

PHIL 97: Responsibility, Praise, and Blame

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Time/Location: Wednesdays 3-5, Emerson 310

Office Hours: Tuesdays 1-3, Emerson 209a

Topic: Every day we engage in interactions that we might classify as ways of holding one another responsible: Friends get annoyed at one another for divulging secrets; Professors assign grades to their students' work; Coaches reprimand athletes for subpar effort or commend them for putting in extra practice time. In more philosophical moods one can get worried about whether any of this is really coherent. Holding one another responsible for what we do seems to presuppose that we have freedom in whether we do it, but *are* we really free in what we do? Ultimately, the reason that we care about the answer to this question is that we care about being responsible. Thus, a good way to approach this question is to first get clear on what responsibility *is*. What are we doing when we hold one another responsible? What, exactly, is required for being fitting targets of those practices, and why? This class explores some of the recent attempts by philosophers to answer these questions. We begin by mapping the terrain, looking at the various positions that are available to take on the question of whether freedom is compatible with the laws of nature. We then try to sharpen our conception of what sort of freedom we really care about having in the first place, examining what our practices of holding one another responsible involve and what the requirements seem to be for being appropriate targets of these practices. We end by trying to understand some of the more discrete aspects of our responsibility practices that have particularly puzzled philosophers, considering questions such as whether ignorance of the right thing to do can mitigate responsibility, and why hypocrisy seems to undermine a person's standing to blame.

Required Materials:

J.M. Fischer, R. Kane, D. Pereboom, and M.Vargas. (2007). *Four Views on Free Will*. Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

This book won't be available in the COOP, so please get it from some other bookseller in advance. (It is available on amazon.) And please let me know if you have trouble acquiring it. All other readings will be made available on the course website. I request that you print them and bring them with you to class.

Assignments: The assignments for this course are designed with both content-related and skill-related objectives in mind. The content-related goal of the course is for you to come away with an understanding of some the most recent philosophical thinking on questions concerning responsibility, praise, and blame. The skill-related goals are two-fold. First, I want you to practice the building blocks for philosophical writing and thinking to which you were introduced in your first philosophy classes: charitable reading, argument reconstruction, and clear and precise writing. Second, I want you to develop and practice habits that will serve you well as you begin to do more advanced philosophical work, such as: identifying parts of a reading that may be subject to interesting objections, articulating your questions clearly, presenting a philosophical problem to peers and talking through it, setting time aside to mull over a problem, and writing in a manner that is aware of potential interlocutors. In addition to (1) **a weekly pass/fail requirement to submit questions** about the readings (except during weeks you are presenting), your assignments will be, (2) **one "last week review" presentation**, in which you explain an issue that puzzled you or a lingering question you had from the previous week's class, explain what about it you found puzzling and why, and propose some potential solutions, (3) **a 4-6 page midterm paper** in response to a prompt, **for which you will be expected to do a rewrite** (4) a longer, **8-10 page term paper, for which a draft submission will be required**. It goes without saying that doing the reading and attending class is mandatory.

Grading: The grading breakdown is as follows: (1) weekly question submission 5% (that will come out to approximately .575% per question, which you will earn simply for submission; you will not be expected to submit a question in the weeks you are presenting) (2) a last week review presentation 10% (3) midterm paper 30% (20% for initial paper and 10% for the rewrite) (5) term paper 35% (10% for the draft and 25% for the final paper) (6) participation 20%.

The late policy is as follows: I am usually happy to grant extensions for reasonable amounts of time, and for legitimate reasons, so long as granting the extension will not disrupt the progress of the class. (E.g. I will **not** grant extensions for your last week review presentations.) However, **all extensions must be requested at least 24 hours in advance**. If you miss a weekly question (or submit it late), you simply will not get credit for that week's question. All other late assignments (assignments that have not been granted extensions) will be penalized by **1/3 of a letter grade per day**, unless there are extenuating circumstances, for which I will require a doctor or dean's note.

