

Moral Responsibility
PHIL 605B
Spring 2020

Prof. Lisa Tessman

Office: Library Tower 1215

Office hours: Tues 1:45-2:45 and Wed 1:30-2:30 or by appointment (appointments may also be via Skype)

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Course description and semester plan:

This course will focus on social practices of holding others, and ourselves, responsible.

For nine class meetings (Jan. 28-March 24), we will read and discuss philosophical literature that represents or engages with a particular approach to the topic of moral responsibility, beginning with P.F. Strawson's work on "reactive attitudes," which describes the (sentimental) attitudes through which we hold others responsible. Work in this tradition, which takes moral responsibilities to be constituted by practices of responsibility, raises questions such as: Who can be held responsible, by whom, and how? Are there different "faces" of responsibility, such as attributability, answerability, and accountability? How do we distinguish appropriate from inappropriate reactive attitudes, or decide which attitudes should be given weight in determining what our responsibilities are? What are the "right kinds of reasons" for having a reactive attitude that holds someone responsible?

After studying work in this tradition, we will research specific moral phenomena that may be illuminated by the work on moral responsibility that we have studied. The task—which will become the basis for the seminar paper in this course—is to identify a real-world, specific social practice in which people hold others (or themselves) responsible in some particular way, to read primarily nonphilosophical work (which could include social scientific/empirical work such as psychology or sociology; or autobiographical or biographical narrative or personal essays, or other media) that offers descriptive accounts of the phenomenon, then to read some philosophical work on the phenomenon (if any exists), and finally, to write a philosophical piece that makes use of the work we studied in the first part of the class to analyze and say something interesting and original about the phenomenon. As a class we will spend a class meeting (March 31) discussing one specific phenomenon: the phenomenon in which a perpetrator of avoidable or unavoidable moral wrongdoing holds themselves responsible for the wrongdoing in such a way that they experience moral distress or moral injury (we will limit our focus to literature by and about military service members and veterans who have this experience, but there is literature on a similar phenomenon that focuses on nurses and other medical practitioners).

Following this, students (preferably in pairs, but students may also work individually) will choose a moral phenomenon to research in order to see if it can be better understood in light of the work on moral responsibility. Possible phenomena to be researched include (but are not limited to): moral repair and forgiveness; collective or shared responsibility; practices of responsibility imbedded in social change movements; impaired agency; and the practice of shaming. Students will propose their topic, develop a reading list in consultation with me, and

then read and discuss the work on this list for two class meetings (April 14 & 21), and briefly present the research to the rest of the class (April 21). On the last day of class (April 28) students who are writing a conference-length paper (see instructions for seminar papers below) will present a full draft of their papers.

Course objectives:

- To familiarize students with some contemporary work on moral responsibility.
- To have students develop their own original, critical thinking about the topic.
- To have students learn and practice philosophical skills; these skills include understanding difficult texts; analyzing and responding critically to arguments; developing and defending their own positions both verbally and in writing; thinking in complex and original, but still disciplined, ways; doing independent research to find literature relevant to a topic; responding philosophically to nonphilosophical accounts of a phenomenon.
- To advance students in their ability to write papers that will be accepted for philosophical conferences and/or publication. Students in this course will get practice in writing either a conference-length or a publication-length paper.

Course readings:

All course readings are available for free.

Readings to be accessed as ebooks through the BU library:

Gary Watson (2004). *Agency and Answerability: Selected Essays*. Oxford University Press.

Cheshire Calhoun (2016). *Moral Aims: Essays on the Importance of Getting It Right and Practicing Morality with Others*. Oxford University Press.

Susan Wolf (1990). *Freedom Within Reason*. Oxford University Press.

David Shoemaker (2015). *Responsibility from the Margins*. Oxford University Press.

Katrina Hutchison, Catriona Mackenzie, and Marina Oshana, eds. (2018). *Social Dimensions of Moral Responsibility*. Oxford University Press.

All other readings (articles, and book chapters from books not listed above) are available in pdf form under “contents” on MyCourses.

Course requirements:

Class preparation and participation: Students are expected to prepare for, attend and participate thoughtfully in ALL seminar meetings. Please avoid scheduling travel (other than for academic conferences), appointments, etc., to conflict with class time. Do email me before class time if you are ill and will be missing class.

