

COSUMNES RIVER COLLEGE & SACRAMENTO STATE UNIVERSITY'S  
CENTER FOR PRACTICAL AND PROFESSIONAL ETHICS **PRESENT**

10<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL  
FALL ETHICS  
SYMPOSIUM

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*The Ethics of Nudges*

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***NOVEMBER 16, 2015***  
COSUMNES RIVER COLLEGE  
RECITAL HALL

***NOVEMBER 17, 2015***  
SACRAMENTO STATE UNIVERSITY  
LIBRARY ROOM



## *The Ethics of Nudges*

How can we help ourselves and others make decisions where things go well for the one deciding, while still respecting the freedom of the decider? Such "nudging" can be a delicate and difficult task, as anyone knows who has tried to parent a teenager or help a friend quit smoking. And ever since the publication of Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein's 2008 book *Nudge: Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth, and Happiness*, the concept of "nudging" - trying to get people to decide what is best for themselves while still respecting their freedom - has been receiving increasing attention in both academic and popular conversations. From the way a school cafeteria arranges the placement of its veggie and desert options, to the way a university arranges incentives for students to graduate, to the way a corporation structures its employee pension contributions, the concept of "nudges" - and the related concepts of manipulation, choice architecture, and "libertarian paternalism" - are hot topics. Is it really possible for individuals to "nudge" one another without manipulation or coercion? Is it really a wise idea for the government to get (or stay) in the business of "nudging" one of its citizens for that citizen's own good? Come join us for two days of reflection and discussion on these and other ethical questions surrounding "nudges."

*Monday, November 16, 2015*

**9:00 A.M. - 9:15 A.M.**

**MORNING REFRESHMENTS,  
COFFEE / TEA**

LOCATION—Recital Hall, Cosumnes River College

**9:15 A.M. – 9:30 A.M.**

**GREETINGS AND OPENING REMARKS**

LOCATION—Recital Hall, Cosumnes River College

*Russell DiSilvestro*, Associate Professor of Philosophy and Director,  
Center for Practical and Professional Ethics, Sacramento State University

*Rick Schubert*, Professor of Philosophy, Cosumnes River College and  
Executive Director, CRC-CPPE Fall Ethics Symposium Series

*Robert S. Nelsen*, President, Sacramento State

*Edward Bush*, President, Cosumnes River College

**9:30 A.M. – 11:30 A.M.**

**SESSION #1: NUDGED AND RATIONAL**

LOCATION—Recital Hall, Cosumnes River College

**MAIN SPEAKER:**

*Timothy Houk*, Ph.D candidate, Department of Philosophy,  
University of California Davis

**PANELISTS:**

*Gerald Dworkin*, Distinguished Professor of Philosophy (Emeritus),  
University of California Davis

*Moti Gorin*, Assistant Professor of Philosophy, Colorado State University

*Dan Haybron*, Professor of Philosophy, St. Louis University

**11:30 A.M. – 1:30 P.M.**

**LUNCH BREAK**

Please visit one of the dining establishments serving campus.

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*Monday, November 16*

1:30 P.M. – 3:30 P.M.

**SESSION #2: MUCH ADO ABOUT NUDGING**

LOCATION—Recital Hall, Cosumnes River College

**MAIN SPEAKER:**

*Moti Gorin*, Assistant Professor of Philosophy, Colorado State University.

**PANELISTS:**

*Gerald Dworkin*, Distinguished Professor of Philosophy (Emeritus),  
University of California Davis

*Dan Haybron*, Professor of Philosophy, St. Louis University

*Timothy Houk*, Ph.D candidate, Department of Philosophy,  
University of California Davis

3:30 P.M.

**RECEPTION, LIGHT REFRESHMENTS**

LOCATION—Recital Hall, Cosumnes River College

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*Tuesday, November 17*

9:00 A.M. - 9:15 A.M.

**MORNING REFRESHMENTS,  
COFFEE / TEA**

LOCATION—Library Room 11 (back entrance, lower level), Sacramento State

9:15 A.M. – 9:30 A.M.

**GREETINGS AND OPENING REMARKS**

LOCATION—Library Room 11, Sacramento State

*Russell DiSilvestro*, Associate Professor of Philosophy and Director,  
Center for Practical and Professional Ethics, Sacramento State University

*Rick Schubert*, Professor of Philosophy, Cosumnes River College and  
Executive Director, CRC-CPPE Fall Ethics Symposium Series

*Christina M. Bellon*, Professor of Philosophy and Chair of the Department of  
Philosophy, Sacramento State

*Edward Inch*, Dean, College of Arts and Letters, Sacramento State

*Frederika “Fraka” Harmsen*, Provost, Sacramento State

*Robert S. Nelsen*, President, Sacramento State

*Edward Bush*, President, Cosumnes River College

## *Tuesday, November 17*

9:30 A.M. – 11:30 A.M.

