

The Ethics of Anger, Revenge and Forgiveness

Spring 2017, PHL 297-01

Monday and Wednesday 3:05PM - 04:45PM

Wold Center, Room 225+

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Course Description

Our attitudes towards anger, revenge and forgiveness are complicated. Anger is generally seen as a volatile and damaging emotion, but when people fail to get angry at atrocities like child abuse or genocide we tend to see their lack of anger as a moral failing. Likewise, personal revenge is often condemned even though many of us take pleasure in revenge stories. Forgiveness is usually seen as virtuous, but sometimes we criticize those who forgive truly monstrous deeds.

As we dig into these issues, looking at both historical and contemporary texts many questions will arise. Is anger necessarily negative? Is revenge always wrong? What is the difference between revenge and punishment? Are there monstrous people or only monstrous actions? Are there any acts so terrible that forgiveness is impossible? Should we forgive even when the wrongdoer fails to repent?

Resources

Writing Center: The Writing Center (second floor of Schaffer Library) provides free one-on-one consultation, both by appointment and as available on a walk-in basis. I encourage you to visit the writing center for any and all writing assignments.
<http://www.union.edu/Resources/Academic/writing/index.php>.

Accommodations: It is the policy of Union College to make reasonable accommodations for qualified individuals with disabilities. If you have a specific disability that qualifies you for academic accommodations, please bring your accommodation ID card to your instructor's office hours as soon as possible. Your instructor will then discuss with you any necessary special arrangements. No accommodations will be provided to students who do not have an accommodation ID card from the Office of Student Support Services (x8785).

Assignments

10% Participation
15% Nexus posts
30% First Short Paper
45% Final Research Paper

Required Texts: All readings will be posted to Nexus.

Description of Assignments

Participation: This is a discussion-based course. Active student participation will be a central feature of the learning experience. There are several different ways to receive credit for participation. Class discussion is the best way to participate, but if you do not feel comfortable speaking in front of class you can also receive participation points by coming to office hours (in which we discuss class material) and participating in the online forums. (Note: you do not have to come to office hours in order to receive credit for participation. This is just one of many ways in which you may participate in the course.) In order to ensure successful participation, it is important that you attend to two main tasks:

- **Reading Assignments:** You should complete the assigned reading prior to the class for which they are assigned in order to contribute meaningfully to class discussion. If you have not read philosophy before, you may find the readings difficult at first. Don't give up! As you read try to identify core claims and arguments. Take notes, jotting down questions or critiques.
- **Class Discussion:** You should contribute to class discussions regularly and in a respectful manner, either by asking questions relating to the topic or contributing your own meaningful insights. Discussion will be based on the reading assignments. One way to prepare for class discussions is by trying to answer the study questions at the end of the reading assignments.

Discussion Board (Nexus): In order to get the maximum amount of points you must post **by 10am** before class. We will not count posts that are entered after 10am. There is no way to make up a missed post. If you do not post on the discussion board by 10am you will not receive any points for that post. You should post at least one paragraph (approx. 5 sentences) in response to the readings for that day. You are encouraged to respond to other posts on Nexus, but it must be clear from your post that you read the material. Each post is worth 15 points. We will take off points if the post does not reflect a grasp of the readings for class and if there are numerous spelling and grammar mistakes. Please keep in mind that the discussion board is worth 15% of your grade so it is very important that you keep up with this assignment.

Term Papers: There are two papers for the course. The first paper is a short paper (4-5 pages) that is on a topic of your choice. Before turning the paper in you **MUST** meet with one of us to have your topic and your secondary sources approved. We will provide you with a grading guideline and a guide to writing philosophy papers, as well as a description of all the requirements you must meet before turning in the paper. The final research paper (10-12 pages) can be based on your short 4-5 page paper, but it need not be. If you decide to write on another topic for your final paper the new topic and secondary sources must again be approved by us. The final research paper should respond to comments we make on your shorter paper should you decide to expand on the ideas in your short paper.

