

Sophie Gibert

sgibert@mit.edu | sophiegibert.com | (303) 552-6258

AREAS OF SPECIALIZATION

Ethics, Philosophy of Action, Bioethics

AREAS OF COMPETENCE

Ethics of Technology, Political Philosophy

EDUCATION

Ph.D. in Philosophy – Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2018-2024 (expected)

Dissertation: “Ethics and the Limits of Autonomy”

Committee: Kieran Setiya (chair), Tamar Schapiro, Sally Haslanger

Abstract: How can we permissibly influence other people’s behavior? In my dissertation, I challenge the pervasive idea that wrongful forms of influence are wrong when and because they co-opt our agency, or make our actions less our own. In my view, wrongful influence is wrong not because it reduces how autonomous our actions are, but because it threatens our autonomy in a different sense: it threatens the rights that secure our discretionary sphere, or the domain in which we’re entitled to control what happens—sometimes called our “autonomy rights.” The upshot is radically new accounts of manipulation and paternalism, on which our rights against these forms of influence depend entirely on what other rights we have.

B.A. in Philosophy and in Biology & Society with Honors – Wellesley College, 2012-2016

Summa cum laude, Phi Beta Kappa Junior year election

Thesis: “Paternalism and Health Behavior Change”

EMPLOYMENT

Ethics Pedagogy Fellow, Edmond & Lily Safra Center for Ethics, Harvard, 2022-present

Graduate Student Scholar, Social and Ethical Responsibilities of Computing (SERC), MIT Schwarzman College of Computing, 2022-2023

Graduate Teaching Fellow, Embedded EthiCS @ Harvard, 2021-2022

Co-Director, MIT Experiential Ethics Program, 2021-2022

Assistant Director, MIT Experiential Ethics Program, 2020-2021

Graduate Teaching Fellow, MIT Experiential Ethics Program, Summer 2020

Pre-Doctoral Fellow, Department of Bioethics, National Institutes of Health, 2016-2018

PUBLICATIONS

Gibert S, “The Wrong of Wrongful Manipulation,” *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 2023.

- Featured on the *New Work in Philosophy* blog
- Online discussion on PEA Soup Blog, with precis by Massimo Renzo, December 2023

PUBLICATIONS, continued

Pierson L, Gibert S (co first authors), Berkman B, Danis M, and Millum J, “Allocation of Scarce Biospecimens for Use in Research,” *Journal of Medical Ethics*, 2021.

Gibert S, DeGrazia D, Danis M, “The Ethics of Patient Activation: Exploring its Relation to Personal Responsibility, Autonomy, and Health Disparities,” *Journal of Medical Ethics*, 2017.

Gibert S, “Closed-Loop Deep Brain Stimulation and its Compatibility with Autonomous Agency,” Open Peer Commentary, *American Journal of Bioethics Neuroscience*, 2017.

WORKS IN PROGRESS

Pierson L, Gibert S, Orszag L, Fei Y, Sullivan H, Largent E, and Persad G, “Bioethicists Today: Results of the Views in Bioethics Survey.” (Under review)

TALKS AND PRESENTATIONS (*=refereed)

* “The Ethics of Paternalism,” Paper Presentation at the American Society for Bioethics and the Humanities Annual Meeting (ASBH) – Baltimore, MD, October 2023

“Paternalism: You May only if You Must,” ANU Philosophy Society – Canberra, Australia, August 2023

* “The Reductive View of Manipulation and Why Relationships Matter,” Paper Presentation at the American Society of Bioethics and the Humanities Annual Meeting (ASBH) – Portland, OR, October 2022

“A Right to be Wronged,” MIT Departmental Work in Progress – Cambridge, MA, October 2022

* “Should I Skip the Line? A Decision Framework for Individuals Seeking COVID-19 Vaccination and Other Scarce Health Resources,” with Leah Pierson, Paper Presentation at ASBH – Virtual, October 2021

“Manipulation as a Non-Basic Wrong,” MIT Departmental Work in Progress – Cambridge, MA, May 2021

* “Why Existing Accounts of Manipulation Can’t Settle Debates About Nudging,” Paper Presentation at the Nudging and Moral Responsibility Workshop – Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam, April 2018

* “Who Should Apologize for Medical Errors that Cause Harm?” Paper Presentation at ASBH – Anaheim, CA, October 2018

