24.134 Experiential Ethics (6-unit) Syllabus
Summer 2023

Course Leaders
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Course description

Welcome to Experiential Ethics! Through weekly, 90-minute discussion groups of ~5 students, you'll have the opportunity to explore ethical, social, and political issues related to your own experiences—whether these are projects you're working on, internships, future goals, or your experiences at MIT. Your discussion group will be led by a Graduate Teaching Fellow (TF), and you will have short assignments to guide you through your ethical exploration, as well as a final project. Fundamentally, the class is driven by you: we want you (as a discussion group and as an individual) to explore these issues as you want to explore them, with our help and guidance along the way. All of us on the Teaching Team are excited to work with you this summer.

This course runs alongside 24.133, and is an enriched and expanded version of that course material. You will participate in virtual field trips and a final showcase with classmates from 24.133.

Intended learning outcomes

By the end of the course, you will be able to:
- Identify your personal values and challenges you might face (e.g. in the workplace)
- Identify and critically evaluate ethical dimensions of real-world situations from current events to your own life
- Explain and apply philosophical concepts including ethical lenses, stakeholders, value-laden choice points, social construction, and structural injustice
- Interpret ethical arguments in different contexts, from philosophical writing to journalism
- Communicate and defend your own ethical perspectives on real-world issues to different audiences
- Recognize and critically evaluate the social and political dimensions of your personal decision-making, scientific inquiry, and technology design
- Advocate for a real-world ethical decision facing a community you participate in

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Course materials

Everything you need in the course can be found on the Canvas page. We also have a Slack channel that you will use to continue the conversation with your discussion group, fellow classmates, and Experiential Ethics alums.

Graduate Teaching Fellows

- Alex Reiss-Sorokin, HASTS (rsalex@mit.edu)
  - Sundays on Zoom
- Alex Benjamín Muñoz Rojas, Political Science (benja_mr@mit.edu)
  - Saturdays on Zoom
- Bess Rothman, Philosophy (bessroth@mit.edu)
  - Tuesdays on Zoom
  - Thursdays on MIT campus, 4-251
- Sonia Maria Pavel, Philosophy (smpavel@mit.edu)
  - Saturdays on Zoom

Time commitment

This is a 6-credit class, which means you can expect a total time commitment (including all homework and class time) of approximately 80 hours over the term.

Assessments and grading

24.134 is graded A/B/C/etc. The grading distribution is as follows:

- Attendance and participation   30%
- Pre-session assignments and discussion questions   5%
- Op-Ed assignment   10%
- Advocacy assignment   10%
- Argument assignment   10%
- Independent project   35%

You must pass each portion of the class to pass the class as a whole. In order to pass the participation portion, you may have only one unexcused absence (including from discussion sessions, field trip, and Fall Showcase). Missed classes and late assignments are excused with a note from Student Support Services. For each unexcused day that an assignment is late, its grade drops by a third of a letter (e.g., A to A-).

To make sure expectations are clear, we have developed **rubrics** for each assessment that you will be able to consult in advance. Rubrics will be available on Canvas.

Participation

Participation is central to Experiential Ethics. We want you to work through ethical issues together with your peers, which requires participation. Your participation grade will not just be determined by the amount you participate, but also the manner. On the first day of class, the members of your discussion group and your TF will create ground rules for discussion. You can also participate through posting on your discussion group's Slack channel. Slack norms will be set by your group and TF.

To facilitate community-building, each of you will share for 2-4 minutes about yourself and your work during one week. Those presentations will be scheduled after Week 1.

You will also participate in a virtual field trip during the course. The field trips are opportunities to connect with professionals who have built their careers with ethics and the public good in mind. Each field trip session involves one or two panelists. You have the opportunity to do research on their work beforehand and ask them questions in small groups on Zoom.

In addition to your contributions in discussion sections, your participation grade will also reflect your completion of the midterm and end-of-term evaluation forms.

Assignments

We have crafted assignments that directly contribute to the course's intended learning outcomes. Assignments are designed to help you engage with course material and integrate the concepts we learn into your personal life.

- **Weekly pre-session assignments**
  - For the class to be student-driven, you have to be prepared to contribute to each session. Each week, there is usually a short mandatory reading, video, or worksheet introducing the content for the session.

- **Discussion questions**
  - Before **three** of your discussion sections, submit a question to your TF via Slack about the week's material.

- **Op-Ed assignment (due after Week 4)**
  - Select a choice point faced by a community you're in and write an op-ed to persuade them to make a particular choice. Details can be found on the Canvas assignment page.

