

# INDIVIDUAL FREEDOM VERSUS THE HIDDEN PERSUADERS

Preserving individual freedom  
in an age of socio-technical  
control via algorithmic  
rewards and punishments

**SEPTEMBER 11, 2019**

**10:00AM – 6:00PM**

Boston University  
Hillel Center  
213 Bay State Rd.  
Boston, MA 02215



**Boston University** College of Communication  
Division of Emerging Media Studies

**Sponsored by** the Division of Emerging Media Studies.

**Co-sponsored by** the Center for Mobile Communication Studies, the Artificial Intelligence Research Initiative at Boston University, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the Consulate General of France in Boston, and the Feld Family Professorship of Emerging Media.



**Boston University** College of Communication  
Division of Emerging Media Studies

The Division is dedicated to understanding and disseminating knowledge about emerging media's role in communication and human processes. This includes how these media are developed, marketed, used, and inevitably shaped and re-created by users.

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**Organized by** Prof. James E. Katz, Division of Emerging Media Studies, Boston University

# SCHEDULE

- 10:00 - 10:20AM** ..... **Registration & Coffee/Bagels**
- 10:20 - 10:45AM** ..... **Welcoming remarks**  
*James E. Katz and Juliet Floyd, Boston University; Michaël Vallee, Consulate General of France in Boston*
- 10:45 - 11:00AM** ..... **SESSION 1: C/overt AI-powered Technologies and the Responsibility of Users**  
*Margrit Betke, Boston University | Chair: Lei Guo, Boston University*
- 11:00 - 12:15PM** ..... **SESSION 2: Psychology of nudging and its limits**  
*James Cummings, Boston University; Nina Mažar, Boston University*  
*Respondent: Jacob Groshek, Kansas State University*  
*Chair: Kelsey Prena, Boston University*
- 12:15-1:00PM** ..... **Lunch with posters in atrium**  
*Yiyan Zhang, Boston University; Li Zhang, Boston University; Wayne Xu, UMass Amherst; Kate K. Mays, Yiming Lei ,Sejin Paik and Rebecca Giovannetti, Boston University*
- 1:00 - 1:45PM** ..... **SESSION 3: Nudging in Singapore: Socio-technical Control Efforts and Their Implications**  
*Keynote: Benjamin Detenber, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore | Respondent: Chris Wells, Boston University*  
*Chair: Jacob Groshek, Kansas State University*
- 1:45 - 2:30PM** ..... **SESSION 4: Why not nudge?**  
*Victor Kumar, Boston University | Chair/Respondent: Juliet Floyd, Boston University*
- 2:30 - 3:15PM** ..... **SESSION 5: Saying things with facts, or: sending messages through regulation. An aspect of contemporary political communication**  
*Peppino Ortoleva, University of Turin | Chair: James Cummings, Boston University | Respondent: Rob Chodat, Boston University*
- 3:15 - 3:30PM** ..... **Coffee Break**
- 3:30 - 4:15PM** ..... **SESSION 6: Nudging, positive and negative, on China's internet**  
*Lei Guo, Boston University | Chair: Margrit Betke, Boston University*  
*Respondent: Eugenio Menegon, Boston University*
- 4:15 - 5:00PM** ..... **SESSION 7: Paternalism vs. Perfectionism**  
*Sandra Laugier, Sorbonne | Chair: Juliet Floyd, Boston University*  
*Respondent: Steven Gerrard, Williams College*
- 5:00 - 5:45PM** ..... **SESSION 8: Irresistible Nudges, Inevitable Nudges, and the Freedom to Choose**  
*Jens Kipper, University of Rochester | Chair: Michael Vallee, French Consulate | Respondent: Kay Mathiesen, Northeastern University*
- 5:45 - 6:00PM** ..... **Closing remarks**  
*James Katz, Boston University*

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## SESSION 1: C/OVERT AI-POWERED TECHNOLOGIES AND THE RESPONSIBILITY OF USERS | 10:45-11:00AM

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Presenter: Margrit Betke, Boston University

Chair: Lei Guo, Boston University

In this talk, I will discuss AI-powered technologies that either openly or covertly nudge their users. Computer scientists develop these technologies at a speed that has produced a cultural lag. Our understanding of the impact of AI innovations needs to catch up with our ubiquitous implementation of them. I will argue that users and developers should take on more ethical responsibilities.

