

RACHEL ACHS

The Queen's College
High Street
Oxford OX4 1AW
England

rachel.achs@queens.ox.ac.uk
rachel.achs@philosophy.ox.ac.uk
rachel.achs@gmail.com
www.rachelachs.weebly.com

EMPLOYMENT

Assistant Professor of Philosophy, University of California, Santa Cruz, 2023-

Extraordinary Junior Research Fellow (The Queen's College, Oxford) and ERC Research Fellow on the project *Roots of Responsibility* (<https://rootsofresponsibility.co.uk/>), 2021-2023

EDUCATION

Harvard University, Ph.D in Philosophy, 2021
University of California, Berkeley, visiting student, Spring 2018
University of Cambridge, M.Phil. in Philosophy, 2013
Yale University, B.A. with honors and distinction in Philosophy, 2011

DISSERTATION

Title: *Self-Righteous Sentiment: On Blame and Its Norms*
Committee: Selim Berker (chair), Christine Korsgaard, T.M. Scanlon

We shouldn't blame people who aren't blameworthy. But what is blame and what makes a person worthy of it? And is there really anything to be said for blaming those who do deserve it? I defend the intuitive thought that voluntary wrongdoing makes people blameworthy and then rely on the idea that blaming involves *awareness* of what makes it warranted in order to build an account of what blame is. Taking my cue from Kant's account of aesthetic judgment, I propose that blame is constituted by a reflexive commitment to its own fittingness on the basis of a particular set of reasons. A person blames when she takes her present way of reacting to be fitting on the bases (i) that the person she blames has done something wrong and (ii) that her present reaction is an instance of the type of reaction that is the fitting way of responding to wrongdoers in our community. This account yields insight into what is valuable about blame. The justificatory commitment involved in blame guides wrongdoers who blame *themselves* in coming to a deeper understanding of what made their behavior wrongful. Moreover, blame has expressive power in virtue of its enacting a communally recognized norm. Blame expresses recognition of wrongdoing for what it is, and has value derived from the importance of this expression to victims.

Areas of Specialization: Moral Psychology, Normative Ethics, Metaethics

Areas of Competence: Applied Ethics, Political Philosophy, Epistemology, Early Modern Philosophy, Feminist Philosophy

PUBLICATIONS

“The Subtleties of Fit: Reevaluating the Fit-Value Biconditionals” (with Oded Na’aman),
Philosophical Studies, forthcoming

“Blame’s Commitment to Its Own Fittingness,” in *Fittingness: Essays in the Philosophy of Normativity*, eds. Christopher Howard and Richard Rowland, Oxford University Press, 2022

“Blameworthiness and Constitutive Control,” *Philosophical Studies* 177, 2020

MANUSCRIPTS

“Hypocritical Blame is Unfitting,” provisionally forthcoming in *Oxford Studies in Metaethics*,
Volume 19

“In Defense of Guilt-Tripping,” under review

PUBLIC PHILOSOPHY

“Accountability without Vengeance,” *Boston Review*, Winter 2020

“Blame and Conventional Meaning,” *For the Record*, Blog of the E.J. Safra Center, Fall 2018

ACADEMIC AWARDS AND FELLOWSHIPS

Carrier Prize, Harvard University, 2021

Annually awarded to the best dissertation in social, political, or moral philosophy

Bowen Prize, Harvard University (x2), 2019, 2021

Annually awarded to the best essay in moral or political philosophy

Dissertation Completion Fellowship, Harvard University, 2020

Center for Moral and Political Philosophy, PhD Summer Workshop Fellow, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2019

Stipend, travel, and living expenses paid to participate in a six-week workshop on the topic of “emotions and perception in moral epistemology”

Edmond J. Safra Graduate Fellowship in Ethics, 2018–2019

Harvard Graduate School of Arts and Sciences Merit Fellowship, 2017

Based on departmental nomination

Certification of Distinction and Excellence in Teaching (x2), Harvard University, 2015, 2016

