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CONSCIENCE IN THE LIGHT OF PSYCHOLOGICAL THEORIES

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Abstract

Conscience was almost exclusively a subject matter of religion, theology and philosophy. But in recent times we have realized that it is too complex to be neatly contained in speculative disciplines alone. It demands interdisciplinary approach and studies. This article discusses moral development and conscience formation in the light of the findings of psychological researches. Though there are several approaches / theories in this field, we have chosen what are considered to be major ones as well as representative. They are identification theory, cognitive-developmental approach, behaviourism and character study. Each theory has its own conception of conscience, its characteristics, formative factors and process — conscience involves affective / empathic, cognitive and behavioural dimensions, all of which need to be integrated into a mature character. Though the various theories presented here appear quite diverse they are at the same time complementary.

Keywords: Identification, Intrinsic Reinforcement, Moral Motivation, Rational-altruistic, Value-concept

Traditionally, themes like morality, conscience, conscience formation, etc., have been almost exclusively the subject matter of

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Religion, Philosophy and Theology. However, with the advancement of human and empirical sciences, particularly psychology, and very recently also neuroscience, the inadequacy of such theoretical approaches has become quite clear. The contributions of positive sciences should be integrated into the traditional approaches for a more realistic understanding of conscience as well as effective formation/guidance of conscience. We need an interdisciplinary perspective on conscience, giving due consideration to the contributions of psychology which has done a good deal of study and research in the realm of conscience. From the part of psychology, Freud had equated conscience with the superego, a view which had dominated for several decades, but does not enjoy reliable empirical support, except certain vague clinical findings. Our focus is on findings of empirical psychology on various conscience-related issues. There are several theories and sub-theories. We discuss (within allotted space) the following main theories: Identification theory, Cognitive-developmental theory, Behaviourism, and Character study.[1]

Empirical approach considers conscience as the fruit of moralization which is part of the wider process of socialization. Empirically, conscience consists of three dimensions: cognitive, behavioural and emotional. The cognitive dimension refers to knowledge-related aspects like knowledge of moral values and norms, moral reasoning and judgement in the light of norms and values. The behavioural dimension refers to actions in relation to one's accepted values and norms. The emotional dimension refers to the emotional reactions one experiences about an action; that is, joy, sense of well-being, etc., after a good act; shame, fear, guilt, etc., after a bad act.

1. Identification Theory

This theory lays emphasis on parent-child relationships and early experiences in moral development and conscience formation. Though this is not typically a Freudian theory, it draws certain ideas and insights from Freud and integrates them with principles of developmental psychology and makes its own synthesis.

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[1]For a detailed discussion of the contribution of empirical psychology towards an understanding of conscience and its integration with the perspective of the Second Vatican Council on conscience, see T. Srampickal, *The Concept of Conscience*, Innsbruck: Resch Verlag, 1976.

Identification refers to taking the role of another *as if* one were the other. For example, though the child and its mother are different / distinct persons, in the process of identification the child becomes psychologically / emotionally so close to the mother that the child believes that he / she is the mother. Becoming psychologically one with the mother, the child thinks, feels and acts like the mother as far as it can. In this process, the child also accepts and internalizes the moral norms and values of the parent as far it has observed and experienced them. These norms and values become the basis of the child's conscience, which has to be further nurtured.[2]

A relevant question at this juncture is why the child identifies with the mother. A new-born infant is totally dependent on the mother, especially for the satisfaction of basic biological needs like hunger, thirst, relief from pain / discomfort, etc., and emotional needs like love and affection. These early need satisfactions and mother-child interactions result in a close bond between them, creating in the child a strong desire to have the mother always beside it or at its beck and call. But gradually the child realizes that it cannot have the mother for itself, which creates in the child an emotional conflict. Identification in which the child psychologically becomes the mother is a way to resolve this conflict. In other words, 'if I can't have her, I myself shall become herself' appears to be the thinking of the child.[3] (May be noted that this is similar to the Oedipal crisis and its solution in typical Freudian theory, and yet different.)

