

# JEN SEMLER

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## RESEARCH AREAS

SPECIALIZATION	Philosophy of AI, practical ethics, normative ethics
COMPETENCE	Philosophy of mind, philosophy of action, experimental philosophy

## EMPLOYMENT

Lecturer (Assistant Professor)	Birkbeck, University of London	2026—
Postdoctoral Fellow	Cornell Tech (Cornell University)	2025-26

## AFFILIATIONS

Digital Life Initiative	Cornell Tech	2025—
Machine Intelligence and Moral Theory Lab	Australian National University	2023—
Philosophical Moral Psychology Lab	University of Oxford	2022—
Institute for Ethics in AI	University of Oxford	2021-25

## EDUCATION

DPhil in Philosophy	University of Oxford	2025
Dissertation: <i>On Artificial Moral Agency</i>		
Supervisors: Carissa Véliz and Alison Hills		
Examiners: Roger Crisp and David Shoemaker		
MPhil in Philosophy	University of Cambridge	2021
Thesis: <i>The Right to Create Future Generations</i>		
MA in Medieval Icelandic Studies	University of Iceland	2020
Thesis: <i>Is Njáll a Compatibilist? Aristotelian Voluntary Action in Njáls Saga</i>		
BA in Philosophy and Public Policy	Duke University	2019
Magna cum laude; economics minor		

## PUBLICATIONS

JOURNAL ARTICLES	Semler, Jen. “Moral Agency Without Consciousness.” <i>Canadian Journal of Philosophy</i>	2025
	Southan, Rhys; Ward, Helena; and Semler, Jen (co-first authors). “A Timing Problem for Instrumental Convergence.” <i>Philosophical Studies</i>	2025

	<u>Semler, Jen</u> ; and Henne, Paul (co-first authors). “Recent Experimental Work on ‘Ought’ Implies ‘Can’.” <i>Philosophy Compass</i>	2019
	Henne, Paul; <u>Semler, Jen</u> (co-first authors); Chituc, Vlad; De Brigard, Felipe; Sinnott-Armstrong, Walter. “Against Some Recent Arguments for ‘Ought’ Implies ‘Can’: Reasons, Deliberation, Trying, and Furniture.” <i>Philosophia</i>	2019
TEXTBOOK CONTRIBUTIONS	<b>Corporate Human Rights Obligations</b> case study for the “Human Rights” chapter in <i>Issues in Political Theory</i> (edited by R. Jubb and P. Tomlin) Oxford University Press	Forthcoming
	<b>Lockdowns</b> case study for the “Liberty” chapter in <i>Issues in Political Theory</i> (edited by R. Jubb and P. Tomlin) Oxford University Press	Forthcoming
AWARDS	Oxford-Reuben Graduate Scholarship (full fees and living expenses for the DPhil)	2021-25
	Global Priorities Fellowship (£5,000)   <i>Forethought Foundation</i> in conjunction with the Early Career Conference Programme at the Global Priorities Institute (Oxford)	2022
	Kate Bertram Prize (£100)   <i>Lucy Cavendish College, Cambridge</i> for passing with distinction in the MPhil	2021
	American Friends of Cambridge University Studentship (£2,500)   <i>Lucy Cavendish College, University of Cambridge</i>	2020
	Phi Beta Kappa Society   <i>Duke University</i>	2019

**TALKS (\* indicates invited, + indicates upcoming)**

- Moral Agents Unlike Us
- AAAI/ACM Conference on Artificial Intelligence, Ethics, and Society (AIES) | *IE University* 2025
  - Digital Life Seminar Series | *Cornell Tech* 2025
  - Workshop on Partiality, Relationships, and AI | *Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich (LMU)* 2024
- Artificial Moral Behavior

- London AI and Humanity Project 2025
- Ethics and Computing Colloquium\* | *Cornell University* 2024
- Machine Intelligence and Normative Theory Lab | *Australian National University* 2024
  