DAAD Intensive Language Course Scholarship, 2015

Supported summer of German language study in Berlin

Harvard Graduate School of Arts and Sciences Summer Pre-Dissertation Fellowship, 2014
Supported summer of German language study in Berlin

Sosland Family Graduate Fellowship, Harvard University, 2015–2016

Wrexham Prize for Best Senior Essay in the Humanities nomination, Yale University, 2011
Sole nominee of the philosophy department

Arthur Liman Fellowship for Public Interest Law, Yale University, 2010

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

**denotes refereed*

“Hypocritical Blame is Unfitting”

- Philosophy Visiting Speaker Seminar, University of Southampton, 2022
- Madison Metaethics Workshop, UW Madison, 2022*
- Workshop for Early Career Responsibility Scholars, jointly organized by Hannah Altehenger and the Salzburg Responsibility group, online, 2022

“The Subtleties of Fit: Reevaluating the Fit-Value Biconditionals” (with Oded Na’man)

- Saint Louis Annual Conference in Reasons and Rationality, Saint Louis, MO, 2022*
- Chapel Hill Normativity Workshop, UNC Chapel Hill, 2022*
- The Slippery Slope Normativity Submit, Lillehammer, Norway 2022*

“Morally Justified Guilt Tripping/In Defense of Guilt-Tripping”

- Departmental Colloquium, UC Santa Cruz, online, 2022
- Departmental Colloquium, NYU, online, 2022
- Ethics in Society Junior Scholars Workshop, Stanford University, online, 2021*
- Southern Society for Philosophy and Psychology, Cincinnati, OH, 2019*

“The Impermissibility Criterion on Blameworthiness”

- Athena in Action, Princeton University, 2018*

“Being Blameworthy and Doing Wrong”

- European Congress of Analytic Philosophy, Ludwig Maximilians University of Munich, 2017*
- Ethical Theory and Moral Practice: Dimensions of Responsibility, University of Pavia, 2017*
- Great Lakes Philosophy Conference, Sienna Heights University, 2017*

COMMENTARIES

Comments on Erasmus Mayr’s “Moral Responsibility, Quality of Will, and Normative Error”

- The Reach of Responsibility: Will, Agency, and Reasons, 2023

Comments on Eugene Chislenko's "Virtues of Willpower"

- APA Eastern Division, 2023

Comments on Pamela Hieronymi's "No Inertia in Consciousness"

- Roots of Responsibility Special Invited Lecture Series, 2022

Comments on Carla Bagnoli's "The Objective Stance and the Boundary Problem"

- Roots of Responsibility ERC Project Workshop: Responsibility, Choice, and Blame, 2022

Comments on Christopher Bennett's "Desert and Dissociation"

- Surrey Workshop on Emotions in Legal Theory, 2021

Comments on Tamar Shapiro's "What Makes Weak-Willed Action Weak?"

- New Horizons in the Philosophy of Action, 2021

Comments (with Cornell West) on Deborah Chasman's "Anatomy of a Decision"

- Edmond J. Safra Center for Ethics Faculty Seminar, 2019

Comments on Mark Schroeder's "The Fundamental Reason for Reasons Fundamentalism"

- Chapel Hill Normativity Workshop, 2019*

SESSION CHAIR

New Orleans Workshop in Moral Responsibility, New Orleans, LA, 2022*

Arizona Workshop in Normative Ethics, held online, 2021*

Madison Metaethics Workshop, University of Wisconsin, Madison, 2019*

American Philosophical Association Eastern Division, Baltimore, MD 2017

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Primary Instructor

Responsibility, Praise, and Blame

Sophomore Tutorial, Harvard Department of Philosophy, 2019

Ethics: Theory and Practice (sole instructor twice, co-instructor once)

Harvard Pre-College Summer Program 2017–2019

Philosophy of the Emotions

Junior Tutorial, Harvard Department of Philosophy, 2017

Teaching Assistant

Introduction to Feminist Political Philosophy, 2017

Instructor: Gina Schouten

Morality and the Good Life, 2016

Instructor: Jeff Behrends

Epistemology, 2016

Instructor: Selim Berker

The True and the Good, 2015

Instructor: Bernhard Nickel

Advising

Supervisor for Erasmus+ Traineeship MA student visiting University College London, ongoing
Project on responsibility for beliefs