Expectations and Classroom Policies

Email

- Please feel free to email us any time, but allow 24 hours to respond.
- If you have questions about the class or the assignments please **check the syllabus** first before emailing.
- If you cannot find the information you need on the syllabus, then send one of us an email.
- If you have any questions about the content of the class or would simply like to discuss some philosophical thoughts of your own do not hesitate to come office hours or set up an appointment. In general philosophical discussions are best to be had in person and not over email.

General Expectations

- Come to class prepared, on time, and with the readings for the class. Please bring past readings as well as the current reading since we may refer back to previous papers.
- Turn off your phone, no texting, no laptops unless absolutely necessary, no newspapers, no talking to one another unless is it part of class discussion, no sleeping.
- You are expected to pay attention and engage respectfully with your classmates.
- If you must use your laptop for note taking, please be aware that you may not use the Internet *for any purpose* during class and you may wish to disable it if you will be otherwise tempted. Failure to abide by this requirement will result in loss of the privilege to use your laptop in class.

Plagiarism

Students are expected to adhere to the Union College Academic Honor Code, which you can access at: www.union.edu/academic_depts/ethics/union/Honor%20Code.php

Union College Honor Code Affirmation (copy and paste to papers)

“As a student at Union College, I am part of a community that values intellectual effort, curiosity and discovery. I understand that in order to truly claim my educational and academic achievements, I am obligated to act with academic integrity. Therefore, I affirm that I will carry out my academic endeavors with full academic honesty, and I rely on my fellow students to do the same.”

Topics and Readings

I. Anger and Hate

- March 27: Introduction
- March 29: Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 2.2-4 [Scheiter], Seneca, *De Ira* (On Anger), [Scheiter]
- April 3: Martha Nussbaum, “Transitional Anger”; Marilyn Frye, “A Note on Anger” [Scheiter]
- April 5: P. F. Strawson, “Freedom and Resentment” [Scheiter]

II. Responses to Wrongdoing (Overview)

- April 10: Martha Nussbaum, “Equity and Mercy” [Zaibert]
- April 12: Michael Moore, “The Moral Worth of Retribution” [Zaibert]
- April 17: Leo Zaibert, “Punishment and Revenge”; “Chapter Four: The Gerrymandering Gambit” [Zaibert]

III. Mercy and Forgiveness

- April 19: Bernhard Schlink, “The Reader” [MOVIE]
- April 24: Eve Garrard, “Forgiveness and the Holocaust” [Scheiter]
First Paper Due by Midnight
- April 26: Eve Garrard and David McNaughton, “In Defence of Unconditional Forgiveness”; Cheshire Calhoun “Changing One’s Heart” [Zaibert]
- May 1: R. A. Duff, “The Intrusion of Mercy”; John Tasioulas “Mercy” [Zaibert]
- May 3: Leo Zaibert, “Chapter Five: Communication, Forgiveness, and Topography” [Zaibert]

IV. The Power of Apology and Repentance(?)

- May 8: A. M. Martin, “Owning up and lowering down: The Power of Apology” [Scheiter]
- May 10: N. Smith, “Dialectical Retributivism: Why Apologetic Offenders Deserve Reductions in Punishment Even Under Retributive Theories” [Scheiter];
- May 15: Leo Zaibert, “Chapter 7: The Right Kind of Complexity” [Zaibert]

V. Punishment and Revenge

- May 17: Whitley Kaufman, “Revenge as the Dark Double of Retributive Punishment”; Tammler Sommers, “Two Faces of Revenge: Moral Responsibility and the Culture of Honor” [Scheiter]
- May 22: Leo Zaibert, “Chapter 3: The Persistence of Consequentialism” [Zaibert]
- May 24: Krisanna Scheiter, “Aristotle’s Non-Sadistic, Non-Retributive Justification for Revenge” [Scheiter]
- May 29: Catch up
- May 31: Catch up

Final Paper Due via Nexus TurnItIn **June 6** by midnight