

LS 819: Mercy and Regret: An Inquiry into the Nature of Forgiveness and Apologies

Spring 2019 | Dr. Gary McCarron

Course Description

Forgiveness and apologies are forms of repentance in which gestures of conciliation are used to draw boundaries between the past and the present; between wrongdoers and their victims; and for the religious, between sin and redemption. These modes of repentant behaviors can have either a secular or religious quality; they can be part of commonplace conversations or highly ritualized expressions of contrition; and they can take on an intensely private or an extremely public character. Therefore, any study of forgiveness and apologies must be broad in its scope and diverse in its approach. Such is the case with this course. We will inquire into the meaning of forgiveness and the nature of apologies with particular attention to the historical and philosophical questions these topics raise. Illustrations will be drawn from a range of sources, authors, and perspectives that will include philosophy, psychology, sociology, history, and linguistics. We will follow specific lines of inquiry relating to apologetic and forgiving behavior as these are represented in the popular arts such as literature and cinema. In short, we will trace the nature of apologies, and the mystery of forgiveness across a varied and challenging intellectual landscape.