding upon my existing work on the nature of belief and political psychology, and the lower limits of mentality. For instance, a chapter of my dissertation asks if religious beliefs differ in any interesting way from other kinds of belief. I argue that they do not, for although the content of religious belief is different, and sometimes so is the function, religious beliefs are still mental, dispositional attitudes that aim to provide a correct representation of the world. Therefore, religious beliefs are best understood as a sub-category of what I call standard beliefs, alongside ordinary and non-ordinary beliefs. Another chapter explores the lower limits of mentality; whether it is fundamental, whether there are borderline cases such as with plants, and what the correct tools for determining answers to these questions are. I believe that philosophy of personality and character traits deserves a Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy entry, and yet there is very little philosophical work on it. I intend to change this by the end of my appointment.

By this research I intend to make novel contributions to the field of metaphysics, metaphilosophy, philosophy of religion, philosophy of mind, and beyond, on topics that are contentious and interesting to the general public. To sum up my research, I am interested in exploring the issue of *how* we ought to make philosophical progress.

Liam