



PRIFYSGOL CYMRU
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
UNIVERSITY OF WALES
Trinity Saint David

Institute of Education and Humanities/
Yr Athrofa Addysg a'r Dyniaethau

**MA Dissertation Approval Form/
Ffurflen Gymeradwyo Traethawd Hir MA**

Student Name/ <i>Enw Myfyriwr</i>	Darren Brookes
Degree Scheme/ <i>Cynllun Gradd</i>	MA Philosophy
Start date/ <i>Dyddiad cychwyn</i>	1st October 2020

I have completed/ ~~about to complete~~* Part 1 of my degree.

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Yr wyf wedi/ ar fun cwblhau Rhan 1 o fy ngradd

** Dileu fel sy'n briodol*

Title of Dissertation: The Modern Pragmatics of Blame
Aims and Objectives: • To describe and critically evaluate the common sense and philosophical attitudes toward blame. • To distinguish and clarify blame as its own phenomenon. • To determine the appropriateness of blame in modern culture

Abstract (approximately 500 words):

In many philosophical discussions about blame we are often waylaid into the dense topic of moral agency, concentrating in particular on whether someone has it, or not. This tends to degenerate further into a conversation about cause & effect, just deserts and free will. Each of which are provocative and intrinsically appealing to the philosopher but, nevertheless, are quite besides the point. That is to say that we do the discussion of blame a disservice when we confuse the subjects of our ultimate and proximal interests.

The subject of our *ultimate* interest is our primary concern, in this case the phenomenon of blame. Secondary to this are the manifold related but otherwise inferior, proximal interests, which in this instance are free will, agency and desert. Ultimately, we would like to know what blame actually is, as a thing in and of itself. Having good proximal knowledge about it, by knowing who ought to have it and whether it is appropriate or not, is simply what makes it matter to actual living persons. As far as most inquiries into blame tend to go, this polarity is flipped, inverting our interests, confusing the topic and inevitably missing the ultimate point, by focusing too heavily on the proximate. Perhaps this explains why the literature on moral responsibility and free will is so incredibly vast while the literature on blame, as its own phenomena, is relatively untouched.

This is not because blame, as a primary phenomena of interest is so diffuse so as to be untouchable. Rather, it is a lack of precision provided by the common parlance, which has not been rectified by philosophers. This is forgivable for the layperson, who does not need to deliberate over the exactness of the language he uses. It only needs to be good enough to communicate something. In this way, the words for responsibility, fault, cause, culpability and blame can and often are used interchangeably without making any further clarification. But, this ignores one crucial point. That *all* words convey something unique and are better suited for certain contexts ahead of others. It is one purpose of this essay to suggest a proper distinction for blame that helps untangle the convoluted mess given by the usual nomenclature.

There are nascent examples of others attempting this, who theorise that blame is something either (1) emotional (2) cognitive, (3) conative or (4) functional. In plain speak, it is usually treated as being the product of an emotional or rational judgment, of some combination of the two, or simply its affective quality or purpose. The evidence for any of these theories can be seen clearly in the light of our own experiences of blame giving and receiving but rarely can they be distilled to a solution so impossibly simple. It is then the main effort of this essay to determine how each criteria interact in a way that takes into account not only the relevant moral philosophy but the perhaps more vital moral psychology of persons; what it is to take into account our actual human nature.

Short Introductory Bibliography:

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- Jonathan Haidt *'The Righteous Mind'*
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Proposed Supervisor: David Cockburn

Please indicate whether ethical approval for project is needed – YES/NO

Please indicate whether sufficient resources are available for the project – YES/NO

The above topic, proposal, and supervisor have been agreed:
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