1.1. Factors Fostering Identification

Since according to this theory moralization and conscience formation is founded on identification, promoting the process of healthy identification is very significant for conscience and its development. Identification is not confined to mother or parents alone. Relatives, friends, teachers and any significant other can be identificands (persons with whom someone identifies). Primary identification is complete by about six years of age while the secondary is more prolonged. In whichever stage, the quality of conscience and its formation depends much on the quality of identification. The theory proposes certain factors which are expected to promote proper identification and healthy conscience-formation.

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[2]R.R. Sears and others, *Patterns of Childrearing*, Evanston: Row Peterson, 1957, 352; J.W. Whiting, "Resource Mediation and Learning by Identification," in I. Iscoe and H.W. Stevenson, ed., *Personality Development of Children*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953, 113.

[3]Sears and others, *Patterns of Childrearing*, 362.

They are: love and affection, nurturance and resource control, status and perceived similarity. These are factors fostering identification between persons irrespective of age, sex, etc. Here we focus on childhood when identification is usually very strong.

1.1.1. Love and Affection

The young child tends to identify with those who give it love and affection. The form of love the child experiences and enjoys is affection — tender, affective, experiential and palpably caring mode of love. Hence, affectionate love is the first requirement for identification. (As we know, the features of love would and should undergo gradual modifications as the child grows up.) According to Erikson's scheme of development, the first skill/task an infant should acquire is basic trust, which is born out of the tender, loving care of the mother or first care-taker. This is required to lay a solid emotional foundation for the development of a psychologically healthy personality. Theologically, we hold that morality is basically sharing of love; psychologically we may add that such sharing of love will be possible only if a person receives and experiences love in the very early years, especially the first two years of life, when his/her interpersonal interactions and basic relationships begin. After all, nobody can share what he does not have. Hence, in order to be able to share love with others, one should have first received it (theologically) from God and (psychologically—humanly) from one's significant others at the critical stages of life.

'How much love and affection' is a practical question sometimes raised in this context. There are only approximate answers. The child should receive sufficient love and affection which makes it feel comfortable and warmly accepted; which instills in the child basic trust, a sense of security and worth. Considerable deprivation of love and affection would lead to feeling of rejection, insecurity, fear and various emotional problems associated with it. Giving very high measure of love and affection not only does not show correspondingly higher benefits, but also seems to make children, particularly when pampered for a long period, very demanding, selfish, comfort-seeking, etc. Balanced measure of love and affection seems to be the ideal.

1.1.2. Nurturance and Resource Control

The child has not only affective needs, but also various other needs — food, drink, pain-relief, etc., — to satisfy. Nurturance refers to the satisfaction of such needs. The child tends to identify

with those who satisfy such needs. Usually, if there is love there will also be nurturance, but not necessarily always so for various reasons like lack of means to nurture the child, lack of mother's sensitivity to the needs of the child, non-availability of the mother at the needed time, etc. People tend to identify also with those who possess or control the resources required for nurturance. For example, mother may be the nurturer and father, the controller of resources. However, such distinctions do not matter much in the case of very young children.

Affection and nurturance should be reasonably steady, not occasional or unreliable. Identification becomes strong when affection and nurturance come reliably from the same person, usually the mother. According to research findings the following are some of the later impacts on children of different love and nurturance practices of mothers: People who had 'secure love' (steadily loving and caring mothers) in childhood should find it easier later to trust, love and to be intimate with others, while those who experienced 'avoidant love' (cold, impersonal and rather rejecting mothers) would fear intimacy, feel emotional ups and downs and jealousy, and finally those who had 'anxious/ambivalent love' (unsure, fluctuating parental love, often depending on parental moods or needs) felt their relationships involved obsession, strong desire for mutuality, excessive sexual attraction and jealousy.[4] This points to the significance of reliable and balanced love-nurturance experience in young childhood in order to develop the capacity for healthy relationship and intimacy in later life.

When a mother affectionately and caringly responds to the affective and other needs of the child, she is behaving empathically, that is, placing herself in the place of the child, understanding the child from within it and positively responding. This evokes the empathy potential of the child, namely, the capacity for an emotional response corresponding to another's emotional state; the capacity to feel another's plight and respond constructively. It lays the foundation of morality in the child. Kagan says that empathy potential is morality's primary emotional support; moral emotion is more basic than moral reasoning at this stage. Of course, this potential has to develop further and get nurtured as the child grows intellectually, socially and so on.[5]

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[4]J. McMartin, *Personality Psychology*, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1995, 68ff.

