**Jen Semler** [jensemlerphilosophy@gmail.com](mailto:jen.semler@philosophy.ox.ac.uk) | [www.jensemler.com](http://www.jensemler.com)

**Research Areas**

specialization Philosophy of AI, practical ethics, normative ethics

competence Philosophy of mind, philosophy of action, experimental philosophy

affiliations Oxford Institute for Ethics in AI  
 Oxford Philosophical Moral Psychology Lab  
 ANU Machine Intelligence and Normative Theory Lab

**employment**

**Postdoctoral Associate** | Cornell Tech (Digital Life Initiative) 2025—

**EDUCATION**

**DPhil in Philosophy** | University of Oxford 2025  
 Dissertation: *On Artificial Moral Agency* Supervisors: Carissa Véliz and Alison Hills  
 Examiners: Roger Crisp and David Shoemaker

**MPhil in Philosophy** | University of Cambridge 2021  
 Thesis: *The Right to Create Future Generations*

**MA in Medieval Icelandic Studies** | University of Iceland 2020

Thesis: *Is Njáll a Compatibilist? Aristotelian Voluntary Action   
in Njáls Saga*

**BA in Philosophy and Public Policy|** Duke University 2019

Magna cum laude; economics minor

**PUBLICATIONS**

journal articles[[1]](#footnote-1) **Moral Agency Without Consciousness**

Forthcoming in *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*

**A Timing Problem for Instrumental Convergence**

(with R. Southan and H. Ward)

Forthcoming in *Philosophical Studies*

**Recent Experimental Work on ‘Ought’** **Implies ‘Can’** 2019  
 (with P. Henne)   
 *Philosophy Compass*

**Against Some Recent Arguments for ‘Ought’ Implies ‘Can’** 2019  
 (with P. Henne, V. Chituc, F. de Brigard, and W. Sinnott-Armstrong)  
 *Philosophia   
 I share first-authorship with P. Henne*

textbook **Corporate Human Rights Obligations** Under Contract

contributions case study for the “Human Rights” chapter in

*Issues in Political Theory* (edited by R. Jubb and P. Tomlin)

Oxford University Press

**Lockdowns** Under Contract

case study for the “Liberty” chapter in

*Issues in Political Theory* (edited by R. Jubb and P. Tomlin)

Oxford University Press

**AWARDS**

Oxford-Reuben Graduate Scholarship (full fees and living 2021-25

expenses for the DPhil)

Global Priorities Fellowship (£5,000) | *Forethought Foundation*  2022

in conjunction with the Early Career Conference Programme at

the Global Priorities Institute (Oxford)

Kate Bertram Prize (£100) | *Lucy Cavendish College, Cambridge* 2021

for passing with distinction in the MPhil

American Friends of Cambridge University Studentship (£2,500) | 2020

*Lucy Cavendish College, University of Cambridge*

Phi Beta Kappa Society | *Duke University* 2019

**TALKS (\* indicates invited)**

Moral Agents Unlike Us

* Workshop on Partiality, Relationships, and AI | *Ludwig* 2024

*Maximilian University of Munich (LMU)*

Two Types of Moral Agency

* Open Minds XVII | *University of Manchester* 2024

Minimal Artificial Moral Agency

* Agency and Intentions in AI Conference | *University* 2024  
  *of Göttingen*

Artificial Moral Behavior

* Ethics and Computing Colloquium\*| *Cornell University* 2024
* Machine Intelligence and Normative Theory Lab | *Australian* 2024 *National University*

Locating Consciousness in Moral Agency

* Machine Intelligence and Normative Theory Lab | *Australian* 2023  
  *National University*

AI and Moral Agency Attributions

* European Experimental Philosophy Conference | *University* 2023  
  *of Zurich*
* 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* 2023  
  *of Oxford*

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, 2022  
  Ethics, and Society (AIES) Student Track Program | *University*  
  *of Oxford*

People Infer Temporal Order and Causal Structure from   
Causal Judgments

* European Experimental Philosophy Conference | *University*  2022  
  *of Granada*
* Society for Philosophy and Psychology & European 2022  
  Society for Philosophy and Psychology (SPP & ESPP)   
  Joint Conference | *University of Milan*

Against the Epistemic Response to Moral Luck

* Free Will, Moral Responsibility, and Agency Graduate 2021  
  Conference | *Florida State University*

**TEACHING**

primary Practical Ethics 2024

instructor[[2]](#footnote-2) Moral Agency in Nonhumans (with Virginie Simoneau-Gilbert) 2024

Ethics of AI and Digital Technology 2022-24

Ethical Computing in Practice 2023

AI Ethics and Public Health 2023

AI Ethics and Warfare 2023

Ethics 2023

thesis supervision Undergraduate thesis on AI and responsibility 2025

seminars Why Be Good? An Introduction to Ethics 2023-24

*Exeter College Summer Programme, University of Oxford*

teaching Why Be Good? An Introduction to Ethics 2022-23

assistant *Michael Hannon, Exeter College Summer Programme, University*

*of Oxford*

Ethics (upper-level); Moral Philosophy (lower-level) 2022-23

*Jean Baccelli, University of Oxford*

Ethical Computing in Practice 2022

*Milo Phillips-Brown, University of Oxford*

other teaching Teaching Ethics to Machines | *Bitesize Ethics, Uehiro Oxford* 2025