*Margrit Betke* is a Professor of Computer Science at Boston University. She co-leads the BU Artificial Intelligence (AI) Research Initiative and the AI-Emerging-Media Research Group. She came to Boston University in 2000 after earning her Ph.D. degree in Computer Science and Electrical Engineering at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. [www.cs.bu.edu/faculty/betke](http://www.cs.bu.edu/faculty/betke)

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## SESSION 2: PSYCHOLOGY OF NUDGING AND ITS LIMITS 11:00-12:15PM

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### Means vs. Outcomes: Leveraging Psychological Insights for Effecting Behavior Change

Presenter: James Cummings, Boston University

Respondent: Jacob Groshek, Kansas State University

Chair: Kelsey Prena, Boston University

Through the lens of a case study on the use of gamification and serious games, this presentation will review the potential of new media technologies for the purpose of behavior change interventions. Expanding upon the findings of this study, it will present a typology of psychological methods for effecting behavior change – namely, reinforcement, nudging, and internalization – and consider the relative allowance for and implications of personal autonomy within each approach.

*James Cummings* ([cummingj@bu.edu](mailto:cummingj@bu.edu)) researches and teaches courses on human-computer interaction and the psychological processing and effects of media in the College of Communication's Division of Emerging Media Studies at Boston University. His most recent work examines patterns, predictors, and effects of task-switching during media use and the technological factors influencing user presence, persuasion, and empathy in immersive media environments.

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### Using Behavioral Insights to Increase Organ Donor Registrations: A Large-Scale Field Study in Ontario, Canada

Presenter: Nina Mažar, Boston University

Respondent: Jacob Groshek, Kansas State University

Chair: Kelsey Prena, Boston University

Current statistics on organ donation in North America point to an ever-increasing demand yet inadequate supply of available donors. Despite broad support, many individuals stick with the status quo and remain unregistered. In a large-scale field experiment testing five interventions we demonstrate that providing individuals with more time to consider their decision along with

1) providing timely information with a brochure, or 2) messaging prompting cognitive 1st person perspective taking (“If you needed a transplant, would you have one?”) more than doubled individuals’ likelihood of registering as organ donors. The findings indicate that satisfying the need for due diligence is an effective means to increase donor registrations, and demonstrate the power of applying behavioral interventions on behaviors significant to societal wellbeing.

**Nina Mažar** is Professor of Marketing and Co-Director of the Susilo Institute for Ethics in the Global Economy at Questrom School of Business at Boston University. She is also the co-founder of BEworks, co-originator of University of Toronto’s BEAR center, and former Senior Behavioral Scientist of the World Bank’s behavioral insights team eMBeD in Washington, DC.

Currently the president of the Society for Judgment and Decision Making, Dr Mažar was named one of “The 40 Most Outstanding B-School Profs Under 40 In The World”. Her focus on behavioral economics includes the investigation of how expectations, emotions, peers, and random cues in the environment affect how we think about products, money, investments, and morality, and their implications for welfare, development, and policy. Popular accounts of her work have appeared among others on NPR, BBC, in the New York Times, Financial Times, Wired, Harvard Business Review, and various NYTimes Bestsellers as well as in the recent documentary feature film “The Honest Truth about Dishonest.” She also serves as behavioral economics advisor on boards of various government and non-for-profit organizations (e.g., Irrational Labs in San Francisco, CA). She was previously faculty at the University of Toronto Rotman School of Management, and before that a post-doctoral associate and lecturer in marketing at MIT Sloan School of Management and the MIT Media Lab (Dan Ariely’s eRationality Group). She holds a PhD in Marketing from the University of Mainz in Germany. Her website is [www.ninamazar.com](http://www.ninamazar.com).

## POSTER PRESENTATIONS

12:15-1:00PM

### **Why We Stop Talking Politics Online: How Social Network Composition, Privacy Concern, and Perceived Government Surveillance Affect Self-censorship of Political Expression on Social Media**

*Presenter: Yiyang Zhang, Boston University*

Free political expression is essential to deliberative democracy. While recent scholarship is celebrating the democratization potential of the Internet as a voicing channel of ordinary people, a darker side - self-censorship on social media - requires more attention as social media have become a major field of political expression. Based on a national representative survey conducted in the U.S. on October 2018, this paper explored the impact that personal-, platform-, and government-related factors had on people’s willingness and actual behavior of self-censorship. The results showed that trust in platforms’ privacy protection and the percentage of contacts with different political views were negatively and positively associated with the willingness of self-censor on social media respectively, whereas people with higher perceived government surveillance were, surprisingly, less willing to self-censor. The study also found that the willingness of self-censor of political expression on social media significantly mediated the three factors.