- Two Types of Moral Agency
  - Open Minds XVII | *University of Manchester* 2024
  
- Minimal Artificial Moral Agency
  - Agency and Intentions in AI Conference | *University of Göttingen* 2024
  
- Locating Consciousness in Moral Agency
  - Machine Intelligence and Normative Theory Lab | *Australian National University* 2023
  
- AI and Moral Agency Attributions
  - European Experimental Philosophy Conference | *University of Zurich* 2023
  - Moral Psychology of AI Conference | *University of Kent* 2023
  - Oxford BioXPhi Lab | *University of Oxford* 2023
  
- Types of Artificial Moral Agency
  - Philosophy, AI, and Society Doctoral Colloquium | *University of Oxford* 2023
  
- Can AI be a Genuine Source of Moral Action?
  - Oxford AI Society Mini-Conference\* | *University of Oxford* 2024
  
- Artificial Non-sentient Moral Agency
  - AAAI/ACM Conference on Artificial Intelligence, Ethics, and Society (AIES) Student Track Program | *University of Oxford* 2022
  
- People Infer Temporal Order and Causal Structure from Causal Judgments
  - European Experimental Philosophy Conference | *University of Granada* 2022
  - Society for Philosophy and Psychology & European Society for Philosophy and Psychology (SPP & ESPP) Joint Conference | *University of Milan* 2022
  
- Against the Epistemic Response to Moral Luck
  - Free Will, Moral Responsibility, and Agency Graduate Conference | *Florida State University* 2021

**TEACHING**

PRIMARY INSTRUCTOR <sup>†</sup>	Practical Ethics Moral Agency in Nonhumans (with Virginie Simoneau-Gilbert) Ethics of AI and Digital Technology Ethical Computing in Practice AI Ethics and Public Health AI Ethics and Warfare Ethics	2024 2024 2022-24 2023 2023 2023 2023
THESIS SUPERVISION	Undergraduate thesis on AI and responsibility	2025
SEMINARS	Why Be Good? An Introduction to Ethics <i>Exeter College Summer Programme, University of Oxford</i>	2023-24
TEACHING ASSISTANT	Why Be Good? An Introduction to Ethics <i>Michael Hannon, Exeter College Summer Programme, University of Oxford</i>	2022-23
	Ethics (upper-level); Moral Philosophy (lower-level) <i>Jean Baccelli, University of Oxford</i>	2022-23
	Ethical Computing in Practice <i>Milo Phillips-Brown, University of Oxford</i>	2022
OTHER TEACHING	Teaching Ethics to Machines   <i>Bitesize Ethics, Uehiro Oxford Institute</i>	2025
	Moral Philosophy Seminar Facilitator   <i>Weidenfeld-Hoffman Trust Leadership Programme, University of Oxford</i>	2023-25
	Oxford PPE UNIQ Summer School Teacher   <i>University of Oxford</i>	2023
	Paradoxes: An Exploration of Problems in Philosophy and Beyond   <i>Duke University</i>	2018-2019
	Volunteer high school tutor   <i>Durham, NC</i>	2015-19
	Freelance philosophy tutor   <i>virtual</i>	2017
	K-12 academic tutor   <i>Turning Point Tutoring, NY</i>	2013-16

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<sup>†</sup> These courses were taught as Oxford-style tutorials: weekly, hour-long teaching sessions consisting of a tutor and 1-2 students. Tutors set a syllabus with readings and essay questions for each session. One exception: "Moral Agency in Nonhumans" was taught as a lecture series.

