

Conceptualization of Conscience: Types and Moral Development in Society

Stephen Nanyele

Catholic University of Ghana, Post Office Box, 363, Sunyani, Ghana

Corresponding author: Stephen Nanyele. Email: snanyele@yahoo.co.uk

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Abstract: While Conscience has been examined extensively in its different aspects, like in philosophy, psychiatry, neurophysiology, neuroplasticity, etc., conscience though it is an equally important aspect of human existence, remains an unknown to a great degree as an almost transcendental aspect of the human mind. It has not been examined as thoroughly as consciousness and largely remains a "terra incognita" for its neurophysiology, brain topography, etc. Conscience is part of a system of information that governs our experience and decision-making process. The article challenges the individualism and neutrality of modern moral conscience and looks at the types of conscience, which include Correct Judgement of the Conscience, Erroneous Conscience, Doubtful Conscience, and Perplex Conscience while arguing that dominant contemporary justifications of conscience in terms of integrity are inadequate without reintroducing these social and moral traits. Conscience is the first principle of moral development. A person is born into a family and a social environment, a society. As the person grows or develops physically, psychologically, and morally, the conscience also develops. Conscience, therefore, is the first principle of moral development This prompts a rethinking of the nature and value of conscience: first, by demonstrating that a morally-responsive conscience is neither a contradiction in terms nor a political absurdity; second, by suggesting that a morally-responsive conscience can be informed by the social world without being a mere proxy for social power or moribund tradition.

Keywords: conscience, correct judgement, erroneous conscience, doubtful conscience, perplex conscience

1. INTRODUCTION

According to (Çınar et al., 2023). Conscience must be informed and moral judgment enlightened. A well-formed conscience is upright and truthful. It formulates its judgments according to reason, in conformity with the true good willed by the wisdom of the Creator. The education of conscience is indispensable for human beings who are subjected to negative influences and tempted by sin to prefer their own judgment and to reject authoritative teachings (Yadav et al., 2023). The education of the conscience is a lifelong task. From the earliest years, it awakens the child to the knowledge and practice of the interior law recognized by conscience. Prudent education teaches virtue; it prevents or cures fear, selfishness and pride, resentment arising from guilt, and feelings of complacency, born of human weakness and faults. The education of the conscience guarantees freedom and engenders peace of heart.

We must keep in mind that, in contrast to "conscience," whose functioning is more simpler, "consciousness mechanics" are intricate and complex. The idea of

"conscience," as it is widely understood in the moral sense, refers to every healthy person's innate capacity to discern between good and wrong and, based on this perception, to control, monitor, and carry out their activities. (Heberle et al., 2020) Such values as right or wrong, good or evil, just or unjust, and fair or unfair have existed throughout human history but are also shaped by an individual's cultural, political and economic environment (Thompson & Kumar, 2022) The closer our inner state of conscience identifies with the higher perception of these concepts, such as good, right, just, and fair, the higher our degree of "conscience", and less physical stress is experienced if we feel that we act according to these concepts (Shavkatovna, 2021) It can be said that "conscience" (Çınar & Gündüz, 2023) is the degree of integrity and honesty of each human being because it monitors and determines the quality of one's actions. One who acts with a "clear conscience" has the advantage of feeling inner peace, which is a feeling that mitigates the adverse physiological effects experienced in times of stress. Conscience is the "highest authority" and evaluates information to determine the quality of an

action: good or evil, fair or unfair and so on. (Cherdymova et al., 2018) Consequently, conscience ranks higher than consciousness and, in addition, has the ability and the authority to decide how information will be used, either for good or for evil. However, conscience is usually influenced by and modified in its decisions by the natural instincts of humans for "survival" and "perpetuation". In other words, conscience determines our final decisions for action after evaluating, in a split second, all of the above parameters.

A person is born into a family and a social environment, a society. As the person grows or develops physically, psychologically and morally, the conscience also develops. Conscience therefore, is the first principle of moral development. The word conscience, etymologically comes from the Latin expression *conscientia*, (conscience of conscience) which means knowledge within oneself. This implies that conscience is the inner voice, the inner judge that reviews past actions and give judgment of praise or blame. The Greek word for conscience is *syneideisis*, which means consciousness of past action, of one having done wrong. From the Greek expression emerges the English equivalent *synderesis* (*synteresis*), which stands for a guide to future actions. Hence, conscience is a moral guide.