ACTIVITIES AND SERVICE

Oxford:

Organized Workshop: “Guilt, Shame, and Regret,” The Queen’s College, 2023

Undergraduate Admissions (for The Queen’s College), 2022

Harvard:

Departmental Climate Working Group, 2019–2021

Philosophy Department Graduate Student Representative, 2018–2019

Minorities and Philosophy Committee Member, 2013–2021

Departmental Climate Survey Committee, 2016

Departmental Representative to the Graduate Student Council, 2014–2015

Reviewer, Harvard–MIT Graduate Conference, 2014, 2015, 2018

Reading Groups:

Moral and Aesthetic Testimony, Organizer, 2020

Relational Normativity, Participant 2019–2020

Moral Ignorance, Participant, 2018–2019

Kant Reading Group, Organizer, 2015, and Participant, 2013–2019

To the Profession:

Referee for: *APA Eastern Division Meeting*, *Chapel Hill Normativity Workshop*, *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, *European Journal of Philosophy*, *Journal of Ethics and Social Philosophy*, *Journal of Philosophy*, *Philosophers’ Imprint*, *Philosophical Studies*, *Philosophy*, *Saint Louis Annual Conference on Reasons and Rationality*

GRADUATE COURSEWORK

**denotes audit*

Harvard:

Normative Categories, Selim Berker*

British Empiricism (graduate seminar), Alison Simmons*

Safra Seminar Graduate Workshop in Ethics, Meira Levinson and Mathias Risse

Punishment and Imprisonment, Tommie Shelby*

Norms of Belief, Selim Berker and Susanna Rinard*
Method, Essence, and Intuition in Metaethics, John Bengson*
Hume's Ethical Theory, Christine Korsgaard*
Fundamentals of Logic, Warren Goldfarb
Responsibility, T. M. Scanlon*
British Empiricism (lecture), Alison Simmons
Second-Year Paper on the Normativity of Meaning, Bernhard Nickel
Plato, Rusty Jones
Metaethics, Selim Berker
Advanced Grammar and Reading (German), Peter Burgard
Classics of Philosophical Psychology, Susanna Siegel
Other Minds, Matt Boyle and Richard Moran
Kant's Ethical Theory, Christine Korsgaard
Kant's Critique of Pure Reason, Matt Boyle*
First-Year Colloquium (Spring), Mark Richard
First-Year Colloquium (Fall), Ned Hall and Alison Simmons
Rationality and Irrationality, Matt Boyle
Beginning German (Intensive), Mark Römisch
Equality and Liberty, T. M. Scanlon

Hebrew University of Jerusalem:

Mini-Seminar: Perspectives on Affective States, Christine Tappolet

U.C. Berkeley:

Morality, Value, and Future People, R. Jay Wallace*
Kadish Workshop in Law, Philosophy, and Political Theory, Josh Cohen and Niko Kolodny*
Kant on Causality, Daniel Warren*

Cambridge:

Thesis on Kant's Critique of Judgment, Raymond Geuss
Paper on Blameworthiness, Hallvard Lillehammer
Paper on Kant's Critique of Judgment, Angela Breitenbach
Paper on Free Will, Arif Ahmed

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Legal Assistant at McAllister Olivarius Law Firm
 London, 2011–2012

Contributed to all aspects of the firm including writing court filings; communicating with clients, opposing counsel, consultants, and judges; legal research; legal analysis; investigation; financial accounting; business development; managing charity projects

LANGUAGES

German (intermediate)
 Spanish (intermediate)

REFERENCES

Selim Berker (*dissertation committee chair*)

Alford Professor of Natural Religion, Moral Philosophy, and Civil Polity, Harvard University
sberker@fas.harvard.edu