[5]Cfr. W. Damon, *The Moral Child*, New York: Free Press, 1988, 14.

1.1.3. Status and Perceived Similarity

People have a tendency to identify with those who have high status and position whether at home, in the community or wider society ('hero worship' and 'fans club' among the youth are good examples), and with those whom they perceive as similar to themselves. For example, a child may notice that its father/mother enjoys higher status at home and this may serve as a (additional) motive for it to identify with that parent. Again, a boy finds his father to be more similar to him (than mother), and a girl finds her mother to be more similar to herself, and these usually serve as additional motives for identification with respective parents. However, regarding very young children, these factors are not so important as affection and nurturance.

Normally, young children of both sexes closely interact with the mother first and hence the chief identificand of the child until about two years of age is the mother. Does this mean that the child acquires only or mainly the moral norms and values of the mother? No. What happens at this stage, as mentioned earlier, is laying a healthy emotional foundation and sensitizing the empathy potential of the child for smooth moral growth. In subsequent years (if not already before) the father also should closely interact with the child, boy and girl, so that he also becomes a close identificand of the children and they acquire the moral standards of both parents. Besides, the theory holds that it is very important for proper sex-role and sexual orientation development of the boy that the father become the chief identificand of the boy from about three years of age, while the mother continues as the chief identificand of the girl.[6]

1.2. Other Factors Relevant for Moral Formation

Besides identification, certain other factors are also required to promote healthy and effective conscience formation. The main ones are: optimum standards, discipline and good models.

1.2.1. Optimum Standards

Though the child seems to have certain inborn empathy potential it does not possess any particular standards or norms for moral or other sorts of behaviour. It has to acquire them from the environment and this acquisition is facilitated when parents or care-takers provide the child with necessary behavioural standards and norms, especially

[6]Those interested in reading more on this point may see the author's "Complex and Uncertain Etiology of Homosexuality," *Jeevadhara* 44, 264(November 2014) 52-78.

right moral norms, as far as conscience formation is concerned. Standards should be optimum, which here means 'the best or most appropriate within the possibilities and limitations' of the child. Usually, the norms become more demanding as the child grows. At any stage, ask for the best but avoid perfectionism. Be demanding, but understanding too.

1.2.2. Discipline

Discipline is conceived as measures employed to foster and channelize the natural tendencies and potentialities of the child to constructive goals, including means adopted to enforce the behavioural standards given to the child, encouraging/ rewarding good behaviours and discouraging/punishing bad ones. Discipline should be steady (not occasional or according to the mood of the parents, etc.) and consistent (avoid frequent change and disparity between maternal and paternal standards) as well as reasonably flexible (for sufficiently weighty reasons). Disciplinary methods are classified into three, as follows: physical, love-based and rational.

Physical discipline refers to giving and withdrawing (respectively for good and bad behaviour) material benefits or causing physical pleasure and pain, like giving toys, toffees, money or refusing food, taking away toys, caning, etc. Physical discipline is easy to apply and brings its effect relatively fast, but it equates moral training/ behaviour with material trade off. Inflicting physical discomfort and pain, besides being a violation of child's right, may lead the child to counter-aggressiveness. Love-based discipline consists in making the child realize, through experience and communication, that good (prescribed) behaviour brings love and affection of the parent while bad (forbidden) behaviour deprives it. The use of this method with young children requires good skill and patience, but has the plus point of associating moral training with love and care. Rational discipline consists in making the child aware of why certain behaviours are prescribed while some others proscribed. This implies entering a little into the nature of morality and its demands. The child has to be a little grown up to understand this. Clarifying the unpleasant consequences of one's bad behaviour for others (siblings, companions, peers) is an easier way of explaining to a child the evil of many a bad behaviour. This method has the advantage of rousing the empathy potential of the child and giving a rational basis for moral behaviour. Moral psychologists hold that a combination of love-based and rational methods is preferable, starting with the former and gradually passing more to the latter.

