

**To nudge or not to nudge: a debate on the ethical pros and cons of ‘soft paternalism’**

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**Abstract**

While economics assumes that we have a comprehensive set of conscious and rational preferences driving our decision-making, behavioural economics (BE) has found through experiments how human beings are, often unconsciously, subject to cognitive biases and emotional reactions. One of the pillars of BE is the ‘nudge’ concept: the deliberative engineering of the choice architecture to change behaviour at an automatic level and in a predictable way without forbidding any options or significantly changing their economic incentives. The motivation of using BE findings in policy is to modify human behaviour towards some perception of what is ‘good’. While Lichtenberg defines *classical, or hard, paternalism* as ‘forcing people by law or some other form of regulation to act in their own best interests’, she defines *libertarian, or soft, paternalism* as ‘attempts to influence the choices of affected parties in a way that will make choosers better off, without forcing them to do something or refrain from doing something’. Given that fisheries management currently uses law and regulation to force people to act according to objectives that are intended to be good for a larger group of individuals collectively (fishers, future fishers, citizens, future citizens), using deliberate nudges would extend this paternalism from hard to soft. The question arises, is it ethical to manipulate people? In this panel discussion the two authors will briefly present and argue opposite views on this issue, purposefully representing the two extremes to clarify the arguments. After their presentations the floor is open to debate among the audience.

**Keywords:** behavioural economics, ethics, manipulation, nudge, paternalism

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