- **Advocacy Assignment (due after Week 7)**
  - Research an issue you care about outside your work or school. Consider potential actions you could take to advocate on this issue. Details can be found on the Canvas assignment page.

- **Argument Assignment (due anytime throughout the course, final deadline Week 10)**:
  - Reconstruct and analyze an ethical argument. Details can be found on the Canvas assignment page.

- **Independent project (milestones throughout the summer; final version due after Week 10)**
  - Your project for this class is highly flexible. We will provide you with certain options—write a 1,750-word essay, create a website, perform an interview on someone in your field and write a commentary about it, make a series of vlogs, etc. You may also propose your own. Details can be found in the Project Guidelines.
  - An important element of the project is a poster presentation at the Fall Showcase. This year's Showcase will be held **Wednesday, September 13 from 4-6pm.**

Course expectations and policies

Academic integrity

We take academic integrity very seriously. If you're in doubt about what counts as a breach of academic integrity, get in touch with your TF or refer to the Academic Integrity Handbook. If academic dishonesty is proven, there will be severe disciplinary consequences, which may include any or all of: a redo of the assignment for a reduced grade; failure on the assignment; failure of the course; a letter in the student's file in the Office of Student Citizenship or referral to the Committee on Discipline. If you're tempted to plagiarize, it's always better to speak to your TF, the course leaders, your advisor, academic deans, or another trusted authority on campus who can help you.

Accommodation

If you have a disability, you have a right under the American with Disabilities Act to an accommodation. As a matter of Institute policy, requests for accommodation must first go through Student Disabilities Services. If you are eligible, they will give you an accommodation letter that you should bring to your TF as soon as possible. That way you and your TF can work together to make sure all of the course content is accessible to you. We take this very seriously, and it is our top priority to support all of our students.

Inclusivity

MIT values an inclusive environment. Experiential Ethics seeks to foster community, collaboration, and respectful dialogue within discussion sections and across the course. We welcome individuals of all backgrounds, beliefs, ethnicities, national origins, gender identities, sexual orientations, religious and political affiliations – and other visible and nonvisible differences. All members of the class are expected to contribute to a respectful, welcoming, and inclusive environment for every other member of the class.

If you have concerns

If you have concerns with anything about the class for any reason, please contact your TF, the course leaders, or write through this anonymous form. (You can also contact the Ombuds Office.) Everyone in the class deserves to feel that they're in a positive and safe environment, and no issue is too small to raise.

Data Privacy

We want you to have ownership over your data and the assignments for the class. After the class is over, the Experiential Ethics team will delete the assignments you've submitted, unless you opt in to share them going forward.

Details subject to change

Some details of the syllabus may change over the course of the term, but the basic workload will remain the same. We will notify you if and when anything changes.

Key dates and deadlines

Week 4 (Jul 2)	Op-Ed Assignment Due
Week 5	Deadline to meet with your TF to discuss project idea
Week 5 (Jul 9)	Deadline to complete the Midterm Evaluation Form
Week 6	Deadline to submit your project proposal
Weeks 7-8 (tentative)	Field Trip Sessions (virtual; mandatory; attend one)
Week 7 (Jul 23)	Advocacy Assignment due
Week 8	Workshop your project with your classmates and TF; give peer feedback on shareable component
Week 9	Turn in second draft of shareable component to TF
Week 10 (Aug 13)	Deadline to submit Argument Assignment
August 18	Deadline to submit your project to your TF
September 13	Present your project at Fall Showcase (In person)
September 22	Deadline to complete the End of Term Evaluation Form

Course schedule

Below is an overview of the class, including all assignment details and deadlines. Please note that every class discussion session starts on the hour (*not 5 minutes past)* and is a full 90 minutes long.

Week 1 (Week of June 5): Introduction

> *Pre-session assignment:*
> - Read and respond to SOCIALIC Week 1
> - Download and complete Personal Values worksheet

Optional Supplemental Reading:
- Andrew Feenberg, "Ten Paradoxes of Technology"

Week 2 (Week of June 12): Ethical Questions and Ethical Lenses

Overview: This week, we begin diving into ethics. What is ethics? How can we go about answering ethical questions and handling ethical problems? We introduce a tool, the *ethical lenses,* to help us start thinking through real-life ethical challenges.