Physical disciplining need not be totally ruled out; it may be used appropriately in a context of love and care. To be completely detested is harsh physical punishments meted out by unloving and non-caring parents.[7]

1.2.3. Good Models

Another important requirement for moral growth is exposure to good models. Parents are expected to be primary models and gradually other significant persons too. Children are influenced more by what they see their loved ones do than what they say. As all know, life and deeds are more powerful than words. This throws a great challenge at the parents to practise the good standards they give to their children.

In sum, according to identification theory the affective resources of the child is of central importance in moral development and conscience formation. A home atmosphere of love and care where children are guided by optimum standards and psychological (love-based and rational) discipline and exposed to good models contributes to the growth of a good / mature conscience. We close this section giving examples of certain imbalanced combinations of factors in home atmosphere, leading to unhealthy conscience. a) very high measure of love and nurturance combined with very high behavioural standards and love-based discipline. A child growing up in such an atmosphere is likely to be perfectionist, prone to guilt and scrupulosity. Explanation: very high love and nurturance makes the child emotionally very close to the parents and the child tries its best to rise up to their expectations. But, since the standards are very high the child is often likely to fail to measure up to them. Consequently, it feels inadequate, self-doubting and guilty for not being able to satisfy such loving and caring parents. b) high love and nurturance, poor standards and discipline; the child is likely to become selfish, self-willed and goalless — the connection, we believe, is clear. c) just enough love and nurturance, high standards and heavy physical punishment for failures; the child is likely to be timid, confused, diffident and may become even a 'punishment seeker' (after a misbehaviour he becomes restless until he has received the punishment or goes and confesses his misdeed and gets the punishment.)

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[7]R.R. Sears and others, "Signs and Sources of Conscience," in R.C. Johnson and others, ed., *Conscience, Contract and Social Reality*, New York: Holt, Rineheart and Winston Inc., 1972, 212 ff.

2. Cognitive-Developmental Theory of Conscience

Cognitive development of the child and its ability for moral reflection and reasoning, which is supposed to flow from certain conception of moral values, is the major point of this theory. Though Jean Piaget was the pioneer of this approach, it was considerably overhauled by Harvard psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg and this has dominated the field for the past several decades, despite certain criticisms. Kiely says: "Kohlberg has provided the clearest and best-researched account of the development of the intellectual or cognitive component of interpersonal relationships that is yet available."[8]

2.1. Levels and Stages of Moral Development

Kohlberg' theory is more concerned about value concept and motivation of morality than its content. In the light of his several researches, starting with 76 boys aged between 10 and 16, Kohlberg distinguished three levels of moral development, known as pre-conventional (till about the age of 10), conventional (between ages of 10 and 17), and post-conventional (which begins about the age of 17 and continues into adulthood). Each level is further divided into 2 stages, giving rise to a total of 6 stages. At each level, the earlier stage dominates first and gradually yields place to the later stage. A very brief presentation of each stage with its essential characteristics, required for the purpose of this paper, is given below.

In the first stage, called 'punishment avoidance stage' which dominates more or less between 4 and 7 years of age, the child conceives 'moral good and bad' of an action in terms of its physical consequences. For a child of this age, punishment and pain are naturally bad consequences. Hence, it conceives punished and punishable activities as 'bad', while those that do not invite punishment are considered 'good'. 'Physical good' is equated with 'moral good' here, and fear generates moral values. Hence, the morality of this stage may be called 'fear morality.' In the second stage, called 'individualist instrumental hedonism' which prevails about 7 to 10 years of age, good is what is instrumental to the satisfaction of one's needs, and the opposite is bad. Need satisfaction (and the ensuing pleasure) is the motivating force for moral behaviour. Relationships and exchanges are understood in terms of each other's need satisfaction. This may be qualified as 'hedonistic morality.' The third stage is that of 'interpersonal expectations and conformity.'

[8]B. Kiely, *Psychology and Moral Theology*, Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1980, 46.

Now the child's idea of good and bad is shaped by the expectations of those who are emotionally close and significant (parents, peers, teachers, etc.) to him. Their approval is important for him and therefore he conforms to their expectations. What they approve is good and the opposite is bad. Kohlberg calls this "good boy-nice girl" orientation. This may be characterized as 'sentimental morality.'

