

THE ETHICS OF BLAME

Blame is a central kind of reaction to the actions, feelings, and character of human beings. But it is ethically problematic in its own right. This course will consider a range of fundamental questions about blame: What is blame? What kind of evaluation, desire, emotion, and/or other attitudes are central to blame? How is blame related to forgiveness, excuses, guilt, and judgment? Most importantly: why and when should we blame? Who has standing to blame someone, and under what circumstances? What is the value of blame, and what is its function in interpersonal interaction? Should we, and can we, live without it? With readings from Confucius, Nietzsche, Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr., and a range of 20th- and 21st-century philosophers, this course aims to guide students through articulating and defending their own views on these questions through class discussion, two short writing assignments, and a substantial final paper.

Instructor: Eugene Chislenko, chislenko@temple.edu

Office hours: Anderson Hall 750, Tuesdays 1:30-3:30pm or by appointment

Course requirements: (1) Up to 100 pages of reading each week (all on course website)
 (2) Four in-class quizzes (20%)
 (3) Two 3-page papers (30%)
 (4) 2-page proposal for final paper (10%)
 (5) 8-page final paper (40%; slightly different for graduate students)

SCHEDULE OF LECTURES AND READINGS

I. What is Blame?

1. Tu 8/30: **Introduction: The Importance of Blame**
2. Th 9/1: **The Reactive Attitudes**
 Reading: Peter Strawson, "Freedom and Resentment"
3. Tu 9/6: **Why is Blame so Hard to Think About? Sanction, Belief, and Emotion**
 Reading: George Sher, *In Praise of Blame*, Chapter 5 ("What Blame Is Not")
4. Th 9/8: **Blame as Desire that a Person be Different**
 Reading: George Sher, *In Praise of Blame*, Chapter 6 ("What Blame Is")
5. Tu 9/13: **Blame as Response to an Impaired Relationship**
 Reading: T.M. Scanlon, *Moral Dimensions: Permissibility, Meaning, Blame*, Chapter 4 ("Blame"), pp. 122-166

6. Th 9/15: **Blame as Protest**
Reading: Angela Smith, “Moral Blame and Moral Protest”
7. Tu 9/20: **Blame and Causation**
Reading: Eugene Chislenko, “Causal Blame”
8. Th 9/22: **Open discussion**
No new reading; **first paper due Friday, 9/23.**

II. Forgiveness, Excuses, Guilt, and Judgment

9. Tu 9/27: **Forgiving without Forgetting**
Reading: Pamela Hieronymi, “Articulating an Uncompromising Forgiveness”
10. Th 9/29: **Getting Out of Blame**
Reading: Marcia Baron, “Excuses, Excuses”
11. Tu 10/4: **Guilt and Self-Blame**
Reading: David Velleman, “Don’t Worry, Feel Guilty”
12. Th 10/6: **Being Judgmental**
Reading: Gary Watson, “Standing in Judgment”

III. The Importance of Blame

13. Tu 10/11: **Problem Cases**
Reading: T.M. Scanlon, *Moral Dimensions: Permissibility, Meaning, Blame*, Chapter 4 (“Blame”), pp. 166-214
14. Th 10/13: **Who are You to Blame Me?**
Reading: Macalester Bell, “The Standing to Blame: A Critique”
15. Tu 10/18: **The Importance of Personal History**
Reading: Gary Watson, “Responsibility and the Limits of Evil”
16. Th 10/20: **Defenses of Blame, I**
Reading: Barbara Houston, “In Praise of Blame”
17. Tu 10/25: **Defenses of Blame, II**
Reading: George Sher, *In Praise of Blame*, Chapter 7 (“In Praise of Blame”)
18. Th 10/27: **Defenses of Blame, III**
Reading: Samuel Reis-Dennis, “Anger: Scary Good”

IV. Life without Blame

19. Tu 11/1: **The Spirit of Non-Violent Resistance, I**

Reading: Mahatma Gandhi, *Non-Violent Resistance (Satyagraha)*, §§1-2, 7, 12-15, 25-26, 68, 73, 76, 88, 100

20. Th 11/3: **The Spirit of Non-Violent Resistance, II**

Reading: Martin Luther King, Jr., “The Power of Nonviolence,” “An Experiment in Love,” “Speech before the Youth March for Integrated Schools,” “My Trip to the Land of Gandhi,” “I Have a Dream,” selections from *Stride Toward Freedom* and *The Strength to Love*

Second paper due Monday, 11/7.