**Yiyang Zhang** is a Ph.D. student in Emerging Media Studies at the College of Communication at Boston University. Prior to BU, she earned her Bachelor degree in advertising (major) and economy (minor) from School of Journalism and Communication at Peking University. Her research focus involves political impact of the dynamic relationship between digital media, citizens, and governments.

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## Gamified Workplace, Deleuzian Modulation and the Neoliberal Market Logic

Presenter: Li Zhang, Boston University

In recent years, gamified practices have proliferated in various domains. This study is focused on the gamified workplace. Informed by theoretical perspectives developed by Foucault, Deleuze, and Polanyi, the author tries to enrich the current critical scholarship on gamification with three main arguments: a) Gamification as manifestation of the 21st century behaviorist turn of capitalism, b) Gamification as Deleuzian modulation, and c) Gamification as an extension of the neoliberal market logic.

*Li Zhang* is a current doctoral student in the Division of Emerging Media Studies, Boston University. His main research interests include the media psychology and political communication, informed by both computational methods as well as critical theory.

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## Imagining a Credit Society: Discourses of the Social Credit System in Chinese Media

Presenters: Jing Wang, New York University, Shanghai; Hongmei Li, Miami University; Weiai Wayne Xu, UMass Amherst; Xian Xu, Fudan University

The Chinese Social Credit System (SCS) has been widely viewed as a technology-enabled surveilling project in the digital age. Yet, the term “social credit system” was coined in the 1990s and has been frequently discussed in Chinese media since the early 2000s, long before data-driven technologies were invented or applied. Rather than taking SCS as a singular and concrete object, this paper studies social credit system as a public discourse cultivated against the backdrop of China’s economic and political reforms in the past two decades. The research team applies the latest computational news frame analysis (i.e., the Analysis of Topic Model Networks) to a repertoire of news reports published between 2003 and 2018. The analysis reveals media frames applied in the promotion of multiple types of social credit system which have been constructed through diverse technologies and promoted by a variety of stakeholders for various purposes. We argue that the social credit system is portrayed as a panacea for a variety of socio-economic, legal, and ethical issues in Chinese society that is baffled by changing moral, social and identity challenges. We also contend that such frames have been utilized to shape the public understanding of morality, justice, and identity in people’s everyday life. While most research takes the SCS as a symbol of political control unique to China, this paper reveals that SCS is rooted in a set of governing ideologies that legitimize “credit” as metrics for social discipline and has been applied beyond China via pre-digital Techniques.

*Jing Wang* is Assistant Professor of Interactive Media Business at New York University in Shanghai. She received her Ph.D. from the School of Information and Communication at Rutgers University. Dr. Wang studies how technologies influence the financial domain in the global context. Her recent work focuses on the social and political implications of fin-techs. Dr. Wang’s work can be found in the journal of *Telecommunications Policy*, *China Quarterly*, *International Journal of Communication*, *The Political Economy of Communication*, and *Communication and the Public*. She has also been invited to comment on *The China Business News*, and *China Global TV Network*. Before joining NYU, Dr. Wang taught at Tulane University in Louisiana.

*Hongmei Li (Ph.D., University of Southern California)* is a tenured associate professor and the coordinator of Strategic Communication at Miami University of Ohio. Her research interests include advertising and consumer culture, new technologies, Chinese media and society, nation branding and public diplomacy, global communication, gender and sexuality, and corporate social responsibility. She is the author of *Advertising and Consumer Culture in China* and editor of *The Middle Class Phenomenon in Emerging Markets: Consumers, Lifestyles and Societies*. Her works appear in top journals such as *Communication Theory*, *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, *Journal of International & Intercultural Communication*, *International Journal of Communication*, *Public Relations Review*, *Chinese Journal of Journalism & Communication* and other journals and book collections.

**Weiai Xu (Wayne)** is Assistant Professor in the Department of Communication at University of Massachusetts – Amherst. He conducts computational research concerning information diffusion and opinion formation in the network society. His works appear in journals such as *Computers in Human Behavior*; *Social Networks*, *Public Relations Review*, *Government Information Quarterly*, *Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology*, *International Journal of Communication*, *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, *Online Information Review*, *American Behavioral Scientist*, and others.