**SESSION #3: KEYNOTE SESSION, CHOICE ARCHITECTURE AND LIFESTYLE INFRASTRUCTURE**

LOCATION—Library Room 11, Sacramento State

**MAIN SPEAKER:**

*Dan Haybron*, Professor of Philosophy, St. Louis University

**PANELISTS:**

*Gerald Dworkin*, Distinguished Professor of Philosophy (Emeritus), University of California Davis

*Moti Gorin*, Assistant Professor of Philosophy, Colorado State University

*Timothy Houk*, Ph.D candidate, Department of Philosophy, University of California Davis

11:30 A.M. – 1:30 P.M.

**LUNCH BREAK**

Please visit one of the dining establishments serving campus, either in the University Union or at the Riverfront Center.

1:30 P.M. – 3:30 P.M.

**SESSION #4: NUDGE? NUDGE? THINK. THINK**

LOCATION—Library Room 11, Sacramento State

**MAIN SPEAKER:**

*Gerald Dworkin*, Distinguished Professor of Philosophy (Emeritus), University of California Davis

**PANELISTS:**

*Moti Gorin*, Assistant Professor of Philosophy, Colorado State University

*Dan Haybron*, Professor of Philosophy, St. Louis University

*Timothy Houk*, Ph.D candidate, Department of Philosophy, University of California Davis

3:30 P.M.

**RECEPTION, LIGHT REFRESHMENTS**

LOCATION—Library Room 11, Sacramento State

*Timothy Houk*, Ph.D candidate,  
Department of Philosophy, University of  
California Davis

### **Nudged and Rational**

#### **ABSTRACT:**

I aim to defend the practice of nudging against a particular moral concern. Some argue that nudging is morally objectionable because it somehow interferes with, or undermines, the rationality of the nudged agents. Promoting rational choice is good and preventing or thwarting rational choice is bad (perhaps because it violates people's autonomy or prevents them from giving informed consent). So nudging appears to be bad. However, I argue nudging does not typically threaten rationality in this way. I evaluate what effect nudging has on our deliberative process and our resulting decisions, and I argue that nudging typically leaves the nudged agent's rationality intact. Lastly, I explore what implications this has for nudging's supposed threat to autonomy.

#### *Biography:*

*Houk was educated at Sacramento State (BA, Philosophy), Biola University (MA, Philosophy of Religion and Ethics), and UC Davis (MA, Ph.D candidate, Philosophy). His teaching responsibilities include courses in the History of Ethics and Ethics and Social Problems in Contemporary Society, and he is the co-author (with Bernard Molyneux) of the forthcoming "Intuitions" article in The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. He served as Conference Director of the 2014 Berkeley-Stanford-Davis Graduate Philosophy Conference, and has served since 2014 as the Website Manager for the UC Davis Philosophy Department. His doctoral dissertation is on the nature and moral status of manipulation.*

*Moti Gorin*, Assistant Professor of  
Philosophy, Colorado State University

### **Much Ado About Nudging**

#### **ABSTRACT:**

Some philosophers claim that libertarian paternalist interventions, i.e., so-called "nudges," exert an illicit form of control over those whose behavior they influence. The worry is that nudgers, by exploiting various cognitive deficits, undermine the autonomy of nudgees. Such criticisms rest on an assumption the truth of which behavioral economists have openly called into doubt. The assumption is that people always, or almost always, have authentic preferences over the options confronting them, preferences that accurately reflect deeply held values. I argue that recent research strongly suggests that this assumption is false and that consequently autonomy-based objections to nudging fail. This narrow defense of nudging does not, however, let libertarian paternalists completely off the hook. Though there is nothing especially morally troubling about nudges they—like any form of influence—can be morally problematic when they are invasive or when they fail to aim at the right ends.

