Synopsis: What is virtue? The question becomes increasingly important as we observe apparently virtuous behavior in animals and task computers with making decisions that have deep, far-reaching impacts on society. Can an animal demonstrate kindness? Computers can be frustrating, but could they be outright mean? In this tutorial, we will explore these two new threads in the study of ethics and behavior. Do we want computers making ethical decisions? Who, or what, will be responsible for the actions of autonomous machines? To complement such forward-looking questions, we will weave a multi-discipline approach that includes animal behavior, ecology, and ethology. Do dogs and monkeys understand and expect fairness? Do mice feel empathy? Can rats be generous? In short, what can the interactions among animals teach us about social living? Might these hold answers for whether, and how, computers could reach such an understanding? Through the lenses of fiction, philosophy, and science, we will investigate the possibility of virtue in animals and machines.

1 Overview

Our major objectives, adapted from the College’s Objectives and Guidelines for the First-Year Tutorial are:

- To help you plan your academic program in the liberal arts
- To develop critical thinking and analysis skills through
  - Close reading
  - Writing and revision
  - Speaking and discussion
- To explore the intriguing interplay and potential of virtue, ethics, and morality in two non-traditional agents: animals and machines.

2 Texts

There are three required texts for our course:


3 Schedule

See the course web page for a detailed schedule of readings and assignments.
4 Activities

Under a normal 16 credit load, I expect that you will spend at least 40 hours per week on your studies (class time, homework, and studying). However, you should note that this is a minimum recommendation for achieving “satisfactory” (i.e., C-level) results. “Good” or “excellent” results will likely require a greater investment of time.

Thus, you should plan to spend a minimum of 10 hours/week on work for this course (but hopefully more). With class time clocking in at 3 2/3 hours, you’ll have at least 6 1/3 hours per week left for the activities described below.

4.1 Reading

Our class meetings will be heavily collaborative and discussion-based; this will require a significant amount of preparation on your part. You should check the class schedule for updates and read any material that has been assigned before coming to class.

4.2 Discussion

Because much of our work in this course involves collaboration and discussion, you will be evaluated on your participation.

Participating in class involves:

- being present in class (physically and mentally)
- coming to class on time
- coming to class prepared
- asking questions when appropriate
- making positive contributions to class discussion by volunteering and when called upon
- staying on task during collaborative exercises, and
- working effectively with your group.

Students who regularly meet these criteria can expect to earn an A- for their participation grade. I will reward students who regularly provide significant insights or guide discussion in productive ways with a higher participation score. Students who fail to participate regularly or who participate in counterproductive ways (e.g., by dominating the conversation or making inappropriate comments) can expect to earn a lower score.

Two absences will have no effect on your participation score. (See the Class Attendance Policy, Section 5 below.)

4.3 Reading Journal

To help focus your efforts and give us a basis for discussion, you will be provided short a list of questions to answer for each day’s reading. Reflecting upon your responses to the questions will help to give you a deeper understanding of the most important concepts surrounding each topic. See the accompanying “Reading Journal” document on the course web page.

Your responses are due by 10 pm the night before our class meeting. No late responses will be accepted. You will submit your responses electronically to a private journal via our PioneerWeb course page, where I will be able to give you feedback on your writing.

While these low-stakes writing assignments are technically “informal,” they must reflect a certain level of engagement and evidence of thinking seriously about the material.
Responses will be graded using the following ternary scale:

PLUS Exhibits exceptional clarity, insight and/or creativity.
CHECK Exhibits evidence of processing and studying concepts.
MINUS Superficial response or insufficient evidence of engagement.

Since I expect most entries will receive a check, I will comment on your journal to report a plus or minus.

4.4 Writing

We will undertake a variety of writing assignments throughout the semester. Some of them will be traditional “large-scale” assignments, like papers. But others will be smaller tasks that provide more focus in building your writing skills.

5 Class Attendance

Attendance is mandatory. Class meetings will involve a mix of discussions and other collaborative activities. In short: You are expected to attend and actively participate in class. I am expected to make class worth attending.