**Wei Xu** is studying for a Ph.D. degree in economics of Kemmy Business School at Limerick University, Ireland. He received his Master's Degree in Insurance from Fudan University, China. His research focuses on FinTech, InsurTech, RegTech and Insurance Accounting. Wei is now contributing to developing knowledge map for Chinese Illness insurance. His work can be found in the journal of *China Insurance*, *Financial Times*, etc.

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## **Beyond the Public Sphere: Nudging in an Emerging Technology Landscape**

Presenters: *Kate K. Mays, Boston University; Yiming Lei, Boston University; Sejin Paik, Boston University; Rebecca Giovannetti, Boston University*

Research on nudging predominantly occurs in the behavioral economics and public policy fields and focuses on the governments' uses. Advances in AI and digital technology allow for choice architecture to be built into technological interfaces and personal devices. This study explores the psychological, behavioral, and social factors that may influence individuals' attitudes toward nudges. We employ a nationally representative survey (N=1500) to measure perceptions of 1) governmental nudges and 2) AI nudges. We compare people's acceptance and perception of nudges from the government versus their own technology and examine whether these preferences differ based on demographic characteristics, political ideology, privacy beliefs, and certain personality traits. We conclude with implications for nudging beyond a policy tool, and as a mechanism for personal betterment and "life optimization." We also consider how the role of personal autonomy and perception of choice may be different in the emerging technology landscape.

**Kate K. Mays** is a doctoral candidate in the Division of Emerging Media Studies at Boston University's College of Communication. She is also a graduate student fellow for computational and data-driven research at the Rafik B. Hariri Institute for Computing and Computational Science & Engineering at Boston University.

**Yiming Lei** is a Master student in Emerging Media Studies program at Boston University. She graduated from Sun Yat-sen University with a Bachelor's degree in Sociology. She also worked for one year and a half at Ipsos China, in both quantitative and qualitative marketing research departments. Having spent one year in EMS program learning and exploring, her research interests now focus on human-computer interaction, the psychological process of players' cooperation in online multiplayer video games, the public conceptualization of AI, and media literacy.

**Sejin Paik** is a doctoral student in the Division of Emerging Media Studies at BU's College of Communication. She received her Master's in Computational & Multimedia Journalism at Stanford University and Bachelor's in International Studies at Emory University. She most recently worked at Google where she helped launch an AI-driven news product.

**Rebecca F. Giovannetti** is a graduate student in the Division of Emerging Media Studies at BU's College of Communications. She graduated with honors in her double-BA in Economics and International Relations at BU. She most recently worked as a Research Lead at BU's Human Security Co-Lab designing an inventory app to pool modern anti-slavery service providers in the Greater Boston area.

## **SESSION 3: NUDGING IN SINGAPORE: SOCIO-TECHNICAL CONTROL EFFORTS AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS**

1:00-1:45PM

*Keynote: Benjamin Detenber, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore*

*Respondent: Chris Wells, Boston University*

*Chair: Jacob Groshek, Kansas State University*

The city-state of Singapore has a long history of social engineering efforts, yet only recently have behavioral scientists started to create nudges and integrate them into daily life. This talk reviews some of the latest actions in three areas: Finance, Health, and the Environment. In discussing the range of nudging practices, their effectiveness will be assessed and some of the implications for society and individuals will be presented.

*Benjamin H. Detenber (Ph.D., Stanford University) is an Associate Professor in the Wee Kim Wee School of Communication at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. His research interests span media psychology, political communication, and public opinion, and his scholarship has appeared in top journals such as Communication Research, the International Journal of Public Opinion Research, and Science Communication.*

## **SESSION 4: WHY NOT NUDGE? | 1:45-2:30PM**

*Presenter: Victor Kumar, Boston University*

*Chair/Respondent: Juliet Floyd, Boston University*

Nudges designed by public policy makers have the potential to improve behavior without coercion or cost. I'll discuss three main ethical problems that surround nudging: they can be manipulative, opaque, or ill-designed. These problems have to be confronted whether the organizations behind nudging are governments, firms, or technology companies.

