

Katie Zhou

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AREAS OF SPECIALIZATION

metaphysics, moral and political philosophy, feminist/queer/trans theory, philosophy of language

AREAS OF COMPETENCE

philosophy of mind, bioethics, ethics of technology

EDUCATION

Massachusetts Institute of Technology

September 2022-present

PhD in Philosophy (expected Spring 2026)

Thesis: *Transformative Political Communication*

Committee: Sally Haslanger (chair), Justin Khoo, Kieran Setiya, Gina Schouten (Harvard)

Short Abstract: What does political communication seek to accomplish, and what norms ought to govern it? In my dissertation, I challenge the idea that political discourse consists primarily in either the exchange of factual information or deliberation about what to do. Rather, by drawing on recent examples of political discourse around gender, I argue that political communication often seeks to change our affective dispositions. Moreover, I argue that this affective dimension of political communication forces us to rethink both what norms ought to govern political communication, and what we owe to those with whom we have entrenched political disagreements.

University of Chicago

August 2017-June 2021

B.A., Philosophy, B.A., Fundamentals: Issues and Texts, Minor in Mathematics
Summa cum laude with Honors in Philosophy and Fundamentals

Thesis: “Hinge Propositions, The Transparency Principle, and Rational Agency”
Supervisor: Anton Ford

PUBLICATIONS

“Verbal Disputes, Total Social Phenomena, and Trans Politics”
Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, **114**(2): 631-651, 2025

“Gender, Gender Expression, and the Dilemma of the Body”
Ethics, **135**(4): 664-688, 2025
Selected for a [PEA Soup](#) discussion, with a critical précis from Cressida Heyes.

WORKS IN PROGRESS

“Affective Autonomy and Affective Civility”
Under review

“Can ‘Might’ Make Right? Epistemic Modals and Action Justification”
Under review

“How to Distinguish Between Explanation and Interpretation”

“The Democratic Legitimacy of Social Change”

PRESENTATIONS AND TALKS (* = refereed)

Affective Autonomy and Affective Civility

122 nd Eastern Division Meeting of the APA* Baltimore, MD	January 2026
Association for Political Theory 2025 Annual Conference* at Loyola University Chicago	November 2025
Philadelphia Normativity Philosophy Conference* at University of Pennsylvania	October 2025
Civility and Politics Conference* at University of Kansas	July 2025
Talks On Morality Across The Ocean (TOMATO ²)* at Durham University	July 2025
Columbia Graduate Conference in Political Theory* at Columbia University	February 2025

Verbal Disputes and Trans Politics

Queer A-φ Conference* at University of California Santa Cruz	April 2025
Thinking Trans* at Lafayette College	March 2025
MITing of the Minds at Massachusetts Institute of Technology	January 2025
Michigan-MIT Social Philosophy Workshop* at Massachusetts Institute of Technology	April 2024
Words Workshop Virtual	November 2023

Gender Talk and Its Discontents

Words Workshop Virtual	April 2023
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Michigan-MIT Social Philosophy Workshop* at University of Michigan	April 2023
Workshop on Gender and Philosophy Reading Group Virtual	October 2022

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

As Primary Instructor at MIT

<i>Experiential Ethics</i> (Life Sciences Track)	Summer 2025
<i>Experiential Ethics</i>	Summer 2024

As Teaching Assistant at MIT

<i>Philosophy of Religion</i> , Jack Spencer	Spring 2025
Guest Lecture: “Religious Freedom and LGBTQ+ Discrimination”	
<i>Bioethics</i> , Robin Scheffler and Michal Masny	Fall 2024
<i>Paradox and Infinity</i> , Benjamin Brast-McKie	Spring 2024
<i>Problems of Philosophy</i> , Eliot Watkins	Fall 2023
Guest Lecture: “Locke on Personal Identity”	

Teaching in High Schools

Assistant Director, Corrupt the Youth Boston	Spring 2025 - present
Instructor, Corrupt the Youth Boston	Spring 2024 - present
Instructor, <i>Verbal Disagreements</i> , MIT SPLASH 2023	October 2023

Invited Guest Lectures

<i>Topics in Feminist Philosophy</i> , Gina Schouten (Harvard University)	Fall 2025
Seminar: “Gender, Gender Expression, and the Dilemma of the Body”	
<i>Bioethics</i> , Haley Schilling Anderson (Oberlin College)	Spring 2025
Lecture: “Gender, Gender Expression, and the Dilemma of the Body”	
<i>Being, Thinking, Doing</i> , Joshua Pearson and Nicholas Collura (MIT)	Spring 2025
Lecture: “Affective Disagreement”	

Pedagogical Training

Microteaching Certificate, MIT Teaching + Learning Lab	Fall 2024
Lesson Planning Track Certificate, MIT Teaching + Learning Lab	Fall 2024
Subject Design Track Certificate, MIT Teaching + Learning Lab	Summer 2023

SERVICE

Founder, MIT Queer Theory + History Reading Group	June 2023-present
Co-organizer, SHAPE	August 2023-present

<i>Community Affairs Coordinator, MIT Philosophy</i>	September 2025-present
<i>Referee, Croatian Journal of Philosophy</i>	September 2025
<i>Co-organizer, WOGAP 25th Anniversary Conference</i>	June 2025
<i>Professional Development Coordinator, MIT Philosophy</i>	September 2024-June 2025
<i>Referee, Noûs</i>	April 2025
<i>Graduate Representative to the Faculty, MIT Philosophy</i>	June 2023-June 2024
<i>Co-organizer, Workshop on Society in (Transition): Gender and Social Change</i>	April 2024
<i>Co-organizer, Harvard-MIT Graduate Philosophy Conference</i>	April 2023

OTHER PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Brave Space Alliance, Development Staff June 2020-July 2022

- Managed donor relations for Chicago’s first Black-led BIPOC LGBTQ+ community center
- Coordinated grocery deliveries from the org’s Community Pantry to families in need
- Co-authored successful grant applications for the org’s first-ever city and state grants

AWARDS AND HONORS

Kenin Sahin Presidential Graduate Fellowship, 2022-23
 Best Senior Exam in Fundamentals, 2021
 Phi Beta Kappa, 2020

REFERENCES

For confidential letters of recommendation, please reach out to Christine Graham (e: cgraham@mit.edu; p: +1 617.253.4141; f: +1 617.253.5017)

Sally Haslanger
 Ford Professor of Philosophy and Women’s and Gender Studies
 MIT Department of Linguistics and Philosophy
shaslang@mit.edu

Gina Schouten
 Professor
 Harvard Department of Philosophy
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Justin Khoo
 Associate Professor
 MIT Department of Linguistics and Philosophy
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Jack Spencer (teaching)
 Associate Professor
 MIT Department of Linguistics and Philosophy
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Kieran Setiya
 Peter de Florez Professor
 MIT Department of Linguistics and Philosophy
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