> Pre-session assignments:
> - Read "The IRS Should Stop Using Facial Recognition," by Joy Buolamwini
> - Read sections I, IV, and VI from Isaiah Berlin, "The Pursuit of the Ideal" in *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*
> - Download and complete the Ethical Questions Assignment; submit to your TF

Optional Supplemental Reading:
- Andrew Feeberg, "Critical Theory of Technology: An Overview"; "Critical Theory of Technology"
- Russ Shafer-Landau, "Ten Arguments Against Moral Objectivity"

Week 3 (Week of June 19*): Decision-Making With Stakeholders in Mind

Overview: This week, we practice applying a framework for integrating ethics and values into our work: the Ethics Protocol. The Ethics Protocol builds on the ethical lenses we encountered last week.

*If your section meets on Monday, it will be rescheduled. Your TF will provide details.

> Pre-session assignments:
> - Watch the Ethics Protocol Video (23 min)
>   - Version with subtitles available here
> - Read one of the following articles (whichever corresponds to the topic your group selected last week)
>   - *Navigation apps:* "Navigation Apps are Turning Quiet Neighborhoods Into Traffic Nightmares," by Lisa Foderaro
>   - *Dockless scooters:* "Electric Scooters are Causing Havoc. This Man Is Shrugging It Off," by Nellie Bowles and David Streitfeld
>   - *Contact tracing apps:* "For States' COVID Contact Tracing Apps, Privacy Tops Utility" by Lindsey Van Ness
> - Complete the Envisioning Futures Assignment

Optional Supplemental Reading:
- "Meant to Keep Malaria Out, Mosquito Nets Are Used to Haul Fish In," by Jeffrey Gettleman; and a response article from the GiveWell Blog, "Putting the Problem of Bed Nets Used for Fishing In Perspective," by Jake Marcus
- T.M. Scanlon, "Contractualism and Utilitarianism" (start with section II)
- "Reflecting on our Language: Stakeholder" by Sarah Bentley

Week 4 (Week of June 26): Values in Science and Technology

Overview: Here, we start looking at the broader, societal implications of our work. We consider the questions of whether science can be objective and whether technology can be value-neutral. Can a technology itself ever be good or bad, or is it always a matter of how people use it? Is science just a matter of collecting and interpreting data, or is it also a social project?

> *Pre-session assignments:*
> - *Read* "Do Artifacts Have Politics?" by Langdon Winner (focus especially on p. 123-129)
>   - You can consult the following video for an overview: "Summary of 'Do Artifacts Have Politics?' by Langdon Winner" by Tom Gorichanaz
> - *Watch* Michael Weisberg, "Should Science be Value-Free?"

Optional Supplemental Reading:
- "Technologies as Forms of Life" by Langdon Winner
- "Knowledge, Human Interests, and Objectivity in Feminist Epistemology" by Elizabeth Anderson
- "The Image of Objectivity" by Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison
- "Inductive Risk and Values in Science" by Heather Douglas
- "Bias in computer systems" by Batya Friedman and Helen Nissenbaum
- Opinion: "Is Science Value Free?"

Week 5 (Week of July 3*): Social Construction, Technology, and Justice

Overview: Here, we delve into the relationship between justice and technology, understood broadly. What does it mean to say that an object or an idea is socially constructed? How can technology either worsen or help alleviate injustices such as economic inequality, racism, sexism, and ableism? We think through these issues using real-world cases and the concept of *discriminatory design.*

*If your section meets on Tuesday, it will be rescheduled. Your TF will provide details.

> *Pre-session assignments*
> - Watch "From Park Bench To Lab Bench: What Kind of Future Are We Designing?" *TEDxBaltimore* talk by Ruha Benjamin
> - Read Sally Haslanger - "Gender and Social Construction: Who? What? When? Where? How?";

> - Meet with your TF (10-15 min) to discuss your independent project (Details about the project can be found on the assignment page)
> - Complete the midterm evaluation

Optional Supplemental Reading:
- "Assessing Risk, Automating Racism" by Ruha Benjamin (in *Science*)
- "Making Up People" by Ian Hacking (in *London Review of Books*)
- *The Social Construction of What?* by Ian Hacking (1999)
- "Big Data's Disparate Impact" by Solon Barocas and Andrew Selbst
- *Design Justice: Community-Led Practices to Build The Worlds We Need* by Sasha Costanza- Chock (2020)
- "The Social Construction of Disability" by Susan Wendell
- "Gender and Race: (What) Are They? (What) Do We Want Them To Be?" by Sally Haslanger

Week 6 (Week of July 10): Social Structures and Structural Injustice

Overview: This week, we build on our understanding of social structures to discuss structural injustice. What is it, and what might it mean to say that we are responsible for it as individuals? We discuss different senses of responsibility and see them in action in real cases.