* “The Ethics of Patient Activation: Understanding its Relation to Personal Responsibility,” Paper Presentation at ASBH – Kansas City, MO, October 2017

FELLOWSHIPS AND GRANTS

Amplify Creative Grant Recipient, Bio(un)ethical Podcast, co-hosted with Leah Pierson, 2023-present

Early Career Women in Philosophy Visiting Program, Australian National University, August 2023

Edna V. Moffett Fellowship, award of \$13,000 toward a first year of graduate study, 2018-2019

TEACHING EXPERIENCE***Program Administration***

Co-Director, MIT Experiential Ethics Program, 2021-2022

- Administered program and recruited students; developed syllabus, lesson plans, and assignments; selected, trained, and supervised interdisciplinary teaching staff; organized events.

Assistant Director, MIT Experiential Ethics Program, 2020-2021

- Participated in administration, course development, and training and advising teaching staff.

TEACHING, continued***Course and Module Development***

Character Development, with Christopher Robichaud, Harvard, 2022-present

“Free Speech and Content Moderation,” with Bradford Skow and Manish Raghavan, Module for SERC, 2022-2023

Experiential Ethics, with Milo Phillips-Brown, Marion Boulicault, and Eliza Wells, MIT, 2020-2022

Teaching Assistantships

Philosophy of Religion, for Jack Spencer, MIT, Spring 2022

Ethics of Technology, for Kevin Mills, MIT, Fall 2021

Minds and Machines, for EJ Green, MIT, Spring 2021

Justice, for Bernardo Zacka, MIT, Fall 2020

Problems of Philosophy, for Miriam Schoenfield, MIT, Fall 2019 (two sections)

Teaching Fellowships

Graduate Teaching Fellow, MIT Experiential Ethics Program, Summer 2020

- Primary instructor for two small discussion groups.

Guest Lectures

“The Learning Healthcare System,” in Ethics of Technology, MIT, Fall 2021

“The Extended Mind,” in Minds and Machines, MIT, 2021

“The Non-Identity Problem,” in Problems of Philosophy, Fall 2019

“Introduction to Medical Ethics: Issues at the End of Life,” with David Miller, in NIH Chaplaincy Internship Program, July 2017

Lectures in Embedded EthiCS

“Differential Privacy in Context,” in Applied Privacy for Data Science, for Salil Vadhan, Harvard, Spring 2022

“Justice in Design,” in Design of Useful and Usable Interactive Systems, for Krzysztof Gajos, Harvard, Spring 2022

“Ethical Tradeoffs in Operating Systems Design: A Look at Cost-Benefit Analysis,” in Operating Systems, for James Mickens, Harvard, Spring 2022

“Algorithmic (Un)fairness,” in Data Science 1: Introduction to Data Science, for Pavlos Protopapas and Natesh Pillai, Harvard, Fall 2021

“Data Privacy,” in Data Systems, for Stratos Idreos, Harvard, Fall 2021

“The Ethics of Hacking Back,” in Systems Security, for James Mickens, Harvard, Fall 2021

TEACHING, continued***Pedagogical Training***

Kaufman Teaching Certificate Program, MIT, 2021

- Interactive workshop series focused on evidence-based teaching techniques. Topics included: designing a course, preparing a lesson plan, assessing and providing feedback to students, and creating an effective and welcoming classroom climate.

Other Teaching Roles

Coach, Winsor High School Ethics Bowl Team, 2019-2020

Tutor in Logic, Wellesley Pforzheimer Learning and Teaching Center, 2014-2016

Tutor in Philosophy Writing, Wellesley Pforzheimer Learning and Teaching Center, 2015-2016

CLINICAL EXPERIENCE

Served as Fellow on Call for the NIH Clinical Center Ethics Consultation Service, 2017-2018

Shadowed the NIH Clinical Center Ethics Consultation Service, 2016-2017

Shadowed NIH Clinical Rounds: Psychiatric Consultation Service, 2016-2018

Shadowed NIH IRB meetings: CNS Blue, 2016

PROFESSIONAL SERVICE***Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion***

Graduate Representative to the Committee on Department Life, MIT, Fall 2019-Spring 2020

Coordinator, Harvard-MIT Minorities and Philosophy (MAP) Chapter, Fall 2019-Spring 2020

Coordinator, Graduate Student Council Inclusion Initiative, MIT, Fall 2019-Spring 2020

