

FIL 4300 høst 2019

Moral Blame – Its Function and Normative Constraints (Christel Fricke)

Course description

In his seminal paper on ‘Freedom and Resentment’ (1962), Peter Strawson suggested a new understanding of agential responsibility. His claim is that we can answer questions about the nature and normative constraints of responsibility when we look at our practices of holding each other accountable for our actions and the underlying quality of will. Blaming is a central part of these practices. Recently, the function and normative constraints of blaming have attracted a great deal of scholarly attention. According to the standard view, we should blame only those wrongdoers who are responsible for their actions; (this excludes young children and people with severe mental disabilities, but as we shall see, things are much more complicated). In the first part of the course, we shall read and discuss a selected number of contributions to the debate about the conditions for an agent to be responsible for her or his actions, focussing in particular on mental health (or the agent’s state of mental development) conditions and on epistemic conditions. In the second part of the course, we turn to a more recent topic of the scholarly inquiry into blame, namely to the conditions someone has to meet in order to have the standing to blame another. In order to get an idea of the topic of this particular discussion, think of the biblical advice “Let he who is without sin cast the first stone.” The final and central part of the course will explore the prospects of understanding blame as a speech act. We shall read J.L. Austin’s famous *How to do things with words* (1962) and then use his conceptual tools for looking at the work of authors who attribute a communicative function to blaming.

Requirements

Students are formally required to attend all course meetings, read all the material assigned to the individual sessions in advance and participate in the discussions; (this should be evident to all interested in choosing the course, but I better mention it anyway.) Anyone who misses more than 2 meetings cannot get the study points – unless there are medical or family related reasons for absence.

Furthermore, students are requested to hand in 3 short papers (1-3 pages) in the course of the term as well as the semester paper (such as summaries of texts we read or short discussions of a particular question). The short papers should help you take the step from reading and discussing to writing and thereby pave the way to writing the semester paper. I shall give you feedback, but the final grading will be based on the semester paper and on your contributions to discussions in class. I shall propose topics for the semester paper, but students may propose their topics as well.

Topics for the semester paper should be closely related to the overall topics of the course. Students are welcome to rely on all relevant literature; the reading list is a first suggestion, but there is a great deal more scholarly literature on the topic.