> *Pre-session assignments:*
> - Read Iris Marion Young, "Structure as the Subject of Justice" (sections I and II) and "Responsibility and Global Justice: A Social Connection Model" (section V)
> - Submit your independent project proposal to your TF

Optional Supplemental Reading:
- Safiya Umoja Noble, *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism* (2018)
- Mar Hicks, *Programmed Inequality: How Britain Discarded Women Technologists and Lost Its Edge in Computing* (2017),
- Charlton D. McIllwain, *Black Software: The Internet and Racial Justice, from the AfroNet to Black Lives Matter* (2020)
- Virginia Eubanks, *Automating Inequality: How High-Tech Tools Profile, Police, and Punish the Poor* (2018)

Week 7 (Week of July 17): Responsibility and Social Roles

Overview: We all have multiple distinct sets of responsibilities at a given time; e.g., those from among: employee, student, daughter/son, parent, scientist, teacher, manager, neighbor, doctor, etc. This week, we consider how occupying those roles can lead to ethical conflicts, and how we can navigate them responsibly.

Pre-session assignments:
- Read "How Not To Teach Ethics," by Susan Silbey
- Read excerpts (noted on pdf) from "Role Morality," by Patricia Werhane
- Complete the field trip assignment corresponding to the field trip session you signed up for. **This assignment is due 3 days before the time of the field trip session, which may occur before or after your discussion session.**

Optional Supplemental Reading:
- "What is My Role in Changing the System? A New Model of Responsibility for Structural Injustice," by Robin Zheng

Week 8 (Week of July 24): Project Workshop

Overview: This week, you workshop your independent project with your peers and TF. Your assigned TF will provide guidelines and expectations for workshopping.

Pre-session assignment:
- Prepare to workshop your project. Workshop guidelines will be available on the assignment page.

Post-session assignment:
- Provide peer feedback on two of your classmates' sharable components on Canvas. Include (1) one thing you like about your classmate's project that you think they should keep and/or build on; and (2) either a response to a question they posed to the group during their presentation or one thing you think they should clarify, improve, or delve deeper into.

Week 9 (Week of July 31): Ethics at MIT

Overview: This week, we think through some of the complicated and difficult ethical issues arising at our shared academic home, MIT. We bring to bear all the tools we've gained in the course to consider what responsibilities we might have in virtue of benefitting from, and contributing to, MIT, as well as how we might go about fulfilling those responsibilities.

> *Pre-session assignments:*
> - Watch <u>"Working at MIT,"</u> by Noam Chomsky
> - Read <u>"Why is there so much Saudi money in American universities?"</u> NYT 2019
> - Read MIT <u>philosophers respond</u> to <u>MIT's decision</u> not to cut financial ties with Saudi Arabia
> - Turn in second draft of shareable component

Optional Supplemental Reading:
- <u>"Seven Dilemmas,"</u> by Angela Chen and Gideon Lichfield
- <u>"The Problem With Philanthropy,"</u> by Sally Haslanger
- <u>"On the Value of the Intellectual Commons"</u>, by James Wilson
- <u>"On Joi and MIT,"</u> by Lessig

Week 10 (Week of August 7): Living in Light of Your Values

Overview: Ethics is the study of how to live one's life. Living ethically requires navigating the world around you in responsible ways, as we've discussed throughout this course. This week, we bridge the individual and community and ask how to live as an ethical global citizen.

> *Pre-session assignments:*
> - Read "<u>Introduction: #TravelingWhileTrans, Design Justice, and Escape from the Matrix of Domination</u>" by Sasha Costanza-Chock (from *Design Justice: Community-Led Practices to Build the Worlds We Need*, 2020)
> - Return to the <u>Personal Values Worksheet</u> you completed in Week 1. Have your answers to any of the questions changed? Think of one additional way you can live by your values more completely.
> - Sign up for a slot at the Showcase
> - Last week to submit Argument Assignment (due Aug 13)

Optional Supplemental Reading:
- MIT D-Lab <u>Creative Capacity Building (CCB)</u>
- Dean Spade, <u>Solidarity Not Charity: Mutual Aid for Mobilization and Survival</u>
- Andrew Feeberg, "<u>Agency and Citizenship in a Technological Society</u>" (talk transcript)

August 18: Deadline to submit your independent project to your TF and upload your shareable component. Details on the assignment page.

September 13: Fall Showcase (4-6 p.m. ET in person)

Overview: The Fall Showcase is the culminating event for the Experiential Ethics course. It gives you all an opportunity to present the projects you've been working on all summer long to members of the broader MIT ethics of technology community. More details about Fall Showcase and how to prepare for it can be found on the assignment page.

September 22: Deadline to complete the End of Term Evaluation Form.