Come to class prepared to:

- 1) explain the day’s reading; and

2) say something that is relevant to the day's material and that you think extends the discussion in a way that matters.

Each student may have one day on which you come unprepared (but these may not be the last three class meetings). Tell me at the beginning of class if it is your unprepared day. You are not allowed to speak in class on your unprepared day, but you may benefit from listening to others. You are expected to speak in class on all other days. Obviously, it is much better to *not* come unprepared on any day but do take your one day if you need it. If you are absent, that day counts as your unprepared day.

Presentations: On the last day of class, students who are writing a conference-length (3,000 word) paper will present a full draft of their paper. Practice your presentations in advance (I recommend videoing them and watching the video to see what needs improvement; be sure to get the timing right).

Seminar paper: Seminar papers are expected to draw both on the required readings from the first part of the semester and on the results of the research done in the last part of the semester into a specific moral phenomenon. Please choose to write *either* a short paper with a 3,000 word limit intended for conference presentation (i.e. with a 20-minute presentation time), or a 6,000-8,000 word paper aimed at publication. If you choose to write a conference-length paper, it must be presented on the last day of class (April 28) and is due in final form (by email or as a google doc) on Monday May 4. If you write a longer paper, it is due in final form (by email or as a google doc) on Friday May 8. The word counts are strict; please include a word count. I encourage each of you to consult with me throughout the writing process to whatever extent this is helpful to you.

Grading:

Grading is based primarily on the seminar paper (in both verbal and written form if you are writing a conference-length paper; in written form only if you are writing a longer paper). Do give serious attention to the *quality*—not just the quantity—of your participation in discussions; inadequate participation throughout the semester can lower the final grade.

No incompletes will be given under normal circumstances.

Schedule

Tues., Jan. 21

Introduction.

Tues., Jan. 28

Strawson, P.F. (1962). "Freedom and Resentment." *Proceedings of the British Academy*.

London: Oxford University Press: 187-211.

Optional background reading (if you choose to read it, read it before the Strawson article):

Austin, J.L. (1956-57). "A Plea for Excuses." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* New Series Vol 57: 1-30.

Tues., Feb. 4

Gary Watson (1987). "Responsibility and the Limits of Evil: Variations on a Strawsonian Theme." Reprinted in Gary Watson, *Agency and Answerability*.

Cheshire Calhoun (1989). "Responsibility and Reproach." Reprinted in Cheshire Calhoun, *Moral Aims*.

Elinor Mason (2018). "Respecting Each Other and Taking Responsibility for Our Biases." In *Social Dimensions of Moral Responsibility*.

Optional background reading (if you choose to read it, read it before the other Watson article):
Gary Watson (1975). "Free Agency." Reprinted in Gary Watson, *Agency and Answerability*.

Tues., Feb. 11

Susan Wolf (1990). *Freedom within Reason*.

Tues., Feb. 18

Cheshire Calhoun (1992). "Changing One's Heart." Reprinted in Cheshire Calhoun, *Moral Aims*.

R. Jay Wallace (1994). Chapter 1 ("Introduction") of *Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments*.

Gary Watson (1996). "Two Faces of Responsibility." Reprinted in Gary Watson, *Agency and Answerability*.

Optional additional reading:

Wolf, Susan (2019). "Attributability and the Self." *Oxford Studies in Agency and Responsibility* Vol. 5: Themes from the Philosophy of Gary Watson.

Tues., Feb. 25

Justin D'Arms and Daniel Jacobson (2000). "The Moralistic Fallacy: On the 'Appropriateness' of Emotions." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 61 (1): 65-90.

Pamela Hieronymi (2005). "The Wrong Kind of Reason." *The Journal of Philosophy* CII (9): 437-457.

Pamela Hieronymi (2019). "I'll Bet You Think This Blame is About You." *Oxford Studies in Agency and Responsibility* Vol. 5: Themes from the Philosophy of Gary Watson.

Optional additional reading:

Justin D'Arms and Daniel Jacobson (2000). "Sentiment and Value." *Ethics* 110 (4): 722-748.