Conferences and Organizing

Referee for *Bioethics*

Co-Organizer of MITing of the Minds Alumni Conference, MIT, January 2022

Colloquium Committee Member, MIT, Fall 2020-Spring 2021

Co-Organizer, Reading Group on Action Theory and Ethics, MIT, Fall 2022-present

Co-Organizer, SHAPE (Social, Historical, Aesthetic, Political, and Ethical Theory) Reading Group, MIT, Spring 2019

Co-Organizer of WOGAP (Workshop on Gender and Philosophy), MIT, Fall 2018-Spring 2019

GRADUATE COURSEWORK (*=audit)***Normative Ethics and Metaethics***

*Topics in the History of Philosophy: Kant's Ethical Theory, Tamar Schapiro, MIT, Fall 2023

*Consent, P. Quinn White, Harvard, Spring 2023

*Topics in Moral Philosophy: Animals, Kieran Setiya and Tamar Schapiro, MIT, Fall 2022

*The Philosophy of Bernard Williams, Richard Moran, Harvard, Fall 2022

Normative Categories, Selim Berker, Harvard, Spring 2020

COURSEWORK IN ETHICS, continued

Modern Moral Philosophy and the History of Ethics, Kieran Setiya and James Doyle, MIT/Harvard, Fall 2019

Moral Philosophy: Reasons for Action, Kieran Setiya, MIT, Spring 2019

Rationalism and Sentimentalism in British Philosophy, Tamar Schapiro, MIT, Spring 2019

Punishment and Imprisonment, Tommie Shelby, Harvard, Fall 2018

Metaphysics, Epistemology, and Language

*Anscombe's Intention, James Doyle, Harvard, Fall 2020

Topics in the Philosophy of Agency, Tamar Schapiro, MIT, Spring 2020

*Indeterminacy, Justin Khoo and Jack Spencer, MIT, Spring 2020

Independent Study on Personal Identity, Caspar Hare, MIT, Fall 2019

Proseminar II: Contemporary Analytic Philosophy, Caspar Hare and Brad Skow, MIT, Spring 2019

Problems in Metaphysics, Brad Skow and Jack Spencer, MIT, Fall 2018

Proseminar I: Early Analytic Philosophy, Alex Byrne and Roger White, MIT, Fall 2018

Other Courses

*Dissertation Seminar, Sam Berstler, MIT, Fall 2022

Dissertation Seminar, Alex Byrne, MIT, Fall 2020-Spring 2021

REFERENCES

Please send requests for recommendation letters to Christine Graham at cgraham@mit.edu.

Kieran Setiya, Professor of Philosophy, MIT, ksetiya@mit.edu

Tamar Schapiro, Professor of Philosophy, MIT, tamschap@mit.edu

Sally Haslanger, Ford Professor of Philosophy and Women's and Gender Studies, shaslang@mit.edu

Jack Spencer (teaching), Associate Professor of Philosophy, jackspen@mit.edu

David DeGrazia, Elton Professor of Philosophy, George Washington University, ddd@gwu.edu

Ethics and the Limits of Autonomy

Jemma wants Lochan to come to her birthday party. There are various ways she can get this to happen. She can move him using physical force—for instance, she can kidnap him. Or she can move him by way of his agency. She can present him with reasons (“There will be cake”), make him an offer (“I’ll give you \$100”), deceive him, make him feel guilty, exploit his jealousy, blackmail him, or threaten never to speak to him again unless he shows up.

Some of these ways of getting Lochan to the party would violate his autonomy rights, or the rights that allow him to control his own life—for instance, deception and blackmail. But why? Having a criterion might allow us to adjudicate the other cases. On a standard picture, the interventions that infringe Lochan’s autonomy rights are the ones that prevent him from being the author of his own actions. That is, they are the ones that disrupt his autonomy in the action-theoretic sense: the distinctive relation that holds between him and his actions, in virtue of which they count as truly his own. Were he to come to the party as a result, there would be a sense in which he did not do so of his own volition. Jemma would have co-opted his agency.

On this picture, autonomy rights are, fundamentally, rights to autonomous action. They are rights to a certain condition of self-government, wherein one’s actions count as one’s own. And no matter how we conceive of this condition, the underlying commitment is the same: the rights which secure our discretionary sphere, or the domain in which we’re entitled to control what happens, are themselves rights to autonomy in the action-theoretic sense. In my dissertation, I challenge this idea. Autonomy, understood as a feature of an individual’s actions or her capacity to perform actions of a certain kind, does not play a direct role in explaining these rights. The upshot is radically new accounts of manipulation and paternalism.