I know that sometimes things happen. Alarm clocks “malfunction”; you get sick; etc. Therefore, you will be granted two unexcused absences from class without penalty if—and only if—you complete all required readings and assignments by the class meeting following your absence.

Since this is a collaborative, discussion-based course, your presence is integral to your learning. Thus, the following will be deducted from your participation grade in the case of absences:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Absences</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

More than 5 absences will constitute a failure of the course.

Each day you miss over two will constitute an unexcused absence automatically unless you make specific arrangements with me in advance. If you wish me to acknowledge your absence as excused, you must notify me in writing (email is acceptable) at least 7 days in advance to make arrangements for your absence.

Our discussions benefit from your contributions. If you do miss a class, you must first talk to a classmate about any material that you may have missed. After that, you may follow up with the instructor about any further questions or concerns.

Arriving to class sessions on time is also important. Therefore, every three late entrances to class will count as one absence.

6 Grading

My goal is for everyone taking this course to be able to demonstrate familiarity and fluency with the course concepts. I would be very happy if you all met the goals above and received ‘A’s. The following weighting will provide a basis for evaluation.
Citizenship and Oral Skills | 20%
---|---
Participation | 10%
Discussion Leadership | 10%

Small Writing Exercises | 20%
---|---
Reading Journal | 10%
Reading Analysis | 5%
Thesis Writing | 5%

Major Writing | 60%
---|---
First Essay (with Revision) | 10%
Annotated Bibliography | 10%
Paper 1 (with Revision) | 20%
Paper 2 (with Revision) | 20%

7 Academic Honesty

You, as students, are now members of the academic community. Both the College and I expect the highest standards of academic honesty. (See the Grinnell College Student Handbook, e.g., [http://www.grinnell.edu/offices/studentaffairs/shb/section3/academichonesty](http://www.grinnell.edu/offices/studentaffairs/shb/section3/academichonesty)). Among other things, this means clearly distinguishing between work that is your own, and work that should be attributed to others. It is expected that the collaboration policies given in this syllabus and on particular assignments will be followed.

In particular, please read Professor Rebelsky’s [statement on academic honesty](http://www.grinnell.edu/offices/studentaffairs/shb/section3/academichonesty). It is a superlative model for understanding what is expected.

As an instructor, I will meet my obligation to bring any work suspected to be in violation of the College’s Academic Honesty Policy to the attention of the Committee on Academic Standing, after which there is no recourse with me.

8 Deadlines

A late penalty of one full letter grade per 24 hour period (including weekends) will be deducted for late work. Thus, you have at most four calendar days to turn in work after the posted deadline.

Assignments due on days for which you have a prior excused absence must still be submitted by the deadline.

9 Contacting Me

Please come by during my office hours to discuss the course content, get any extra assistance, or just talk about how your courses are going. Note that if multiple students have similar questions or issues, we may work together as a group. If you cannot attend a scheduled office hour, you may also email me to schedule an appointment; please include 3-4 possible meeting times so that I can pick one that works for me, too.

I enjoy getting to know my students, but I prefer to reserve office hours for academic matters. If you would like to have a more informal conversation, I would be delighted to join you for lunch.

Email is an especially reliable way to contact me, but please allow 24 hours for a response (except on weekends, when I do not regularly read email). You may also call me in my office (x9812 on campus or 641-269-9812 off campus).
10 Accommodations

If you have any disability that requires accommodations, please meet with me right away so that we can work together to find accommodations that meet your learning needs. You will also need to provide documentation of your disability to the Dean for Student Academic Support and Advising, Joyce Stern, located on the 3rd floor of the Rosenfield Center (x3702).

Please also note that I require your accommodations. The chemical fragrances found in lotions, after shave, body sprays, scented laundry products, perfume, cologne, etc. make many people who suffer with asthma, allergies, environmental sensitivities, cancer, and migraines much sicker. I am sensitive to many chemicals you may not even notice, so please try to avoid using such scented products before coming to class and especially if you visit my office.

With thanks to Janet Davis for some key policies and Erik Simpson for portions of the attendance policy text.