21. Tu 11/8: **Writing workshop**

No new reading.

22. Th 11/10: **Open discussion**

No new reading; **second paper rewrite due Friday, 11/11.**

23. Tu 11/15: **Life without Moral Responsibility**

Reading: Galen Strawson, “The Impossibility of Moral Responsibility”

24. Th 11/17: **Life without Blame, I**

Reading: Confucius, *The Analects*, I.1,4,16; IV.1,2,4,17; V.23,25,27; VII.19,22; XII.16; XIV.29,34,35,37; XV.15,19,24,25; XVI.10; XVII.24; Kwong-loi Shun, “On Anger”

No class Tu 11/22 (Fall Break) or Th 11/24. Happy Thanksgiving!

26. Tu 11/29: **Life without Blame, II**

Reading: Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, Preface to Second Edition and #276, 279, 295, 304, 307, 319-23, 327, 334, 378, 382-3

27. Th 12/1: **Life without Blame, III**

Reading: Reread Confucius and Nietzsche

28. Tu 12/6: **Conclusion**

Reading: Eugene Chislenko, “Blame and Protest”

Final paper proposal due Wednesday, 12/7.

29. Th 12/8: **Discussion of paper proposals and final papers**

No new reading. **Final paper due Friday, 12/16.**

COURSE POLICIES

Office Hours: I encourage you to come to office hours often; talking one-on-one or in small groups is one of the best ways to get a handle on the material and methods of the course. You’ll probably get more out of it if you come with specific questions, but coming to talk about the issues in a more general way is fine too. If you have friends in the class, feel free to come as a small group. If you want to meet but have a schedule conflict, let me know and we can find a different time. I’ll also hold extra office hours each time a paper deadline is coming up.

Quizzes: There will be five short reading quizzes, usually at the beginning of class. This is a way of keeping attendance, holding you accountable for doing the readings, and reflecting how you are doing in the course. You won't know in advance which day there will be a quiz. Each quiz will be graded as an A, B, C, D, or F (no plus or minus grades); your four highest grades will be averaged together as 20% of your course grade. There will be no makeup quizzes, but only the best four count, so you can miss one quiz or get one F with no penalty. Your answer does not need to be perfect in every detail to get an A; if you read the assigned reading a few times and take some notes on the main ideas, you should have no trouble.

The instructions on each quiz will be as follows: "Reading quiz: Please answer the following question about the reading for today, summarizing the relevant parts of the reading." The question will be a basic question about the main ideas of the reading for that day. At least one quiz will be in Unit I, and will be on one of the following questions:

- For lecture 2: What are reactive attitudes, and why does Strawson talk about them?
- For lecture 3: On what grounds does Sher reject the view that blame is an emotion?
- For lecture 4: What is blame, according to Sher? How does he defend his view?
- For lecture 5: What is blame, according to Scanlon? How does he defend his view?
- For lecture 6: What is blame, according to Smith? How does she defend her view?
- For lecture 7: What is causal blame, and why is it important?

Plagiarism: *All* written work for this course must be your own. Be sure to cite any works you use, including web sites, books, and articles. Presenting *anyone* else's work as your own is considered plagiarism. Please read Temple University's Policy on Academic Honesty: http://www.temple.edu/bulletin/Responsibilities_rights/responsibilities/responsibilities.shtm

Disabilities: Any student who has a need for accommodation based on the impact of a documented disability, including accommodations for access to technology resources and electronic instructional materials required for the course, should contact me privately to discuss your situation by the end of the second week of classes, or as soon as you can. If you haven't already, please contact Disability Resources and Services (DRS) in 100 Ritter Annex or 215-204-1280 to learn more about the resources available to you. I will work with DRS to coordinate reasonable accommodations for all students with documented disabilities.

Statement on Academic Freedom: Freedom to teach and freedom to learn are inseparable facets of academic freedom. Temple University has adopted a policy on Student and Faculty Academic Rights and Responsibilities (Policy # 03.70.02) which can be accessed through the following link: http://policies.temple.edu/getdoc.asp?policy_no=03.70.02