*Institute*

Moral Philosophy Seminar Facilitator | *Weidenfeld-Hoffman* 2023-25

*Trust Leadership Programme, University of Oxford*

Oxford PPE UNIQ Summer School Teacher | *University of Oxford*  2023

Paradoxes: An Exploration of Problems in Philosophy 2018-2019

and Beyond | *Duke University*

Volunteer high school tutor | *Durham, NC* 2015-19

Freelance philosophy tutor | *virtual* 2017

K-12 academic tutor | *Turning Point Tutoring, NY* 2013-16

**BROADER ENGAGEMENT**

presentations Invited Talks and Panels

* The Rise of Deepfake AI (panel) | *Reuben College*  2025
* Outsourcing to AI | *University of Oxford Department of*  2025

*Continuing Education, “Thinking Machines and the Ethics of AI”*

* Can AI Be Moral? | *Magdalen College School, Oxford* 2024
* AI Safety and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: A FemTech 2024

Perspective | *Oxford FemTech Society*

* Making Moral Machines | *Oxford University Computer Society* 2022 *and Hertford Politics and Economics Society*

Other Talks, Panels, and Exhibitions

* Moral Responsibility and AI (talk) | *London Academy of* 2025

*Excellence, Tottenham*

* What Even Is Philosophy Research? (talk)| *Reuben College* 2024
* The Moral Mind (exhibition) | *Oxford Museum of Natural* 2023

*History Brain Awareness Week*

* What Does the Future Hold for Humanity? (panel) | *Reuben* 2022

*College*

* AI and the Moral Community (talk) | *Reuben College* 2022
* Experimental Philosophy (talk)| *Reuben College* 2022
* Jen Semler on AI, Icelandic Studies, Women in Philosophy, 2022  
  and Publishing (interview) | *The Philosopher’s Nest* podcast

**RELEVANT EXPERIENCE**

research Milo Phillips-Brown (ethics of technology) | *University of*  2022-24

assistantships *Oxford, University of Edinburgh*

Project Vox | *Duke University*  2018-19

Moral Attitudes and Decision-Making Lab | *Duke University* 2016-19

employment Philosophy Undergraduate Admissions Interviewer | *Jesus*  2021-23

*College, University of Oxford*

Research Programs Intern | *National Endowment for the Humanities,* 2018

*Washington, D.C.*

**SERVICE**

conferences Organizing Committee Member

* Oxford Women and Gender Minorities in Philosophy 2022  
  Internal Workshop | *University of Oxford*
* Oxford Graduate Philosophy Conference | *University of Oxford* 2022
* Háskóli Íslands Student Conference on the Medieval 2020  
  North (cancelled due to COVID-19) | *University of Iceland*

Commenter

* Artificial Intelligence and Collective Agency Workshop | 2025

*University of Oxford*

Session Chair and/or Assistant

* Oxford Graduate Philosophy Conference | *University of Oxford* 2023
* Responsibility and Autonomy in Artificial Intelligence 2022  
  Conference | *University of Oxford*
* Cambridge Graduate Conference on the Philosophy of 2021  
  Mathematics and Logic | *University of Cambridge*

representation Women and Gender Minorities Graduate Philosophy Student 2023-24

Representative | *University of Oxford*

Graduate Director for Ethics and Values Theme | *Reuben College*  2022-24

reviewer Journals: *Philosophical Psychology; Philosophy & Technology*

Conferences: *Oxford Graduate Philosophy Conference; Fairness,*

*Accountability, and Transparency Conference (ACM FAccT); Artificial  
Intelligence, Ethics, and Society Conference (AAAI/ACM AIES)*

miscellaneous Judge | “*Philosothon” at Magdalen College School, Oxford* 2025

Consent Workshop Facilitator | *Reuben College* 2023-24

Judge | *Ethics Cup (formerly JS Mill Cup), held online* 2021

**REFERENCES**

**Carissa Véliz**

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

**Alison Hills**

Professor of Philosophy | University of Oxford

[alison.hills@sjc.ox.ac.uk](mailto:alison.hills@sjc.ox.ac.uk)

**David Shoemaker**

Wyn and William Y. Hutchinson Professor of Ethics and Public Life | Cornell University

[dws267@cornell.edu](mailto:dws267@cornell.edu)

**Roger Crisp**

Professor of Moral Philosophy | University of Oxford

[roger.crisp@uehiro.ox.ac.uk](mailto:roger.crisp@uehiro.ox.ac.uk)

**Joanna Demaree-Cotton**

Research Fellow in Moral Psychology | University of Oxford

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**Milo Phillips-Brown**

Lecturer in Philosophy | University of Edinburgh

[milopb@ed.ac.uk](mailto:milopb@ed.ac.uk)

**Michael Hannon (teaching)**

Associate Professor of Philosophy | University of Nottingham

[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.

1. Unless otherwise noted, all authors share first-authorship on co-authored papers. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. 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. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)