*Presentation Abstracts &  
Speaker Biographies*

*Biography:*

*Gorin was educated at Rice University (PhD, MA, Philosophy) and The University of Pennsylvania (MBE, Bioethics). He has been an Assistant Professor at Colorado State since 2015; from 2013-2015 he was a Postdoctoral Fellow in Advanced Biomedical Ethics in the Department of Medical Ethics and Health Policy, Perelman School of Medicine (University of Pennsylvania). His published work is primarily in moral philosophy, studying the nature and ethical dimensions of manipulation, both at a theoretical level and at various applied levels affecting decision-making in medical settings.*

*Dan Haybron*, Professor of  
Philosophy, St. Louis University

**Choice Architecture and Lifestyle Infrastructure**

**ABSTRACT:**

The literature on nudges has tended to focus mainly on “point interventions” meant to encourage specific actions. In some cases, like setting default options to favor retirement savings, nudging seems unobjectionable. But as a broad approach to policy that aspires to substantially improve citizens’ welfare, it raises reasonable concerns about paternalism and an unwelcome expansion of government: devising and implementing such nudges could require a costly and intrusive administrative apparatus that could be hard to monitor, and might not always be restrained or wise in its efforts to influence people’s choices. I suggest that this approach misses the forest for the trees: some of the most important policy decisions affecting citizens’ well-being have to do with the institutions, norms, and social and physical environment that shapes the way people live: lifestyle infrastructure. Tax and regulatory regimes, urban planning and transportation policies, agricultural subsidies, and many other policy choices play an enormous role in setting the stage on which people make their lives. (Consider how the American lifestyle has evolved since WWII.) Such choices are inevitable, and they bombard people with a daily blizzard of nudges that can profoundly influence their well-being. I argue that lifestyle infrastructure decisions constitute a central case of well-being policy, and require choices about which manner of nudges we wish to subject ourselves to. The result is perhaps a far more ambitious application of the nudge strategy than the standard approach; indeed such policy shapes not only choices, but also preferences. Yet ironically it may be less vulnerable to worries about government expansion and bureaucratic meddling: no effort is made to manage specific choices; policymakers simply add further information to their deliberations about policy choices they already have to make about matters that promise to strongly influence the way people choose to live. I suggest that it is a crucial element of policy that aspires to enable citizens better to achieve their values.



## *Presentation Abstracts & Speaker Biographies*

*Biography:*

*Haybron was educated at Rutgers University (PhD, Philosophy, 2001) and has been teaching in the Department of Philosophy at Saint Louis University since 2002. His work is primarily in the psychology of well-being and its connections with issues in ethical and political thought. He has written Happiness: A Very Short Introduction (Oxford University Press, 2013) and The Pursuit of Unhappiness: The Elusive Psychology of Well-Being (Oxford University Press, 2008), and he was recently named as the principal investigator on Happiness and Well-Being: Integrating Research Across the Disciplines, a \$5.1 million project funded by the John Templeton Foundation (see <http://www.happinessandwellbeing.org/> for more details).*

*Gerald Dworkin*, Distinguished Professor of Philosophy (Emeritus), University of California, Davis

**Nudge? Nudge? Think. Think.****ABSTRACT:**

Why should you not call yourself a libertarian paternalist? Why might nudging be bad? Even if nudging is not always bad, still, when might nudging be criticized? Unlike paternalism, which, when wrong, has a clear explanation of why it is wrong--because it interferes with liberty or autonomy--nudges, when wrong, may be wrong for lots of different reasons which have no obvious unifying explanation.

*Biography:*

*Dworkin was educated at UC Berkeley (PhD, Philosophy, 1966) and taught at Harvard, MIT, the University of Illinois Chicago, and then for many years in the Department of Philosophy at UC Davis until he retired as Distinguished Professor in 2011. His work in moral and political philosophy includes many reflections on paternalism, where someone attempts to restrict another's freedom for the alleged benefit of the one whose freedom is restricted. Among his many writings are his books Morality, Harm, and the Law (Westview Press, 1984), The Freedom and Practice of Autonomy (Cambridge University Press, 1988) and (co-authored with R. G. Frey and Sissela Bok) Euthanasia and Physician-Assisted Suicide: For and Against (Cambridge University Press, 1998).*

## *Acknowledgements*

*We wish to thank the following...*

Academic Technology and Creative Services,  
Sacramento State University

Cosumnes River College Foundation

Office of the President, Cosumnes River College

Public Information Office and Duplicating Services,  
Cosumnes River College

Sacramento Educational Cable Consortium

Wagenlis Foundation

### **ABOUT THE CENTER FOR PRACTICAL AND PROFESSIONAL ETHICS**

Founded in 2005 by the Philosophy Department as a complement to its teaching and scholarly focus upon ethics, The Center for Practical and Professional Ethics takes as its overriding mission to foster and enhance the place of ethics in professional and public discourse, and to foster and support ethical practice, both in the University Community and in the broader Sacramento Region. Its mission is, therefore, educative, scholarly and practical. For further information about this and future ethics events, to support our activities, or for consultation services, please visit [www.csus.edu/cppe](http://www.csus.edu/cppe).



# ETHICS

