**Philosophy of Moral Responsibility:**

**Blame, Praise, Excuse, & Free Will**

Spring 2018

Reading Group (1 Credit)  
**[Weekday, Time, Room]**

Sponsored by:

Information Society Project (ISP)

Yale Law & Philosophy Society (YLPS)

Faculty Advisor: Prof. Gideon Yaffe;

Organizers: Samantha Godwin, Elise Sugarman

**course description**

Questions of moral responsibility are pervasive in law, politics and social theory. When is someone culpable for “their” actions? What excuses are morally relevant? How much credit should someone get for achievements that are largely the product of their good luck? People tend to have both a strong intuition that a person’s *intent* determines their blameworthiness, but also that those who attempt murder should not be treated with the same gravity as those who successfully murder – how does that work? If someone sets a series of events into motion – such that an unintended negative consequence or an unintended positive consequence follows from their actions – do the intervening steps attenuate their responsibility and appropriate blame or praise in all cases or only some cases? If we have reason to doubt the extent of our own free will (however conceived), how does this implicate our capacity for moral responsibility and the fairness of treating others as morally responsible?

This reading group will explore some questions of moral responsibility, including issues of free will and determinism as they relate to moral responsibility, and ideas of blameworthiness, praiseworthiness, excuses, justifications. This reading group will be offered for one unit of credit (C/F). According to YLS guidelines, members must attend 12.5 hours to obtain the credit. People are also welcome to participate on a non-credit basis. Meetings will take place for 70 minutes.

Weekly readings will be made available on Canvas.

**Week 1:**

P.F. Strawson, 1962. “Freedom and Resentment,” *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 48: 1–25. Reprinted in Fischer and Ravizza, 1993.

Gary Watson, 2014. “Peter Strawson on Responsibility and Sociality” *Oxford Studies in Agency and Responsibility* 2:15-33.

John Martin Fischer, 2014. “Peter Strawson and the Facts of Agency” *Oxford Studies in Agency and Responsibility* 2:93-119.

**Week 2:**

Harry G. Frankfurt, 1969. “Alternative Possibilities and Moral Responsibility” *The Journal of Philosophy* 66:829-839

David P. Hunt, 2000. “Moral Responsibility and Unavoidable action” *Philosophical Studies* 97: 195-227

David Copp, 2002. “Defending the Principle of Alternate Possibilities: Blameworthiness and Moral Responsibility,” *Nous* 31:441-456.

**Week 3:**

R. Jay Wallace, 1994. *Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments* 1-74

**Week 4**:

R. Jay Wallace, 1994. *Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments* 118-221

**Week 5**:

Joshua Knobe & Gabriel Mendlow, 2004. “The Good, the Bad and the Blameworthy: Understanding the Role of Evaluative Reasoning in Folk Psychology.” Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology, 24(2), 252-258.

Joshua Knobe, 2006. “The Concept of Intentional Action: A Case Study in the Uses of Folk Psychology” *Philosophical Studies* 130:203-231.

**Week 6**:

Angela M. Smith, 2012. “Attributability, Answerability and Accountability: In Defense of A Unified Account” *Ethics* 122:575-589.

**Week 7**:

Elinor Mason, 2015. “Moral ignorance and blameworthiness” *Philosophical Studies* 172: 3037-3057.

Conor McHugh, 2013. “Epistemic Responsibility and Doxastic Agency” *Philosophical Issues* 23:132-157

**Week 8:**

Kelly G. Shaver, 2012 *The Attribution of Blame: Causality, Responsibility and Blameworthiness* 1-84

**Week 9:**

Kelly G. Shaver, 2012 *The Attribution of Blame: Causality, Responsibility and Blameworthiness* 87-177

**Week 10:**

Kurt Gray & Daniel Wegner, 2009. “Moral Typcasting: Divergent perceptions of moral agents and moral patients *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 96(3):505-20

Kurt Gray, Liane Young & Adam Waytz, 2012 “Mind Perception is the Essence of Morality” *Psychological Inquiry* 23(2):101-124.

**Week 11:**

Wayne Riggs, 2009., “Two Problems of Easy Credit” *Syntheses* 169:201-216.

Dana Kay Nelkin, 2014. “Difficulty and Degrees of Moral Priaseworthiness and Blameworthiness” *Nous* 50(2):356-378.

**Week 12**:

Richard Brandt 1969. “A Utilitarian Theory of Excuses” *The Philosophical Review* 78(3):337-361.

J.L. Austin, 1956. “A Plea for Excuses” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 57:1-30.

**Week 13**:

David Copp 1985. “Considered Judgments and Moral Justification” in *Morality, Reason and Truth.*

Donald Davidson, 1963. “Actions, Reasons and Causes” *Journal of Philosophy* 60:685-699.