Collaboration and Academic Integrity:

Collaboration is integral to philosophy, and I hope you do discuss your ideas and your papers with one another. That said, the work in your papers should be your own, and you should cite all your sources. Plagiarism is unacceptable. Please ask if you have questions about these matters.

What you can expect from me: I will be available at least 2 hours per week for office hours, I will return all assignments promptly, and I will respond to emails within 24 hours. I will not be able to read drafts or outlines in advance of your turning in papers, but I'm very happy to discuss ideas with you – so long as you request to do so at least 48-hours prior to when an assignment is due. (If you request to meet within 48-hours of when an assignment is due, I will do my best to accommodate you, but can't guarantee that I will be available on short notice).

Schedule

Note: Changes may be made to some reading assignments as the term progresses.

Unit 1: Free Will and Determinism

9/4/19: First Meeting

OPTIONAL "Introduction" in *Four Views on Free Will* (2007)

9/11/19: The Consequence Argument and Libertarianism

Peter van Inwagen, "The Powers of Rational Beings" in *Metaphysics 4th Edition* (2018)

Robert Kane, "Libertarianism" in *Four Views on Free Will* (2007)

9/18/19: Compatibilism

Harry Frankfurt, "Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility," *The Journal of Philosophy*, (1969)

John Martin Fischer, "Compatibilism" in *Four Views on Free Will* (2007)

9/25/19: Skepticism about Responsibility

Galen Strawson, "The Impossibility of Moral Responsibility," *Philosophical Studies* (1994)

Derk Pereboom, "Determinism al Dente," *Noûs* (1995)

Unit 2: Holding Responsible

10/2/19: What are praise and blame?

Peter Strawson, "Freedom and Resentment," *Proceedings of the British Academy* (1962)

T.M. Scanlon, "Interpreting Blame," in *Blame: Its Nature and Norms* (2013)

10/9/19: What do we blame people for?

Robert Adams, "Involuntary Sins," *The Philosophical Review* (1985)

Neil Levy, "The Good, the Bad, and the Blameworthy," *Journal of Ethics and Social Philosophy* (2005)

10/16/19: What do we praise people for?

Nomy Arpaly, "Moral Worth," *Journal of Philosophy* (2012)

Zoe Johnson King, "Accidentally Doing the Right Thing," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* (2018)

10/23/19: Midterm paper due by 11:59 pm

10/23/19: Why should we praise or blame?

J.J.C. Smart, "Free Will, Praise, and Blame," *Mind* (1961)

Amia Srinivasin, "The Aptness of Anger," *The Journal of Political Philosophy* (2018)

Unit 3: Special Topics in Responsibility, Praise, and Blame

10/30/19: Praise and Supererogation

J.O. Urmson, "Saints and Heroes," in *Ethics: History, Theory, and Contemporary Issues* (1958/1998)

Julia Markovits, "Saints, Heroes, Sages, and Villains," *Philosophical Studies* (2012)

11/6/19: Moral Ignorance

Gideon Rosen, "Skepticism about Moral Responsibility," *Philosophical Perspectives* (2004)

Michele Moody-Adams, "Culture, Responsibility, and Affected Ignorance," *Ethics* (1994)

11/13/19: Rewrite of midterm paper due by 11:59 pm.

11/13/19: Standing

G.A. Cohen, "Casting the First Stone: Who Can and Can't Condemn the Terrorists?" *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* (2006)

Patrick Todd, "A Unified Account of the Moral Standing to Blame," *Noûs* (2017)

11/20/19: Forgiveness

Agnes Callard, "The Reason to be Angry Forever," in *The Moral Psychology of Anger* (2017)

Oded Na'aman, "The Fitting Resolution of Anger," *Philosophical Studies* (2019)

11/26/17: Draft of Term-Paper due by 11:59pm

12/8/17: Term-Paper Due by 11:59pm