As indicated earlier conscience is the first principle of moral development. According to St. Thomas Aquinas (1224-1273), conscience is the mind of a person making moral judgments. It is also the experience of remorse for bad actions. In other words, the moral conscience is the habitual sense of moral values; sensitivity of moral goodness. Conscience is the power to do evaluative judgment when confronted with a situation.

The conscience is the conscious self to moral values and devalues. A person ought to act according to his/her conscience always. You must not act against your own will no matter what your super-ego tells you. To act according to one's conscience doesn't mean you follow the dictates of your feelings as instinctively and intuitively. What it says is that you act according to your judgment, after careful reflection according to your capability and also according to practical reason. This means that in every circumstance or situation in which the person lacks relevant information or where your judgment is impaired or limited, you should accept the judgment of the most reliable and/or recognized

authority. This demands a serious responsibility on the part of every individual.

Conscience is an activity of reason, it needs to be improved and instructed, it is not infallible, and it can be in error. It is therefore, the duty of every individual to do his/her best to dispel ignorance. However, there are two types of ignorance:

A. Invincible Ignorance: *This is the type of ignorance that cannot be overcome. A person with this type of ignorance cannot be blamed for his/her actions.*

B. Culpable/Guilt Ignorance: *This type of ignorance can be overcome. Here, the person is blamable for his/her actions. It should be noted that acting according to the dictates of your conscience does not mean the person will act rightly always. It only ensures that the person is morally blameless. Conscience is the ultimate authority of the individual against which nobody should act.*

Whenever a child is born, it comes into the world without a 'conscience'. This means that the child comes into the world without already made set of moral concepts or mature mind and body. Nevertheless, it comes into the world with moral potential (Bull, 1969: 14). Conscience is part of the normal process of growth or human development. And within that process of growth, conscience is the intellect, which regulates a moral judgement. Conscience is the voice of God in us that tries to keep us on the right path. Whenever the conscience passes judgement, it must be correct.

2. TYPES OF CONSCIENCE

Correct Judgement of the Conscience

This type of conscience is the moral judgment of the intellect when all the reasoning process involved in the application of the objective norm of morality is carried out logically and without any mistake. In other words, correct or certain conscience is when conscience judges what is good to be good and what is bad to be bad. It judges objectively and consciously.

(Kokka, 2020) Moral conscience, present at the heart of the person, enjoins him at the appropriate moment to do good and to avoid evil. It also judges particular choices, approving those that are good and denouncing those that are evil. It bears witness to the authority of truth in reference to the supreme Good to which the human

person is drawn, and it welcomes the commandments. When he listens to his conscience, the prudent man can hear God speaking. (Carroll & Brown, 2018) Conscience is a judgment of reason whereby the human person recognizes the moral quality of a concrete act that he is going to perform, is in the process of performing, or has already completed. In all he says and does, man is obliged to follow faithfully what he knows to be just and right. It is by the judgment of his conscience that man perceives and recognizes the prescriptions of the divine law:

Conscience is a law of the mind; yet [Christians] would not grant that it is nothing more; I mean that it was not a dictate, nor conveyed the notion of responsibility, of duty, of a threat and a promise. . . . [Conscience] is a messenger of him, who, both in nature and in grace, speaks to us behind a veil, and teaches and rules us by his representatives. Conscience is the aboriginal Vicar of Christ. (Popa, 2022a)

(Kuurne & Vieno, 2022) It is important for every person to be sufficiently present to himself in order to hear and follow the voice of his conscience. This requirement of interiority is all the more necessary as life often distracts us from any reflection, self-examination or introspection:

Return to your conscience, question it. . . . Turn inward, brethren, and in everything you do, see God as your witness. (Thompson & Kumar, 2022)

(Shavkatovna, 2021) The dignity of the human person implies and requires uprightness of moral conscience. Conscience includes the perception of the principles of morality (synderesis); their application in the given circumstances by practical discernment of reasons and goods; and finally judgment about concrete acts yet to be performed or already performed. The truth about the moral good, stated in the law of reason, is recognized practically and concretely by the prudent judgment of conscience. We call that man prudent who chooses in conformity with this judgment.

Erroneous Conscience

The judgement of conscience is erroneous when moral judgement of the intellect is based on false principles. Also, conscience is erroneous when one applies the correct principles in a faulty way. Thus, one falsely pronounces an action to be good or bad. In other words, it judges what is really good as evil or bad and what is

really bad or evil as good. Erroneous conscience can be invincibly erroneous when the error cannot be overcome. On the other hand, conscience can be evincibly erroneous when the error can be overcome and the false judgement can be corrected. This type usually contradicts the truth.

