

The Problems of Guilt Conference  
Parallel Paper Panels Session 2  
Abstracts

## Panel Three: The Paranoid Defence Against Guilt

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Chair: David Taylor (British Psychoanalytical Society, Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust and University College London, UK)

### Abstract:

Klein is reported to have said that *the paranoid defence against guilt* was her most important discovery. However, the provenance of this remark is nowhere to be found<sup>1</sup>. Yet the idea that some internal sense of accusation might dispose to a form of paranoia that is universal has distinct appeal.

The Panel will ask when and to whom it *might* have been said. It will conjecture as to why Klein might have thought this the most important of her ideas. Others, such as her conception of early object relations or the role of unconscious envy, would seem to be more obvious candidates.

The Panel's contributors will give their own views of the clinical grounds for its importance. For example, there are often occasions when guilt may feel too difficult to bear. It is dealt with by attributing a wrongdoing to someone else. This projection of responsibility outside oneself commonly sets up a power struggle in which what might appear to be slight criticism prompts a feeling of being attacked; it creates an enemy, and a compensating self-aggrandisement.

There are still other situations in which the degree and quality of the guilt seem frankly to be unbearable. Equally, then, we should ask what part such more protean forms of guilt might have in the formation of delusions of persecution, of grandeur, and in the transmissibility of murderous states of scapegoating and hatred - not only in individuals but in groups and nations as well.

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To my knowledge<sup>1</sup>

## Panel Four: Figurations of retribution: the phantasies of incest, matricide, patricide ...

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Luis Rodriguez de la Sierra (British Psychoanalytical Society, UK)

Chair: David Bell (British Psychoanalytical Society, UK)

This Panel enquires into the clinical grounds for the thesis that there are different *domains or phyla* of guilt, which vary according to the powerful wishes and impulses revolving around and between gendered objects. These are the incestuous, matricidal, and patricidal, phantasies which constitute the prototypical primal mortal crimes; and which lead in turn to the existence of distinctive kinds of aggression, anxiety, guilt, suffering and repentance; and as well of love and reparation.

Famously, Freud focussed on the murder of a patriarch: this was the primal crime, and castration the primal punishment. Somewhat less widely known, Klein considered an attack on the mother's belly to be a more primary sin, since the aim is to destroy and rob her of any potential babies.

Of course, there are other candidates for the genealogy of guilt for the Panel to consider; and the views we take will have implications for psychoanalytic technique.