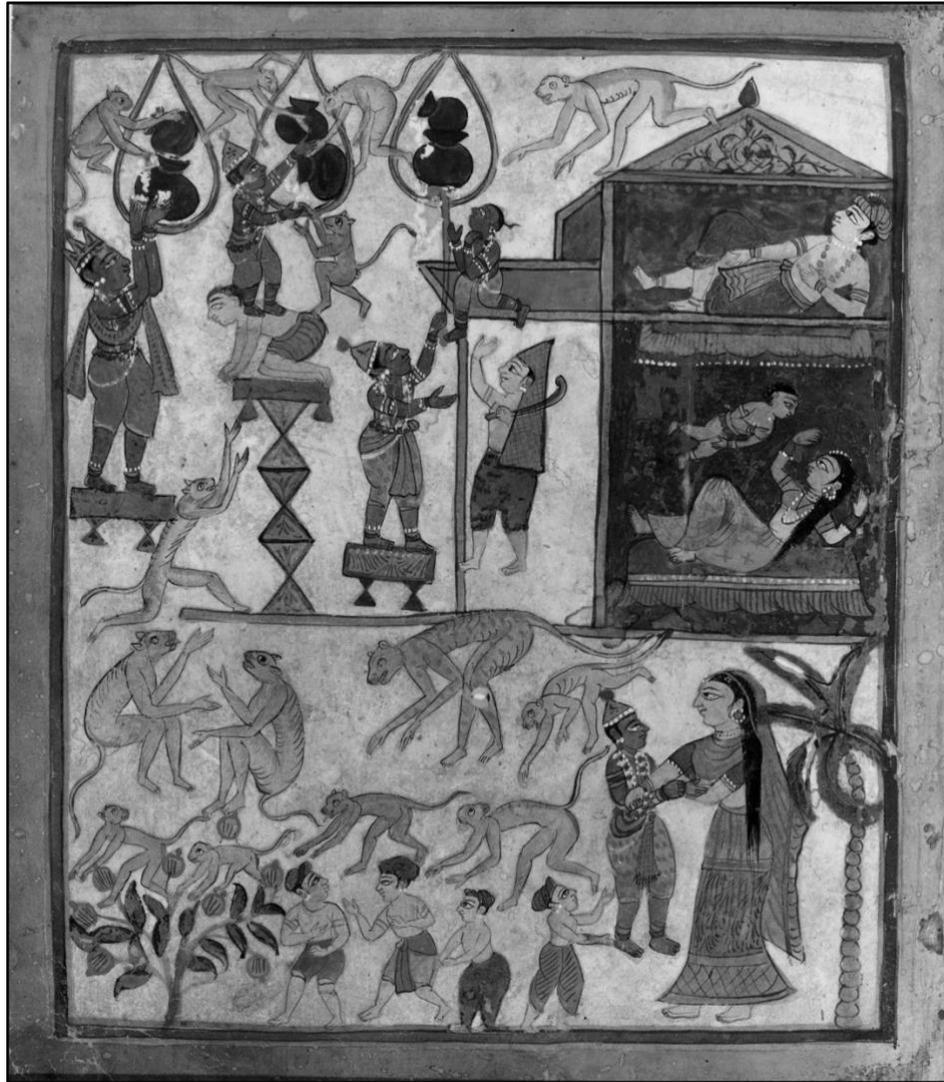


Abridged Syllabus for Expos 20: Friendship (Subject to Change)



Young Lord Krishna and His Friends Steal His Mother's Butter
@ Harvard Art Museums

What the Class Is About

Would a real friend help you hide a body? Is our tendency to trust our friends based on good evidence that they are trustworthy or are we just taking a leap of faith? What makes someone a friend in the first place? Philosophers since Aristotle (circa 384-322 B.C.E.) have been wrestling with these questions and in doing so, they have added crucial details, distinctions and depth to our understanding of friendship. In this class, we will join this conversation by considering several key claims that philosophers have made about friendship. We will begin our journey by studying Aristotle's foundational question of what makes someone a friend. Next, we will visit early modern Europe to investigate the bright side of friendship by considering philosophers Mary Astell (circa 1666-1731) and Michel Montaigne's (circa 1533-1592) views. In the final unit of the course, we will consider the dark side of friendship as we research contemporary issues about the dangers of friendship. Students will have the opportunity to choose their own cases as they attempt to answer

whether friendship can be harmful.

Unit 1: The Foundations for Friendship

“The Greeks...were the first, and so far the last, to whom the friend has appeared a problem worth solving.”—Nietzsche

What We’ll Study

- *Inspiration Text:* Books 8 and 9 of Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* (you’ll have to buy [this book](#))
ISBN-13: 978-1624661174
ISBN-10: 1624661173

What We’ll Do

To help you master the skills necessary for writing strong college essays, your first assignment targets your ability to read a text closely and to fashion an argument well. We read a text closely when we slow down and try to detect the nuances in the text, as opposed to when we skim the text quickly to gather its gist. We fashion an argument well when we support our thesis with appropriate evidence and embed this evidence in helpful analysis, as opposed to providing a laundry list of ideas that are loosely connected to one another and the paper’s thesis.

To harness these skills, your first assignment is limited to just one source and will center on an interpretive question about Aristotle’s views on friendship. The essay will be between **900 and 1000 words**. In class, we’ll learn what an interpretive question is, why they’re worth asking, as well as what kind of considerations can be adduced as evidence for a philosophy paper revolving around an interpretive question. We’ll also learn some basic argumentative strategies for addressing an interpretive question in philosophy and how, with some adjustments, these strategies can be successfully deployed in other disciplines as well.

Though this unit is primarily focused on improving your close reading and argumentation skills.

Unit 2: The Bright Side of Friendship

“Were the world better, there would be more friendship, and were there more friendship, we should have a better world.”—Mary Astell

What We’ll Study

- *Inspiration Text:* Selections from Astell’s corpus
- *Opposition Text:* Montaigne’s “On Friendship” (provided as a PDF on the Canvas site)

What We’ll Do

The second assignment builds on the close reading and argumentation skills that the first essay developed but puts more emphasis on argumentation skills.

You’ll be asked to pick a side in the ongoing debate about the relation between friendship and morality and to defend your position. Unlike the first assignment, this assignment asks you to answer an analytical question, requires you to work with two given sources and will fall between **1400-1600** words.

To prepare you for this assignment, we'll learn some basic argumentative strategies for responding to a question in philosophy and how, with some minor adjustments, these strategies can be fruitfully imported to other disciplines as well.

Unit 3: The Dark Side of Friendship

"A true friend stabs you in the front."—*Source Unknown*

What We'll Study

- *Inspiration Text:* Casey Doyle's "Deferring to Others about One's Own Mind" or Katherine Hawley's "Partiality and Prejudice in Trusting"

What We'll Do

The third and final assignment is meant to solidify the skills targeted in previous units and to give you practice writing a research paper. We will therefore shift gears and put stress on a relatively new skill—finding your own sources and wisely incorporating those sources into your paper.

This last assignment will ask you to evaluate a controversial and contemporary claim about friendship. Unlike the previous assignments, this last assignment has two tracks from which you are to choose one. And unlike other assignments, it will be your responsibility to find **four** additional sources and ways to work them into your paper. Your research paper should be between **2300-2500** words.

Because this last assignment is the longest and most involved of all the assignments, we will spend most of our class time working on activities designed to keep you on track. For example, you will teach your inspiration text to the class in a short presentation and will participate in a writing workshop designed to give you peer feedback on your draft.