

**Major Seminar: Exploring Philosophical Methods Through the Nature and Norms of  
Blame, Praise, Apology, Forgiveness  
Spring 2024  
Syllabus**

Instructor: Dana Kay Nelkin

Office Hours: Thursday 1:30-3:30 and by appointment

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**Course Description and Course Aims:** This course is designed for philosophy majors to hone their skills in understanding, constructing, evaluating, presenting, and discussing philosophical arguments and writing about them in a clear and careful way. The small seminar setting will provide lots of opportunity to practice using all of these skills. The format of each class will be discussion of the views and arguments expressed in the readings assigned for that day, with everyone prepared for a constructive class discussion. The rich and evolving literature on the nature and norms of blame, praise, apology, and forgiveness will be our starting point. We will begin with an exploration of how each of these practices features in our interpersonal relationships and will end by investigating how they “scale up” to the institutional or societal level.

**Course Schedule and Readings**

(Subject to minor changes)

Please note: All readings can be found on our Canvas site.

**Introduction to the Course**

April 2: No new reading

**The Nature and Norms of Blame**

*(recommended background reading: David O. Brink and Dana Kay Nelkin, “The Nature and Significance of Blame”)*

April 4: Neal Tognazzini and Justin Coates, “Blame” (section 1)

April 9: Kyle G. Fritz and Daniel Miller, “Hypocrisy and the Standing to Blame”

April 11: Maria Seim, “The Standing to Blame and Meddling”

April 16: Kathleen Connelly, “Patronizing Blame”

April 18: Dana Nelkin, “How Much to Blame?: An Asymmetry Between the Norms of Self-Blame and Other-Blame”

## **The Nature and Norms of Praise**

*(recommended background reading: Daniel Telech, "Praise")*

April 23: Daniel Telech, "Praise as Moral Address"

April 25: Emily Bingeman "The Risks and Powers of Praise"

## **The Nature and Norms of Forgiveness**

*(recommended background reading: Warmke, Nelkin, McKenna, Forgiveness and Its Moral Dimensions, Introduction)*

April 30: Dana Kay Nelkin, "Changing the Normative Landscape: Forgiveness and Letting Go"

May 2: Per-Erik Milam, "Against Elective Forgiveness"

May 7: Rosalind Chaplin, "Taking it Personally: Third-party forgiveness, close relationships, and the standing to forgive"

May 9: Monique Wonderly, "Can We Un-forgive?"

## **The Nature and Norms of Apology**

May 14: TBA

May 16: TBA

## **Scaling Up: Analogs and Applications in the Law, Society, and Institutions**

May 21: Tommie Shelby, *Dark Ghettos: Injustice, Dissent, and Reform* (excerpt)

May 24: Kyle G. Fritz, "Hypocrisy, Inconsistency, and the Moral Standing of the State"

May 28: Angela Smith, "Institutional Apologies and Forgiveness"

May 30: Amia Srinivasan, "The Aptness of Anger"

June 4: Ben Matheson, "Fame and Redemption: On the Moral Dangers of Celebrity Apologies"

June 6: Linda Radzik, *The Ethics of Social Punishment: The Enforcement of Morality in Everyday Life* (excerpt)

### ***Requirements:***

- **Five short weekly reading response papers** (25%). These will be short (600 words or about 2 double-spaced pages max), and turned in between weeks 2 and 8. The idea here is to get good practice and feedback in regular writing in a low stakes way. Your grade will be calculated based on the grades of your five best papers. (This means that you can turn in all seven and drop the lowest two grades, or you can

simply turn in five). Your paper should engage with one of the readings for the week. For the first two weeks, I will provide prompts to give you a good idea of how to approach these. After that, you'll be asked to do one of the following (or something similar): (i) provide a careful reconstruction of an interesting piece of reasoning to be found in a relevant text, (ii) evaluate the validity or soundness of an argument in a relevant text, (iii) articulate and provide support for a philosophical position that competes with those found in the relevant texts.

- **One longer (3000-3500 word) term paper (50%)**
  - The long paper should address positions and/or arguments to be found in the course readings or in outside readings that we can discuss at the prospectus stage. I will make suggestions for optional readings as we go along, and you should always feel free to ask for recommendations. Due **June 11 at 5 pm**.
  - The prospectus (2-3 pages) should include an articulation of your paper's main thesis, the paper's rough structure, along with a summary of some of the arguments you will be planning to use in support of the main thesis, and a bibliography. Due **May 24 at 5 pm**.
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- **Attendance and participation (15%)**. We will discuss norms of participation together in class. If you have a valid excuse and cannot make it to class, you need to let me know as soon as you can.
- **1-2 short presentations depending on our numbers**. Each presentation will be on a text or part of a text and will include a handout. Scheduling will begin in week 2. (10%)
- All assignments must be completed in order to receive a passing grade in the course. Because the weekly writing assignments are designed to help prepare you for discussion, these must be turned in in advance of the relevant class to receive credit. But note that you can miss two if you need to (see above).

### ***How to get the most out of the class and do well:***

1. Ahead of time: Reading with care ahead of the class at which the readings will be discussed is a key first step. Asking yourself questions as you go and taking notes in the margins will help you to be engaged and increase your understanding. For example, you can ask yourself questions such as the following: "What is the author's main thesis?", "What reasons does the author provide to support their thesis?" "What position(s) is the author arguing against?" "What is at stake or important about the debate the author is engaged in?" "Are the author's reasons convincing?" "How would an opponent best respond?" "What conclusion do /

think is most plausible?” (Also re-reading and reviewing after class is a great way to solidify your learning.)

2. In class: Being engaged during class and group discussion is most valuable. Listening carefully and interacting with others will help you engage with the material more deeply and learn more.
3. Outside of class: Attend at least one office hour *early in the quarter*, just to introduce yourself, have a chat, and get to know what office hours are like. And check in during office hours or by appointment with any questions at all any time! It is important to let me know about any challenges you might be facing and that might create obstacles to your full engagement in the class. I’m very glad to help, and it will help me to do that if I know about your situation at an early stage.

- **Academic Integrity and Outside Tools and Sources**
- ***All writing in the class must be entirely your own.*** The most important thing about this class is your learning, and the point of the essay is to show your own understanding of the material. To do this, the ideas must be expressed in your own words and manifest your own grasp of the reasoning you set out. Therefore, you should not use *any* AI tool, including but not limited to Grammarly, Chat-GPT, OpenAI, or any sort of LLM, in any way in completing this assignment. You should be prepared to answer any questions in person about your writing or reasoning if asked.
- You must comply with the Honor Code. Further detail about what is required and permitted will be provided on each assignment. Please refer to the resources at AIO: <https://academicintegrity.ucsd.edu>.

### **Resources**

- **Basic Needs:** This link takes you to a page with links to help with food security and off-campus housing resources: [basicneeds@ucsd.edu](mailto:basicneeds@ucsd.edu), or call 858-246-2632.
- If you find yourself in need of psychological counseling and you do not already have a counselor, please check in with Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS): <https://wellness.ucsd.edu/CAPS/Pages/default.aspx>