

The Problems of Guilt Conference

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Since antiquity, the protean forms and sources of guilt have been written about. Today, we investigate them with psychoanalysis. For example, in *Civilization and its Discontents* – written only a decade after World War I - Freud needed to differentiate guilt from remorse (or regret) [1]. He considered guilt as one manifestation of a destructive drive, which might be inherent in living organisms, and certainly - he felt the evidence of his experience compelled him to conclude - in human nature: for example, intransigent forms of guilt have a thallium-like quality; they can imprison their melancholic sufferer in the equivalent of a death mask.

A realistic and mature sense of guilt and responsibility is a difficult developmental achievement: guilt usually seems too much or too little, too severe, or too indulgent, of the wrong kind, or misdirected. The avoidance of guilt and responsibility is tempting; it can feel imperative. Guilt persecutes inwardly: it prompts evasiveness, self-righteousness, accusation of others. It figures in extremes of violence, suicide, and in grandiose paranoid delusional states.

Thus, guilt plays a great part not only in individual life but in the affairs of nations and peoples. However, as a factor sublimated in the endeavour to repair, re-create and make reparation, it can lead to great undertakings

The papers in this year's Conference will examine the forms and alterations of guilt in the detail that psychoanalytic treatments can offer.