

Of all negative sentiments, guilt is perhaps the only one to be actively encouraged by customary education. Thousands of children everyday are forced to beat their chests and whisper:

through my fault, through my fault,  
through my most grievous fault;

César Vallejo, in *Los heraldos negros*, describes the man riddled by tragedy as one who's eyes betray his entire life as *un charco de culpa* (a puddle of guilt). Everybody knows of Judas' faith, who cried: *I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood*, and hanged himself. Dante, shortly after entering the fourth circle, asks horrified: *Why do we let our guilt consume us so?* And everybody knows the story of Oedipus, which psychoanalysis popularized, who realizing the man he had killed was his father, and the woman he married his mother—who hanged herself—blinds himself out of remorse.

Yet, though guilt is familiar to everyone, it is intriguing to see how varied are its causes among people. I personally make an interest of the matters a person feels guilty for, as they are often quite revealing of their personality.

For instance, I once knew a man who carried a truly sinister weight, having destroyed his family through acts of virulent hate. When I asked what he felt guilty for, he gravely said a single thing still haunted him to that day: That he wasn't all that nice to certain girlfriend of his youth. In one of Guevara's diaries, he tells that a little dog which accompanied his troops was about to get them killed: in a sudden burst of barking, it was giving away their position. He and another soldier had to silently asphyxiate the poor creature, which apparently caused him such sorrow that he could never forget.

Bertrand Russell, in *The conquest of happiness*, makes a long and well-argued case against guilt. He points out, indisputably to me, that guilt induces no positive effect in the world. The victim of a wrongdoing is in no way benefited if the author of it feels guilty, nor the latter incurs in any reparation by drowning in remorse. We should strive to amend the mistakes we can amend and forget those we cannot. It is evident that a world where this ethics is practiced is happier and more harmonious than its alternative.

If someone has ever hurt me, or treated me unjustly, I sincerely wish that he and I forget about it. If the evil is too serious, for there are things one cannot forget, what I seek is restoration—and no amount of guilty feelings can have a restorative effect. Inversely, though one should in general strive for kindness, it is inevitable that we shall be unfair or wicked to some people. As long as our wrongdoings aren't so great that even a compassionate soul may be incapable of forgetting them, we can forget them ourselves if amendment isn't possible. If that limit is crossed, I have nothing to advice, and perhaps there is nothing to be said

but to recall Plauto's words: *Nihil est miserius quam animus hominis conscius*.  
[Nothing is more miserable than the soul of a man conscious of guilt.]