

PHILOSOPHY DEPARTMENT SPEAKER SERIES



UNIVERSITY
of GUELPH

CHANGING LIVES
IMPROVING LIFE

IF IT'S EXCUSABLE, THEN WHY DO I FEEL SO BAD?:
ACCOUNTING FOR RATIONAL SELF-FORGIVENESS WHEN NO
ONE BLAMES US

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ABSTRACT

Consider occasions when one refuses to forgive oneself even as others excuse the self-blaming agent. Must one of the parties be mistaken about the blameworthiness of the agent? I am interested in identifying occasions on which an agent is appropriately excusable by others, and still appropriately refuses to self-forgive. I consider examples including duress, tragic accident, and oppression. I find that especially in cases of oppression, others may excuse for good reasons based on circumstances exceeding the thresholds of reasonable normative expectations, while agents may hold themselves to standards they didn't meet for the purposes of maintaining their senses of agency even in oppressive conditions. I connect the agent's interest in blameworthiness to Carol Hay's arguments that we may have obligations to resist our own oppression which are met by forms of internal resistance, and I argue that self-blame may always function proleptically or didactically in a way which serves the imperfect duty of resistance.