When we feel guilty because of what we have done we often suffer. We are also characteristically disposed to confess, to seek out punishment, to make some sacrifice, to ask for forgiveness. A number of questions are raised by these familiar phenomena. Among them are these: Why should we suffer because of what is past? Why should obtaining still further suffering allay our feelings of guilt? Why should forgiveness allay our suffering? Professor Herbert Fingarette has addressed himself to these important and intriguing questions, and I find what he has to say imaginative and provocative, but not convincing.

"The operation of conscience", he tells us, "consists... in requiring of ourselves that we conduct ourselves... in a certain way". But what is it to require something of oneself? Professor Fingarette's analysis proceeds by first drawing our attention to what it is to require something of another. This implies power over the will of another. Such power is neither to be identified with manipulation of another's body nor with merely requesting or entreating another to act. While to have power over the will presupposes an individual's capacity not to comply, the mark of the existence of a requirement is constraining the will of the person who is non-compliant. When one's will is constrained, one is made to suffer and when one suffers one's will is humbled. Suffering is to be understood as the will's not having its way. This, then, is the analysis provided of a requirement. It introduces the concepts of a will, of power over the will, of constraining and humbling a will and of suffering. It is these concepts, applied to the phenomenon of conscience, the phenomenon, that is, of a self-imposed requirement that, on Professor Fingarette's view, permit us to answer those fundamental questions about guilt and suffering and forgiveness.

There are three distinct matters that this analysis is intended to illuminate: first, the suffering that is constitutive of feeling guilty, that is, the painful state we are in when we feel guilty; second, the suffering that is sought by the
individual who is feeling guilty; and third, asking for and obtaining forgiveness and the power of forgiveness to allay suffering. I shall raise some questions now about Professor Fingarette's explanation for each of these connections. For the most part I shall not distinguish, though I think it very important to do so, being conscience-stricken or feeling pangs of conscience from feeling guilty.

There appear to be according to Professor Fingarette's theory two sources for the suffering experienced when one feels guilty. He says:

Suppose... that I act non-complyingly; that is, my action embodies a will that does not comply with what my will-as-conscience requires. Then I have frustrated my will-as-conscience. Frustration of will is suffering. So far, then, the theory plainly conforms to fact: It is in the nature of conscience that having disobeyed conscience, I suffer. 2

An additional explanation is this:

So the feeling guilty is also the feeling associated with my as yet unconsummated will to humble the will of the non-complier, namely myself. 3

Our suffering, then, is to accounted for by two factors, the frustration of our will-as-conscience and the as yet unsatisfied will to humble the non-compliant will.

If I understand Professor Fingarette correctly, he is claiming that disobedience to conscience involves an internal drama closely analogous to the interpersonal drame of, say, one person commanding another and meeting with non-compliance. The suffering intrinsic to guilt is, then, of the sort we might imagine a father, for example, experiencing when his son disobeys a command, a suffering that would be a function of both the distress felt because will-as-command was being frustrated and the distress felt because the activated punitive will was not yet consummated. The key to the suffering is frustration of will. It is, I think, no easy task separating out the various bases of the distress that is constitutive of feeling, as we say, pangs of conscience or feeling guilty. My own introspective experiments, however, lead me along a path different from that travelled by Professor Fingarette. Here are my difficulties.

There is, first, a difficulty I have in imagining an inner distress that derives from and simply from my disobeying myself, a difficulty I do not have in reconstructing the distress I feel when disobeyed by another. Second, when a father is disobeyed by his son or a thief by his victim I would not be inclined to think of them, just because their desires are frustrated, as suffering. That