Conscience is correct or erroneous; certain or doubtful; scrupulous or lax. An erroneous conscience dictates falsely -- i.e., contrary to objective and binding law -- through ignorance of that law. (On ignorance in this regard. A correct conscience testifies, judges, approves, etc., in accordance with the objective law as it truly is. But it has only moral certainty in its judgments. Both a correct conscience and one invincibly ignorant, as we have seen, are to be followed, for it is always sin to act against one's conscience, whether it be correct or erroneous (Rom. xiv. 23 -- see Bishop Sanderson's excellent sermon on this text). But there may be sin in using its permission, since vincible error is wilful and sinful error. "The conscience hath power in obligations and necessities, but not so much nor so often in permissions" (Duct. Dubitant. I. i. rule 7; I. iii. Rule 2). But duty requires that one should earnestly and steadfastly seek for that outward light which illuminates conscience to see the right path for conduct (Whewell, El. Moral. iii. 365).

When should the priest enlighten an erring conscience? (See Supplement, page 599.) If the error be probably invincible, and the erroneous opinion which has been followed be consistent with a state of grace, the error must be opened or not according to prudent consideration of the person and his affairs. But let the priest beware of converting material sin into "formal" sin; and also of "casting pearls before swine" (Duct. Dubitant. I. iii. Rule 8; I. IV. Rule 14; op. Rom. vii. 7; 1 Tim. i. 13).

(Eyni et al., 2023) A human being must always obey the certain judgment of his conscience. If he were deliberately to act against it, he would condemn himself. Yet it can happen that moral conscience remains in ignorance and makes erroneous judgments about acts to be performed or already committed. (Karras et al., 2022) This ignorance can often be imputed to personal responsibility. This is the case when a man "takes little trouble to find out what is true and good, or when conscience is by degrees almost blinded through the habit of committing sin."⁵⁹ In such cases, the person is culpable for the evil he commits. (Otoboevich, 2022) Ignorance of Christ and his Gospel, bad example

given by others, enslavement to one's passions, assertion of a mistaken notion of autonomy of conscience, rejection of the Church's authority and her teaching, lack of conversion and of charity: these can be at the source of errors of judgment in moral conduct.

(Popa, 2022) If - on the contrary - the ignorance is invincible, or the moral subject is not responsible for his erroneous judgment, the evil committed by the person cannot be imputed to him. It remains no less an evil, a privation, a disorder. One must therefore work to correct the errors of moral conscience. (Heberle et al., 2020) A good and pure conscience is enlightened by true faith, for charity proceeds at the same time "from a pure heart and a good conscience and sincere faith. (Shavkatovna, 2021)

The more a correct conscience prevails, the more do persons and groups turn aside from blind choice and try to be guided by objective standards of moral conduct.

Doubtful Conscience

A doubtful conscience person making judgement has a reasonable ground to fear that the opposite of his judgement may be true. Sometimes there is hesitation in making the judgement. For example, a hunter who is not certain whether the object that moves is a deer or a person –is faced with a doubt of fact. And if the hunter is not sure whether the law forbids the shooting of deer in that particular season, then it is called doubt of law or doubt of obligation.

Only a few words can here be added respecting that wide subject in Moral Theology known as "probabilism." Since opinion, with its uncertain judgments founded on fallible arguments, and with apprehension of a possible opposite, must often be our only guide to the right, and since in such a case we are compelled to act without moral (subjective) certainty that we are right in our choice of action, a few well-settled principles may be a useful clue in our difficult course.

(1) Where there is obligation of obtaining a determined end, it is not lawful to reject the surer and safer means of reaching it in order to follow what will probably enable us to reach that end. This condemns, e.g., the popular Protestant sentiment, "We are all travelling to the same place, and it matters not what road we take." Again, the priest must apply this rule

where questions arise respecting sacraments "generally necessary to salvation." Again, this rule prohibits the physician's trying experiments on his patient if the healing art provide remedies which are morally certain to have good effect (Duct. Dubitant. I. IV. Rule 3; I. v. rule 5).