## BROADER ENGAGEMENT

### Writing

- “[Moral Agency Without Consciousness](#),” *New Work in Philosophy Blog* 2025
- “[A Timing Problem for Instrumental Convergence](#),” *Reflective Altruism Blog* (invited post as part of the “papers I learned from” series) 2025
- “[A Timing Problem for Instrumental Convergence](#),” *New Work in Philosophy Blog* 2025

### Invited Talks and Panels

- The Rise of Deepfake AI (panel) | *Reuben College* 2025
- Outsourcing to AI | *University of Oxford Department of Continuing Education*, “Thinking Machines and the Ethics of AI” 2025
- Can AI Be Moral? | *Magdalen College School, Oxford* 2024
- AI Safety and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: A FemTech Perspective | *Oxford FemTech Society* 2024
- Making Moral Machines | *Oxford University Computer Society and Hertford Politics and Economics Society* 2022

### Other Talks, Panels, and Exhibitions

- Moral Responsibility and AI (talk) | *London Academy of Excellence, Tottenham* 2025
- What Even Is Philosophy Research? (talk) | *Reuben College* 2024
- The Moral Mind (exhibition) | *Oxford Museum of Natural History Brain Awareness Week* 2023
- What Does the Future Hold for Humanity? (panel) | *Reuben College* 2022
- AI and the Moral Community (talk) | *Reuben College* 2022
- Experimental Philosophy (talk) | *Reuben College* 2022
- Jen Semler on AI, Icelandic Studies, Women in Philosophy, and Publishing (interview) | *The Philosopher's Nest* podcast 2022

## RELEVANT EXPERIENCE

RESEARCH ASSISTANTSHIPS	Milo Phillips-Brown (ethics of technology)   <i>University of Oxford, University of Edinburgh</i>	2022-24
	Project Vox   <i>Duke University</i>	2018-19
	Moral Attitudes and Decision-Making Lab   <i>Duke University</i>	2016-19
EMPLOYMENT	Philosophy Undergraduate Admissions Interviewer   <i>Jesus College, University of Oxford</i>	2021-23

Research Programs Intern | *National Endowment for the Humanities, Washington, D.C.* 2018

## SERVICE

CONFERENCES	Organizing Committee Member	
	– Oxford Women and Gender Minorities in Philosophy Internal Workshop   <i>University of Oxford</i>	2022
	– Oxford Graduate Philosophy Conference   <i>University of Oxford</i>	2022
	– Háskóli Íslands Student Conference on the Medieval North (cancelled due to COVID-19)   <i>University of Iceland</i>	2020
	Commenter	
	– Artificial Intelligence and Collective Agency Workshop   <i>University of Oxford</i>	2025
	Session Chair and/or Assistant	
	– Autonomy: Theory and Practice   <i>NYU</i>	2025
	– Oxford Graduate Philosophy Conference   <i>University of Oxford</i>	2023
	– Responsibility and Autonomy in Artificial Intelligence Conference   <i>University of Oxford</i>	2022
	– Cambridge Graduate Conference on the Philosophy of Mathematics and Logic   <i>University of Cambridge</i>	2021
REPRESENTATION	Women and Gender Minorities Graduate Philosophy Student Representative   <i>University of Oxford</i>	2023-24
	Graduate Director for Ethics and Values Theme   <i>Reuben College</i>	2022-24
REVIEWER	Journals: <i>Philosophical Psychology; Philosophy &amp; Technology; AI and Ethics; Communications of the ACM</i>	
	Conferences: <i>Oxford Graduate Philosophy Conference; Fairness, Accountability, and Transparency Conference (ACM FAccT); Artificial Intelligence, Ethics, and Society Conference (AAAI/ACM AIES)</i>	
MISCELLANEOUS	Judge   “ <i>Philosothon</i> ” at Magdalen College School, Oxford	2025
	Consent Workshop Facilitator   <i>Reuben College</i>	2023-24
	Judge   <i>Ethics Cup (formerly JS Mill Cup), held online</i>	2021

## REFERENCES

**Carissa Véliz** | University of Oxford  
Associate Professor of Philosophy  
[carissa.veliz@philosophy.ox.ac.uk](mailto:carissa.veliz@philosophy.ox.ac.uk)