The fourth is 'law and order' stage. Now the individual feels the need of something more objective than personal relationships as the source of moral good and bad. He comes to perceive authority, law and social order as that source. Therefore, good is what is in conformity to law and authority. Obedience to proper authority and doing one's duty according to law is the epitome of all goodness, and its contrary is bad. This can be labelled as 'authoritarian or legal' morality. The fifth is 'social contract and utility' stage for which the basis of moral good is promotion of common good and well-being. Laws and rules are made/modified by the consensus of the community as a whole for the sake of common weal. Hence, actions which foster common good are morally good and their opposites morally bad. This may be qualified as 'social morality.' The final stage is that of 'universal ethical principles.' Now the individual becomes capable of understanding for himself the equal dignity and rights of all human persons and the duty to respect those rights. Consequently, good is what respects justice and rights of other persons, every other person, and bad is what infringes them. Since this is a self-chosen morality enlightened by universal ethical principles, this may be called personalized, autonomous or principled morality.[9]

The above pattern shows that the moral orientations of an individual are very 'immature' in the early stages, when the motives and content of one's morality are dictated by selfish considerations and external (i.e., punishing) agencies. It is superseded in the second stage by something positive like need-satisfaction and pleasure, and the agencies satisfying the needs become the major shapers of child's morality. Third stage shows further growth as it is guided by warm relationships with some other people and their approval. This is transcended in the fourth stage where something more objective and less sentimental like law, authority figures and their approval become key factors. Hence, these 4 stages are highly susceptible to external

[9]A summary presentation of the theory may be found in L. Kohlberg, *The Psychology of Moral Development,* New York: Harper and Row, 1984, 170-205.

influences and manipulations. It is in the 5th stage, when the individual's moral outlook begins to be guided by a more abstract idea of 'common good,' that his morality becomes more free from such external influences and selfish considerations. In the 6th stage, when motive is properly 'interiorized' and the objective/universal demands of the dignity, justice and rights of individual persons dictate the content of morality, does it become truly personalized and mature. Increasing interiorization of motive and universaliation of content are marks of growth.

2.2. Factors Influencing Development

Moral development supposes in the child a corresponding intellectual development without which no moral thinking and reasoning would be possible. Granted that, development results from the interaction between the individual and his socio-moral environment, which usually includes opportunities for various types of role-taking and interaction. The environment is ideally conducive to development only if it can challenge the existing moral orientation of the child by providing him with the moral thinking, orientation and experience of the next higher stage, because at any given stage one is normally disposed to grow towards the next higher stage. This also means that development is sequential (progressing through the stages without skipping any). For example, the development of a first stager, who thinks in terms of punishment-avoidance, will be fostered only if he encounters the second stage orientation of need satisfaction and is challenged by it. For this, he should experience the association between good behaviour and need satisfaction in his actual interactions and role-takings. Such experiences 'pull' him towards second stage. To grow to the third stage, one needs to experience warm relationship and approval of significant others vis-à-vis good behaviour. On the contrary, if a second stager is deprived of the possibility of any positive, affective relationship with a significant person (for example, a boy from a broken family in a slum area, where nobody is likely to love and care for him), his moral development is likely to be arrested. If a third stager is not sufficiently exposed to moral thinking and experience based on authority, law and order he may not progress to the fourth stage. Similarly, development to any stage requires an encounter with the moral thinking and experience/action corresponding to that stage.

Students and youngsters are often instructed about the importance of common good and the need of mutual understanding to promote the common good (5th stage), or about the significance of self-

responsibility and respect for personal rights (6th stage). But in actual practice they are mostly required to act according to the prescriptions of law and authority (4th stage). Here development to the higher stages, that is, 5th and 6th, will be slow and difficult because of the inconsistency between theory and practice. Often such youngsters are found to give 5th or 6th stage theoretical responses to problems and issues, but in actual behaviour they revert to the 4th stage. During the course of development an individual encounters explicitly and implicitly a wide variety of moral reasonings and experiences at home, in the school, in peer groups, in religious circles, in the wider society and particularly in the mass media today. Some of them are highly conducive to sound moral development while others are not and still others (e.g. consumer culture) are counter-productive.[10]

