

Research Statement – Nate W. Olson

My research focuses around the ways in which our relationships and commitments, whether personal, professional, or political, affect what we owe each other. My dissertation addressed the personal relationships we share with friends and family members. In it, I argued for a novel approach that grounds our obligations to our friends and family members in the duty to respect them as co-participants in valuable relationships. I also defended the idea that the value of relationships is affected by both subjective factors, like participants mutually valuing a relationship, and objective ones, like a relationship being ethically permissible to value. In so doing, I provided theoretical support for obligations that play a central role in commonsense morality but that have long been philosophically puzzling.

Since completing my dissertation, I have continued to develop my work on relationships in two directions. First, in the past year, I have written a series of articles on the issue of ancillary care in medical research. In these articles, I have identified features of the researcher-participant relationship that give researchers obligations to provide ancillary care, or medical care that is outside the scope of research objectives. This is an issue that is particularly important for research in low- and middle-income countries, where participants' health needs may remain unmet if researchers do not attend to them. In an article forthcoming in the *APA Newsletter on Philosophy and Law*, I argue that the researcher-participant relationship exhibits all the main features of a fiduciary relationship and so should be treated as such by the law. In an article under review, I argue for a relationship-based approach to ancillary care that countenances all the morally relevant features of a researcher-participant relationship to determine researchers' ethical obligations. And in a commentary published in the *American Journal of Bioethics*, I argue that the rationale for ancillary care obligations carries over to the context of health systems research.

My work on these articles developed as I attended seminars at the Stanford Center for Biomedical Ethics (SCBE). My connection to SCBE has helped deepen my knowledge of bioethical issues and also given me first-hand experience with clinical ethics issues through attending Stanford Hospital Ethics Committee meetings and ICU rounds. These experiences, as well as my current position as Book Review Editor for the *American Journal of Bioethics*, have prepared me to write on a wider range of bioethical issues in the future. Some of the issues that interest me, such as how the obligations of the “citizen scientists” involved in crowd-sourced research differ from those of traditional scientists, are directly tied to my past work on relationships, while others, such as the norms that should govern the allocation of organs, are a step removed. Transplant ethics, in particular, interests me as a jumping-off point into research on issues where norms of impartiality trump the particularities of personal relationships.

In my second line of research, I am refining the ideas I laid out in my dissertation to further investigate the place of relationships in ethical theory. One article in preparation, “Turning Respect Toward Relationships,” adapted from my dissertation, argues for my respect-based approach to our obligations for our friends and family members. In a second article, “Partiality and the Moral Value of Relationships,” I extend my discussion of relationships to the more general issue of partiality and identify both subjective and objective sources of value for relationships. I also addressed the issue of partiality in a recent review of Simon Keller’s *Partiality* for the journal *Ethics*. In the future, I plan to address other dimensions of partiality. For instance, my respect-based approach to relationship-based responsibilities is well suited to taking a fresh look at the place of partiality in global ethics and justice. Here, as elsewhere, by examining the normative contours of our relationships, I hope to enrich our understanding of the moral force of partiality and impartiality alike.