Christine Korsgaard

Arthur Kingsley Porter Research Professor of Philosophy, Harvard University
christine_korsgaard@harvard.edu

T. M. Scanlon

Alford Professor of Natural Religion, Moral Philosophy, and Civil Polity (emeritus), Harvard University
scanlon@fas.harvard.edu

Bernhard Nickel (*teaching*)

Professor of Philosophy, Harvard University
bnickel@fas.harvard.edu

LONG DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

Self-Righteous Sentiment: On Blame and Its Norms

Blame seems to be an integral fixture of moral life and yet it is also one that arouses suspicion. On the one hand, blame is a primary means by which we hold people morally responsible and thus, one might think, a way of standing up for our rights and for the rights of others to be treated in accordance with moral norms. On the other hand, there is a viciousness to blame that can make us wonder whether we wouldn't be better off holding people accountable in some alternative way. One thing that makes it difficult to know whether we should eschew blame is that it is hard to get a handle on what blame *is*. What we call "blame" comprises a multifarious set, ranging from unexpressed affective responses to criminal prosecution. Yet I believe that blame's diverse manifestations possess a unifying feature: they all involve a subject's taking her present response to be fitting on the basis of a particular set of reasons. In my dissertation, I use this insight to build an account of blame and then demonstrate how that account can help to answer questions about blame's value.

I develop my account in Chapter 1 by first focusing not directly on blame itself but rather on what makes someone worthy of it. I start with the intuitive thought that voluntary wrongdoing is a necessary ground of being blameworthy, defending this principle against those who would deny it. Some "non-voluntarist" philosophers think that people can be blameworthy for things not under their control: in particular, for their defective non-voluntary attitudes. I argue that non-voluntarists overlook a way in which we can control some of our attitudes by making choices about what to do that constitute those attitudes. Once we recognize this type of control, the cases non-voluntarists take to be counterexamples to voluntarism turn out not to be counterexamples after all.

Armed with the principle that voluntary wrongdoing is required for blameworthiness, I turn to blame itself in Chapter 2. I argue that, even though people blame in extremely diverse ways, all blame essentially involves what I call "reflexive endorsement": blame involves the blamer's taking the way she is presently reacting to be fitting on the basis of the blamee's having (voluntarily) done something wrong. I argue that taking blame to have this feature best accounts for both blame's directedness (how blame always seems to be *for* someone's wrongdoing) and its phenomenology (how blame can feel particularly self-righteous). I clarify that, because reflexive endorsement can occur via automatic mental processes, taking blame to involve reflexive endorsement is *not* incompatible with the existence of recalcitrant blame (i.e. cases in which people blame in spite of judging that the targets of their blame aren't blameworthy).

While reflexive endorsement is a *necessary* component of blaming, saying that a subject is taking her present way of reacting to be fitting on the basis of someone's having done something wrong is not restrictive enough so as to delineate *only* blame. So, in Chapter 3, I complete my account of blame by adding further stipulations so as to render it sufficiently restrictive. I argue that the best way to do this involves indexing a blamer's understanding of her present response to our own communal conception of the fitting response to wrongdoing. On my complete account, a person blames when she takes her present way of reacting to be fitting on the bases (i) that the person being blamed has done something wrong and (ii) that her present way of reacting is an instance of the type of reaction that is the fitting way of responding to wrongdoers in our community.

The fourth and final chapter is about what blame is good for. I rely on my account of blame to explain how blaming achieves two important ends: (i) expressing recognition of a wrongdoing and (ii) inducing a culpable wrongdoer to more deeply understand her wrongdoing. The uniting thread of this discussion is the question of what we might lose if our accountability practices took on a less vicious form. In particular, I attempt to determine the extent to which the *painfulness* of blame itself plays a role in promoting the valuable ends that blaming can achieve. My conclusions on this count are ambivalent. I argue that, although some of what blaming achieves could have been realized through more measured means, the entrenchment of viciousness in our current accountability practices has created a situation in which attempting to reform now would (and sometimes does) require significant sacrifice.