*Victor Kumar is an assistant professor in philosophy at Boston University. He works mainly at the intersection of ethics and cognitive science. He has published articles on moral emotions, moral reasoning, and moral learning.*

## **SESSION 5: SAYING THINGS WITH FACTS, OR: SENDING MESSAGES THROUGH REGULATION. AN ASPECT OF CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL COMMUNICATION | 2:30-3:15PM**

*Presenter: Peppino Ortoleva, University of Turin*

*Chair: James Cummings, Boston University*

*Respondent: Rob Chodat, Boston University*

There are many ways in which governments communicate with their citizens. Much has been written and is being researched about the uses of media, from traditional mass media and their presumed loss of influence to social networks and their presumed ascent. Some attention has been dedicated to the communication value of major political innovation, such as the "realignment" operated by Ronald Reagan through the change in tax policies, although generally what has been written about these subjects is strongly conditioned by the writer's judgment on

those policies. The realm of what we may call action/communication, or to reverse J. L. Austin's formula, "saying things with facts", is much wider and pertains to the daily life of politics not only to great political transitions.

This paper is centered on the political communication that is implicit in some regulations that are represented as neutral, such as the norms on compulsory vaccination. The fact that (in my opinion) these norms are necessary does not make them void of a meaning that go beyond their concrete effects. They implicate:

- » a representation of the state-as-doctor, in a society that is at the same time "morally skeptic" (to borrow Hillary Putnam's phrase), and more and more reliant on forms of therapy to resolve all aspects of life. In this representation, the state does not determine what is morally Good but promotes the what is concretely good for the citizen's bodies;
- » a representation of the state-as-scientist, which finances and promotes research, actively applies its results, and has a role in discriminating truth from falsehood;
- » a legitimation of the state and its norms, based not on the consensus of the citizens and their shared values, or on the charisma of a leader, but on the objectivity of medicine.

**Peppino Ortoleva** has been active for more than forty years as a scholar, critic, curator, at the crossroads of history, media studies, TV and radio authoring, museums and exhibits. He has been full professor of *Storia e teoria dei media* at the Università di Torino. He is also Profesor Adjunto at the Universidad de los Andes in Bogota, Colombia. He has recently taught courses in Germany, Spain and in other countries. His most recent book *Miti a bassa intensità (Low Intensity Myths)*, is a thorough analysis of contemporary mythologies and their presence in modern media. He has also published books on the history of the media system, on the youth movements of the Sixties, on private television in Italy and its cultural and political role, and on cinema and history. He is now working on a new book about the role of misunderstanding in communication. His activity as a curator of exhibitions and museums started in the early 1980s. Among the most recent exhibitions he has curated: *Rappresentare l'Italia on the history of Italian Parliament*, 2011, *I mondi di Primo Levi/ Les monds de Primo Levi*, 2015, *Lungo un secolo on narrating the XXth Century*, 2016. He is now curating, among other projects, the city museum of Catania, in Sicily.

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## SESSION 6: NUDGING, POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE, ON CHINA'S INTERNET | 3:30-4:15PM

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*Presenter: Lei Guo, Boston University*

*Chair: Margrit Betke, Boston University*

*Respondent: Eugenio Menegon, Boston University*

Since 2012, the slogan "transmitting positive energy" has been frequently used in China's mainstream media to encourage positive thoughts and attitudes that are aligned with the Party-State's ideological or value systems. That is, a good Chinese citizen should generally avoid participating in politics unless they do so to help maintain social harmony and stability. Drawing upon evidence collected from a national survey and a series of focus group discussions, the talk will shed light on whether Chinese citizens embrace the idea of "positive energy" and to what extent they implement it in practice. It will then discuss the relationship between news consumption, citizenship norms, and political expression in China's emerging media environment.

**Lei Guo** is an assistant professor in the Division of Emerging Media Studies at College of Communication, Boston University. Her research focuses mainly on the development of media effects theories, emerging media and democracy, and computational social science methodologies.

## SESSION 7: PATERNALISM VS. PERFECTIONISM | 4:15-5:00PM

*Presenter: Sandra Laugier, Sorbonne*

*Chair: Juliet Floyd, Boston University*

*Respondent: Steven Gerrard, Williams College*

We live in a world of norms and coercion, and our form of life is permeated by rules we follow in order to belong (Wittgenstein 1953, Diamond 1991, Cavell 1979). We are also 'manipulated' and influenced by communication, advertisement, images, new media (Katz, Floyd). Our freedom is limited and given these realities of the capitalist world and of the social order, why not accept the idea of nudges, i. e. incentives that would gently lead us to behavior that is positive for us and for others? For me, the problem with nudges does not concern restriction of freedom (nudges have the advantage of being non-coercive and allowing choice, their promoters Sunstein and Thaler repeat to us, 2008). We are all happy to be encouraged, by any means, to do this or that by people we love or admire, or by books and films that matter to us, and to try to become better (Cavell 1993, Laugier 2019).