**David Shoemaker** | Cornell University  
Wyn and William Y. Hutchinson Professor of Ethics and Public Life  
[dws267@cornell.edu](mailto:dws267@cornell.edu)

**Roger Crisp** | University of Oxford  
Professor of Moral Philosophy  
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**Alison Hills** | University of Oxford  
Professor of Philosophy  
[alison.hills@sjc.ox.ac.uk](mailto:alison.hills@sjc.ox.ac.uk)

**Joanna Demaree-Cotton** | University of Oxford  
Research Fellow in Moral Psychology  
[joanna.demaree-cotton@uehiro.ox.ac.uk](mailto:joanna.demaree-cotton@uehiro.ox.ac.uk)

**Milo Phillips-Brown** | University of Edinburgh  
Lecturer in Philosophy  
[milopb@ed.ac.uk](mailto:milopb@ed.ac.uk)

**Michael Hannon (teaching)** | University of Nottingham  
Associate Professor of Philosophy  
[michael.hannon@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:michael.hannon@nottingham.ac.uk)

### DISSERTATION ABSTRACT: ON ARTIFICIAL MORAL AGENCY

Suppose Tommy destroys Marvin's house. We might have some questions—whether, for instance, Tommy committed a moral wrong or whether Tommy is morally responsible. The answers to these questions depend, in part, on what kind of entity Tommy is. Our evaluation of this scenario differs if Tommy is a strong gust of wind, or a giraffe, or a human. Specifically, our assessment turns on whether Tommy is a *moral agent*. My dissertation considers what follows if Tommy is an AI system. On my account of moral agency, AI systems can be moral agents in principle, but existing AI systems fail to meet the necessary conditions. As such, our use of AI in moral decision-making should be limited. Moreover, genuine artificial moral agents will be different from human moral agents in normatively significant ways.

**Part I—Towards a Theory of Moral Agency**—develops a theoretical account of moral agency. In Chapter 2, “Moral Agency Without Consciousness” I preempt an objection to the prospect of artificial moral agency, namely that AI systems cannot be moral agents because they lack consciousness. I argue that phenomenal consciousness is not necessary for moral agency. In Chapter 3, “Two Types of Moral Agency,” I propose and defend a distinction: *deontic moral agents* are appropriate subjects of deontic evaluations—their actions can be described as morally wrong—and *responsible moral agents* are appropriate subjects of responsibility ascriptions—they are fully-fledged moral agents. This distinction illuminates difficult cases of moral agency as well as instances of genuine responsibility gaps.

**Part II—Prospects of Artificial Moral Agency**—evaluates the extent to which AI systems are moral agents. I consider whether existing machine learning methods and empirical results support classifying existing AI systems, specifically large language models and reinforcement learning systems, as moral agents. In Chapter 4, “Artificial ‘Agents’ are Not Agents,” I argue that AI systems lack the kind of agency required for moral agency—namely, the capacity for intentional action—because they lack mental states on both interpretivist and representationalist views. In Chapter 5, “Artificial ‘Agents’ are Not Moral,” I argue that AI systems are far from instantiating the additional necessary capacities for deontic and responsible moral agency: AI systems lack responsiveness to moral reasons and moral understanding.

**Part III—Using Artificial (non) Moral Agents**—considers how the moral agency of AI systems, or lack thereof, bears on how we should use those systems in moral decision-making. In Chapter 6, “Artificial Moral Behavior,” I argue that delegating moral decisions to AI systems is wrong—even if the outputs are reliable and accurate—because doing so replaces moral *actions* with, at best, moral *behaviors*. In Chapter 7, “Moral Agents Unlike Us,” I argue that even if AI systems qualify for responsible moral agency, they are different from human moral agents in morally significant ways. While their lack of consciousness is no barrier to moral agency, it *is* a barrier to playing certain roles in the moral community. Moral agency is not all that matters.