Wlodek Robinowicz and Toni Rønnow-Rasmussen (2004). "The Strike of the Demon: On Fitting Pro-attitudes and Value." *Ethics* 114 (3): 391-423.

Pamela Hieronymi (2014). "Reflection and Responsibility." *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 42 (1): 3-41.

Tues., March 3

Stephen Darwall (2006). *The Second-Person Standpoint: Morality, Respect and Accountability*, Part I (chapters 1-3).

Michelle Mason (2014). "Reactivity and Refuge." *Oxford Studies in Agency and Responsibility* Vol. 2: 'Freedom and Resentment' at 50.

Optional additional reading:

Korsgaard, Christine (2007). "Autonomy and the Second Person Within: A Commentary on Stephen Darwall's *The Second Person Standpoint*." *Ethics* 118(1): 8-23.

Wallace, R. Jay (2007). "Reasons, Relations, and Commands: Reflections on Darwall." *Ethics* 118(1): 24-36.

Watson, Gary (2007). "Morality as Equal Accountability: Comments on Stephen Darwall's *The Second-Person Standpoint*." *Ethics* 118(1): 37-51.

Darwall, Stephen (2007). "Reply to Korsgaard, Wallace, and Watson." *Ethics* 118(1): 52-69.

Tues., March 10

David Shoemaker (2015). *Responsibility from the Margins*, Introduction & Part I (chapters 1-3).

Optional additional reading:

Wolf, Susan (2015). "Responsibility, Moral and Otherwise." *Inquiry* 58 (2): 127-142.

Tues., March 17

David Shoemaker (2015). *Responsibility from the Margins*, Part II (chapters 4-7) & Conclusion.

Optional additional reading:

Talbert, Matthew (2018). "Judgmental Alternatives, Empathy, and Moral Responsibility." *Philosophical Studies* 175: 973-980.

McKenna, Michael (2018). "Shoemaker's Responsibility Pluralism: Reflections on *Responsibility from the Margins*." *Philosophical Studies* 175: 981-988.

Watson, Gary (2018). "Three Faces of Responsibility? Comments on *Responsibility from the Margins*." *Philosophical Studies* 175: 989-998.

Shoemaker, David (2018). "Responses to Watson, Talbert, and McKenna." *Philosophical Studies* 175: 999-1010.

Tues., March 24

Michael McKenna (2018). "Power, Social Inequities, and the Conversational Theory of Moral Responsibility." In *Social Dimensions of Moral Responsibility*.

Catriona Mackenzie (2018). "Moral Responsibility and the Social Dynamics of Power and Oppression." In *Social Dimensions of Moral Responsibility*.

Marina Oshana (2018). "Ascriptions of Responsibility Given Commonplace Relations of Power." In *Social Dimensions of Moral Responsibility*.

Tues., March 31

Work on the phenomenon of “moral injury,” by and about military service members and veterans:

Camillo C. Bica (1999). “A therapeutic application of philosophy: the moral casualties of war: understanding the experience.” *International Journal of Applied Philosophy* Vol. 13, No. 1: 81-92.

Ashley Gilbertson (2009). “The life and lonely death of Noah Pierce.” *The Utne Reader*
<https://www.utne.com/politics/lonely-death-noah-pierce-ptsd-iraq-war>

Tyler Boudreau (2011). “The morally injured,” *The Massachusetts Review* Vol. 52, Issue 3/4: 746-754.

Brett Litz, et al. (2009). “Moral injury and moral repair in war veterans: a preliminary model and intervention strategy.” *Clinical Psychology Review* 29: 695-706.

Tine Molendijk (2018). “Toward an interdisciplinary conceptualization of moral injury: from unequivocal guilt and anger to moral conflict and disorientation.” *New Ideas in Psychology* 51: 1-8.

Lisa Tessman (unpublished manuscript), “Moral Injury and Moral Failure.”

FRIDAY April 3: research topics and preliminary reading lists due by email or as a google doc.

Tues., April 7

No class

Tues., April 14

Discussion in research groups (on first half of reading lists).

Tues., April 21

Discussion in research groups (on second half of reading lists); brief presentations of research.

Tues., April 28

Paper presentations.