The problem of nudges, therefore, is not in method or freedom, but in morality. It is not the reality of soft power or control, or the influences and incentives that permeate our society that we must fight: they are either inevitable or appreciable, and learning to lead a life is about creating a path in the middle of all this. What must be fought is moralism and conformity, which are at work in political thought, modelled on economic thought, in the very concept of nudging, which in its formulation is intended to be positive and gentle. Why should we accept that governments and society adopt the methods of trade/business, even if it is for our wellbeing? And, as has already been noted by a number of critics (Qizilbash 2018), why should we accept that some (experts and governments) decide what is good for us, and how to conduct ourselves?

The question is indeed that of democracy as a public space for discussion and collective choice, but also that of morality itself, as if it were to be the object of agreement, but also of learning and acquisition. Despite paternalism's denials, promoting nudges rather than the information and education method, it reflects a deeply undemocratic vision of society and of human perfectibility and education, and a lack of confidence in the capacities of citizen empowerment created by public discussion and participation. It is an actual regression in the conceptions of citizens' capabilities. I will illustrate this position with the example of TV shows' use for information and public policy.

**Sandra Laugier** is Professor of Philosophy at Université Paris 1 Panthéon Sorbonne, Paris, and a senior member of Institut Universitaire de France. She is deputy director of the Institut des sciences juridique et philosophique de la Sorbonne (UMR 8103, CNRS Paris 1). She has extensively published on ordinary language philosophy (Wittgenstein, Austin), moral philosophy and American philosophy (Cavell, Thoreau, Emerson), gender studies, democracy, and popular culture (film and TV series). She is the translator of Stanley Cavell's work.

She has been Visiting Professor at La Sapienza Roma in 2019, Boston University in 2019, University Pontifical, Lima in 2017, Visiting Researcher, Max Planck Institute, Berlin, in 2014 and 2015, Distinguished Visiting Professor, Johns Hopkins University, 2011, "Chaire invitée" at Faculté Saint-Louis de Bruxelles, October 2009, Visiting Professor, Johns Hopkins University, 2008, 2009. She has lectured at various other universities in Italy, Spain, Germany, Belgium, Switzerland, England, USA (Tufts, Harvard, JHU, UCLA, Berkeley, Columbia), Canada, Brazil, China, Japan, Taiwan, Singapore.

As a senior member of Institut Universitaire de France (2012-2018 and 2019-2023), she was recently awarded an ERC Advanced Grant for her project DEMOSERIES – Shaping Democratic Spaces: Security and TV Series (2020-2024). DEMOSERIES studies the "soft power" of TV series and shows how they constitute new resources for the moral education, creativity and perfectibility of their audience. Television series are increasingly recognized as an object of research, but their aesthetic potential to visualize ethical issues and develop collective reflection on democratic values has not yet been sufficiently appreciated; while they can play a crucial role in

the creation of shareable and shared values. She is also a columnist at the French Journal *Libération*. [www.liberation.fr/auteur/6377-sandra-laugier](http://www.liberation.fr/auteur/6377-sandra-laugier)

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## SESSION 8: IRRESISTIBLE NUDGES, INEVITABLE NUDGES, AND THE FREEDOM TO CHOOSE | 5:00-5:45PM

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*Presenter: Jens Kipper, University of Rochester*

*Chair: Michael Vallee, French Consulate*

*Respondent: Kay Mathiesen, Northeastern University*

In this presentation, I examine the effects of nudges on the autonomy and freedom of those nudged. I consider two arguments put forth by Richard H. Thaler and Cass R. Sunstein for the claim that these effects can only be minor. According to the first of these arguments, nudges cannot significantly restrict a person's autonomy or freedom since they are easy to resist. According to the second argument, the existence of nudges is inevitable, and thus, pursuing liberalist paternalism by nudging people doesn't make a relevant difference to people's autonomy and freedom. After arguing that both of these arguments fail, I elucidate the general conditions in which, and the degrees to which, a person's autonomy and freedom are affected by nudges. One focus of this discussion concerns how people's autonomy and freedom are affected if—e.g., due to progress in information technology—nudges become more effective, more individualized and more common, and affect more people.

*Jens Kipper is an assistant professor in philosophy at the University of Rochester. Most of his work is in the philosophy of language and mind, including the philosophy of Artificial Intelligence. Dr Kipper also has a background in applied ethics: For several years, he worked in a research group on neuroethics, and he is a co-author of a textbook on research ethics.*

