

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? 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, short writing assignments, and a substantial final paper.

Instructor: Eugene Chislenko, chislenko@temple.edu

Office hours: Mazur Hall 750, Tu 2:30-4:30pm or by appointment

Course requirements: (1) Required reading each week (all on course website)

- (2) Class participation (10%)
- (3) Four in-class reading quizzes (20%)
- (4) Two 3-page papers (30%)
- (5) 2-page peer feedback assignment (10%)
- (6) 6-8 page final paper (30%)

The instructor reserves the right to fail students who do not complete all the assignments.

SCHEDULE OF LECTURES AND READINGS

I. What is Blame?

1. Tu 1/14: **Introduction: The Importance of Blame**
2. Th 1/16: **Why is Blame so Hard to Think About? Blame as Sanction, Belief, and Emotion**
Reading: George Sher, *In Praise of Blame*, Chapter 5 (“What Blame Is Not”)
3. Tu 1/21: **Blame as Seeking Alignment**
Reading: Miranda Fricker, “What’s the Point of Blame? A Paradigm Based Explanation”
4. Th 1/23: **Blame as Attention**
Reading: Eugene Chislenko, “Blame as Attention”

II. Alternatives to Blame

5. Tu 1/28: **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

6. Th 1/30: **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*

First paper due Friday, 1/31 by 11:59pm.

7. Tu 2/4: **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”

8. Th 2/6: **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

9. Tu 2/11: **Defenses of Blame, I**

Reading: Barbara Houston, “In Praise of Blame”

10. Th 2/13: **Defenses of Blame, II**

Reading: Samuel Reis-Dennis, “Anger: Scary Good”; watch Myisha Cherry, “Anger is not a Bad Word” at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uysTk2Elotw>

11. Tu 2/18: **Writing workshop**

No new reading.

12. Th 2/20: **Review and discussion**

No new reading. **Second paper due Friday, 2/21 by 11:59pm.**

III. Excuses and Forgiveness

13. Tu 2/25: **Excuses**

Reading: Marcia Baron, “Excuses, Excuses”

14. Th 2/27: **Hard Childhoods**

Reading: Gary Watson, “Responsibility and the Limits of Evil”

No class 3/4 or 3/6. Happy spring break!

15. Tu 3/11: **Forgiveness**

Reading: Paul Hughes and Brandon Warmke, “Forgiveness”

16. Th 3/13: **Can You Find it in Your Heart to Forgive?”**

Reading: Watch Myisha Cherry, “Can you Find it in your Heart to Forgive? Race, Requests, & Repair,” + Q&A, at <https://wwoldw.youtube.com/watch?v=UERZo9x6d0Y>

IV. Hard Cases

17. Tu 3/18: **Who are You to Blame Me?**

Reading: Macalester Bell, "The Standing to Blame: A Critique"

18. Th 3/20: **Look Who's Talking**

Reading: Kyle Fritz and Daniel Miller, "Hypocrisy and the Standing to Blame"

19. Tu 3/25: **Standing and Commitment**

Reading: Patrick Todd, "A Unified Account of the Moral Standing to Blame"

20. Th 3/27: **Applying Our Views of Blame**

Reading: Matt King, "Attending to Blame"

V. What is Standing to Blame?

21. Tu 4/1: **Permission to Deflect**

Reading: Ori Herstein, "Understanding Standing: Permission to Deflect Reasons"

22. Th 4/3: **Power to Create Obligations**

Reading: James Edwards, "Standing to Hold Responsible"

23. Tu 4/8: **Authority**

Reading: Adam Piovarchy, "Hypocrisy, Standing to Blame and Second-Personal Authority"

24. Th 4/10: **Writing Workshop**

No new reading. Choose a topic and key readings for your final paper.

25. Tu 4/15: **Ability to Blame without Disrespect**

Reading: Eugene Chislenko, "Respect and the Standing to Blame"

26. Th 4/17: **Open discussion**

No new reading. **Final paper draft due Thursday, 4/17 by 11:59pm.**

27. Tu 4/22: **Review and discussion**

Reading: Your partner's paper draft.

Peer feedback assignments due Wednesday, 4/23 by 11:59pm.

28. Th 4/24: **Open discussion**

No new reading. **Final paper due Wednesday, 4/30 by 11:59pm.**

COURSE POLICIES

Class Participation: You will get much more from the course if you participate actively in class! Active participation means showing up prepared, having done the readings more than once and coming in with questions and reactions. But it also means taking responsibility for the class going well for everyone, including you. That can include: pointing to an interesting passage; asking a clarificatory question; emphasizing the importance of someone else's comment; raising a problem; directing discussion in a productive direction; and making suggestions that help the class go well,

either in class, in office hours, or over email. You are expected to attend class consistently and participate actively in class. If you are struggling to participate, please talk to your instructor.

Office Hours: 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.

Quizzes: There will be four 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. There will also be two makeup quizzes. You won't know in advance which day there will be a quiz. 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 taken from a list of reading questions which you will have in advance. Each quiz will be graded as an A, B, C, D, or F (no plus or minus grades). Your four highest quiz grades will be averaged together as 20% of your course grade, so you can miss two quizzes or get two Fs 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.

Plagiarism: *All* written work for the course must be your own. Be sure to cite any works you use, including web sites, books, and articles. Presenting *anyone* else's work, or the work of AI, as your own is considered plagiarism. Please follow this link to see Temple University's Policy on Student Conduct Code, which includes academic honesty: policies.temple.edu/PDF/398.pdf. The Philosophy Department Plagiarism Policy mandates an "F" grade, and reporting to the Chair and the CLA Undergraduate Affairs Office, for plagiarized work.

Disabilities: Any student who has a need for accommodations based on the impact of a documented disability or medical condition should contact Disability Resources and Services (DRS) located in the Howard Gittis Student Center South, 4th Floor at drs@temple.edu or 215-204-1280 to request accommodations and learn more about the resources available to you. If you have a DRS accommodation letter to share with me, or you would like to discuss your accommodations, please contact me as soon as practical. I will work with you and with DRS to coordinate reasonable accommodations for all students with documented disabilities. All discussions related to your accommodations will be confidential.

Statement on Academic Freedom: Freedom to teach and freedom to learn are inseparable facets of academic freedom. The University has a policy on Student and Faculty Academic Rights and Responsibilities (Policy #03.70.02) which can be accessed at policies.temple.edu.