

Philosophies of Friendship
Phil 337, 3 credits
Dr. Michelle Brady

Course description:

This course will consider philosophical discussions of the nature of friendship. The basic question of the class will be how, or whether, friendship is integral to a good life. We will also explore the intersection of friendship and the larger community in which one lives.

Required Texts:

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* VIII-IX
Montaigne, "Of Friendship", "Of Cruelty"
Emerson, "Self-Reliance", "Friendship"
Lewis, *The Four Loves* ("Friendship", "Charity")

Assignments:

The major project for the semester will be a research paper on one of our four authors.

Students will submit short (one paragraph) responses to each reading, developing a question on the text. In addition, I will divide students into small groups, and each week a different group will be responsible for leading class discussion. Regular participation in class discussion will also be part of the final grade for the course.

For further detail, including grading, see attached syllabus.

My course fits the criteria for an E/RS course in the following ways.

1. *While preserving the integrity of the discipline from which it comes, the course integrates in a substantive way the ethical and/or religious analysis of a socially significant issue or issues.*

The social significance of the theme of friendship can be found in the fact that friendship is one of the first ways we learn to look beyond ourselves to develop a concern for others. This relationship may, therefore, provide a model for concern for the public. Friendship is also, however, a relationship among a few that excludes others. Our interest in helping our friends may thus prevent us from helping those who are not our friends. Because friendship stands at the intersection of an individual life and the life of a community, it provides a unique opportunity to explore the questions of what we owe others, and whether we owe everyone the same things.

Our ethical analysis of the issue of friendship will occur through the exploration of the place of friendship in the best life. Why do we want friends, and what do we owe our friends? If friends make our lives better, does this reduce the relationship to one of utility? We will also ask how our friendships shape our understanding of what is good. Why might we need friends to help us decide what matters in life, and how might relying on friends for this prove dangerous?

This issue will be integrated into the course in a substantive way. Since the theme of the course is friendship, all aspects of the course, including texts and assignments, are organized around the exploration of this issue.

2. The course is clearly identified as an E/RS course.

This course will be listed as an E/RS course on the syllabus. Since the social and ethical ramifications of the issues surrounding friendship provide a clear way to explain to students the relevance of this course for their lives, regular reference to these dimensions of the topic will be made throughout the semester.

3. The course provides regular and substantive opportunities for critical discussion.

Because I intend to run the course as a seminar, student participation will be critical. Students will have responsibilities not only for participating in class discussion but also for leading discussion.

The texts I have chosen are designed to represent a range of approaches to the fundamental questions concerning friendship. We will read authors who argue for the benefits of friendship both in an individual life and for a political community. We will read others who emphasize the dangers that such relationships pose to the individual and to the larger community. Comparing accounts from a range of thinkers will help us consider how different understandings of friendship reflect, and shape, different understandings of an individual's relationship to a larger community. Exposing my students to such differing accounts will also encourage them to confront thinkers who disagree with each other, and with the students themselves.

4. The course complements, in some demonstrable way, the other required courses that make up the E/RS Focus.

The most obvious connection between this course and other E/RS courses is with Ethics as an Introduction to Philosophy. The theme of my ethics class is the question of whether one should be just, whether the best life includes concern for others or not. Since friendship is the first experience most of us have of a motive to care for others, and to do so for their sake rather than for any further advantage, friendship can provide a way to understand the value of justice. The larger questions of justice, such as the proper balance between concern for others and concern for oneself, can be seen in microcosm in this more intimate relationship. In addition, the partiality we show our friends raises the question of whether justice demands the same from us with respect to everyone.

I also see connections between this course on friendship and E/RS courses in theology and literature. The theme of friendship is prominent in literature, more prominent, in fact, than it is in philosophical works. The nature of friendship is also central to much of theology, particularly Christian theology. C. S. Lewis makes this connection explicit, since he places his consideration of friendship in a theological context. He contrasts the love found in friendship with the love required when we are commanded to love our neighbors as ourselves, providing an opportunity for us to explore the intersection between ethical and religious perspectives on friendship.