In Part One—*The Wrong of Wrongful Manipulation*—I argue against the dominant view of why wrongful manipulation is wrong, tracing its appeal to the assumption that autonomy rights are rights to autonomous action. The dominant view is that manipulating someone is wrong when and because it alters their practical reasoning in a certain way—either subverts it, circumvents it, or affects it non-rationally. On this picture, manipulation is a non-normative psychological kind, defined in action-theoretic terms, against which we have a basic right. I argue that this family of *Reasoning Views* is false. In its place, I defend the *Reductive View*, which says manipulating someone is wrong when and because it infringes one or more of her *other* rights—specifically, her non-interference rights.

The main argumentative strategy is to show that each variant of the Reasoning View is open to systematic counterexamples, and that the Reductive View provides the recipe for generating them. Whether a given way of (say) subverting someone’s reasoning is wrongfully manipulative depends on whether it encroaches on their domain of non-interference. For instance, in a business negotiation, it may not be wrongfully manipulative to induce bad reasoning by stroking someone’s ego, but it *is* wrongfully manipulative to induce bad reasoning by alluding to their private history of drug use, thereby infringing their privacy rights. Moreover, it may be wrongfully manipulative to induce that pattern of reasoning in one’s spouse by stroking her ego, in virtue of what else you owe her *qua* spouse.

Once we drop the assumption that autonomy rights must be rights to autonomy in the action-theoretic sense, we can see that adopting the Reasoning View is not the only way to vindicate the idea that the wrong of manipulation has *something* to do with our autonomy. On the Reductive View, manipulation threatens our autonomy in that it threatens the rights which secure our domain of discretion. If so, then we can answer important normative questions about manipulation without defining it; and instead of focusing on how a given influence interacts with someone's reasoning, we should engage with broader questions about the background of rights and duties against which it occurs, given the context and the influencer's relationship to her target. The core of this argument appears in "The Wrong of Wrongful Manipulation," published in *Philosophy & Public Affairs*.

In Part Two—*Paternalism and the Right to Be Wronged*—I challenge the prevailing solution to a puzzle about paternalism, and in so doing, defend a new account of what makes paternalistic intervention permissible, when it is. The puzzle is to explain why it is easier to justify treating someone paternalistically when they don't know what they are doing or are not in their right mind—for example, in John Stuart Mill's famous case, why it is easier to justify physically restraining a stranger to stop him from crossing a damaged bridge when he is unaware of the damage, or when he is aware but delirious. The standard explanation, which I call the *Faulty Action View*, is that *because* the stranger's act of crossing the bridge is non-autonomous, he lacks certain bodily rights that would otherwise make it wrong for you to restrain him. Against this view, I argue that not all paternalism is paternalistic intervention in a person's conduct. Consider, for example, withholding upsetting news from a person in crisis or waking a sleeping stranger on the train. This makes it difficult for the Faulty Action theorist to give a unified account of what makes paternalism justified, when it is. Moreover, I argue that the Faulty Action View faces serious explanatory challenges.

The shortcomings of the Faulty Action View should not surprise us, for the analogous view of why paternalism toward children is justified (i.e., that they lack the same rights most adults have because they aren't yet capable of autonomous action) also falls short. In general, it isn't paternalism toward children that is justified, but paternalism toward *one's own* children. According to the "priority thesis" in the philosophy of parenthood, parental rights—including rights to decide for one's child in her best interest—derive from parental duties. Taking this as my starting point, I defend the *Priority View* of justified paternalism: treating someone paternalistically is permissible, when it is, because she has a claim to your aid that overrides her right against interference. The Priority View explains an overlooked but mysterious fact about paternalism: that when it is permitted and costless to you, it is required. It also explains why the permissibility of paternalism depends on who is enacting it—e.g., whether it is a friend, a clinician, the state, a private funder, a technology company, etc.—since these entities have different duties of aid toward the different individuals and populations they influence. Finally, it indicates that some of our positive claims to aid are claims on others for help in living our own lives, therefore vindicating the contested idea that we have positive autonomy rights.

Thus, autonomy in the action-theoretic sense does not play a role in articulating our negative rights against manipulation or paternalism. There *is* one place where it figures in ethical theory, but it is not what we thought it was. The only rights that pertain to autonomous action are positive claims to aid.