(2) When the question is of the existence of an obligation or a law, a probable opinion may be followed, even if it be not the safer one, for an uncertain law does not bind conscience. This moral principle, e.g., is calculated to meet a specious argument for perverting to the Roman communion -- sc., "You are not morally certain that it has no claim on you; but you admit that submission to the Roman see is the safer course." Unless you are morally certain that duty requires you to leave your religion and join that or any other, you sin in doing so. Therefore, you imperil your salvation by a course.

(3) Note here the difference between uncertainty of the law and uncertainty of the fact; for in the latter case the rule is precisely the opposite. In doubt whether you have filled an obligation under the law that law may still be binding respecting that obligation.

(4) In doubt or uncertainty you may act on presumption if you were possessed of moral certainty. "Melior est conditio possidentis."

(5) If the principal and most essential fact be certain, but you are doubtful respecting other circumstances or necessary conditions, you may act upon probability; doubt is to be decided favorably.

(6) Decide, then, in favour of liberty if there be no contrary presumption, and the public good put no obstacle in the way of that liberty. But observe that civil law may be stricter than the moral law in this respect; e.g., in questions connected with the matrimonial contract.

(7) In doubtful cases, favours are to be regarded liberally, and extended as far as possible; penalties, on the other hand, are to be construed strictly; e.g., in case of an ecclesiastical trial.

Perplex Conscience

This is where the person can't make up his/her mind but remains in a state of indecision. Especially if the person thinks that whatever he/she decides may be wrong.

Conscience may be perplexed, being compelled to choose between two evils. But observe the ambiguity in our proposition. If the "evils" be sins, you are not allowed to choose either of them; both must be rejected. But, on the other hand, the evils may be results of sins between which ("mala paenae") you are compelled to choose. Then applies the maxim, "Of two evils choose the least" (Sanderson's Praelect. ii. 18; Duct. Dubitant. I. IV. Rule 3; I. v. rule 8).

The choice, e.g., may lie between continuing in a corrupted church and implicitly favoring apostasy and unbelief.

Again, a wife may have to choose between condoning a husband's infidelity to her by living with him, or breaking up a family.

Remember, also, that laws are of four different grades (page 503), and that the lower must always yield to the higher.

Ductor Dubitant. I. v. rule 8, defends the opinion that a lesser sin may be made a counsel to him who is bent upon a greater one. Thus, Pilate might rightly have counselled the Jews to scourge the Lord and let Him go; "not absolutely, but comparatively; that is, rather than the other (the crucifixion), if ye will do one" of them.

3. CONCLUSION

Conscience is man's most secret core, and his sanctuary. Conscience is a judgment of reason by which the human person recognizes the moral quality of a concrete act. For the man who has committed evil, the verdict of his conscience remains a pledge of conversion and of hope. A well-formed conscience is upright and truthful. It formulates its judgments according to reason, in conformity with the true good willed by the wisdom of the Creator. Everyone must avail himself of the means to form his conscience. Faced with a moral choice, conscience can make either a right judgment in accordance with reason or the divine law or, on the

contrary, an erroneous judgment that departs from them. A human being must always obey the certain judgment of his conscience. Conscience can remain in ignorance or make erroneous judgments. Such ignorance and errors are not always free of guilt. The Word of God is a light for our path. We must assimilate it in faith and prayer and put it into practice. This is how moral conscience is formed. However, to attain the true goals of human life all persons are morally obliged in every free decision involving an ethical question to: 1. Inform themselves as adequately as possible about the relevant facts [and values] and ethical norms. 2. Form a morally certain judgment of conscience on the basis of this information. 3. Act according to this well-informed conscience. 4. Accept responsibility for their own actions.

Future Directions on Conscience Research

Consciousness remains one of the biggest scientific challenges among all disciplines as the most fundamental questions are not simply unanswered it is still highly unclear how one should even begin to answer them. Currently, consciousness research is often considered a "topic" or even "niche" under the umbrella of cognitive neuroscience. Nevertheless, consciousness researchers often point out that subjective experience is the underlying and fundamental reason for many questions in neuroscience. Scientists interested in the brain are often seeking answers to questions such as why we become addicted, how we remember, perceive, or solve problems. Such questions arguably presume conscious experience and make little sense without. Terms such as "memory" or "perception" do not solely refer to behavior, but also to particular kinds of conscious content which we know about from introspection. For this reason, one future ambition for consciousness research could be to become a more integral part of the overall ambition to understand the brain, and as such become part of the basic curriculum for any neuroscientist.

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The author confirms being the sole contributor of this work and approved it for publication.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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