3. Behavioural Approach to Conscience

Behavioural approach which is broadly known also as 'learning theory' today includes various sub-theories. Behaviourism does not have any specific theory regarding conscience, but only applies its general principles to conscience formation and functioning.[11] A simple model of this is *the classical conditioning* theory of Ivan Pavlov, who conditioned a starving dog to salivate to the sound of a gong by placing meat powder on the tongue of the dog (to which any starving dog would spontaneously salivate) immediately after sounding the gong. After this 'pairing' had been done for a few times, the dog began to salivate to the gong without getting meat powder because through a few paired instances the dog learned that the gong was the sign of oncoming meat powder, and it spontaneously anticipated salivation response. Applying this to conscience formation, it is argued that after a child has been punished a few times for a misbehaviour, the behaviour becomes a sign for punishment and hence the child avoids such behaviour in future because he wants to avoid punishment / pain. Often parents label punished behaviours as 'naughty', 'bad', etc., and this helps the child to generalize fear to all such labelled actions. The theory reduces conscience to 'conditioned fear response.' Though fear may sometimes influence our moral

[10]We abstain from questions like 'religious motivation,' C. Gilligan's criticism of Kohlberg, etc., for lack of space.

[11]Any good text book in General Psychology — e.g. W. Weiten, *Psychology: Themes and Variations*, Pacific Grove, California: Brooks / Cole Publ. Company, 1989 — gives the principles of learning theory. For a detailed application of the principles of behaviourism to various aspects of conscience and conduct, see J. Aronfreed, *Conduct and Conscience,* New York: Academic Press, 1968.

behaviour, the above is a very simplistic view of conscience; in fact a far cry from mature conscience.

More influential is the *operant conditioning* process of B.F. Skinner. It starts from the traditional learning principle that the behaviour of an organism (man/animal) is effectively influenced by its consequences. An organism tends to repeat a rewarded behaviour and through rewarded repetitions it learns the behaviour or makes it part of its behavioural repertoire. It will re-enact the act when needed or appropriate occasion comes. However, a learned behaviour may also be extinguished (unlearned) if not properly maintained. If a behaviour is punished in one way or other the organism tends to suppress/stop that behaviour and gradually learns to avoid it because avoidance wards off punishment and the fear about it. (Many readers must be aware that Skinner's original researches were on rats: he taught rats to press a bar and get food pellets, to press a switch to avoid electric shock, etc).

The central concept in this theory is probably reinforcement, namely, the consequence of a behaviour which has a rewarding value; it is that reward-experience which prompts the organism to repeat and learn the behaviour. There are different types of reinforcement. Reinforcement is *positive* when its getting becomes rewarding, as a rat gets food pellet for pressing a bar; it is *negative* when its withdrawal/ cessation becomes rewarding as in cessation of shock upon pressing the switch. That is, getting something pleasant and getting rid of something unpleasant are both reinforcements and promote learning. Reinforcement can be also *continuous* and *intermittent*. It is continuous if reinforcement is given to every correct/prescribed behaviour as, for example, a mother who has instructed the elder child to take care of the younger one on certain particular occasions and rewards him in some way (praising him, thanking him, giving candy, etc.) on every occasion the elder child complies with her request. On the contrary, if the mother does not reward every time but only occasionally, it would be intermittent reinforcement. It is established that continuous reinforcement facilitates speedier learning in comparison with intermittent reinforcement, while in the latter schedule learning is slower but what is learned lasts longer. So, the theory would say, in moral training one may encourage good behaviour by suitable rewards; however, do not reward every time but only occasionally so that the good behaviour may persist longer even though its acquisition takes a little more time.

Reinforcement can be *extrinsic, intrinsic* and *mixed.* The first category comes from external world or outside of the individual. Money, in the form of wages and salaries, which motivates people to learn various works and jobs and do them faithfully is a good example. Intrinsic refers to reward attached to the very act; for example, an artist takes great pains to produce very fine paintings just for the joy of it. Mixed refers to combination of intrinsic and extrinsic rewards, for example getting salary as well as job satisfaction.

Intrinsically rewarded act is self-reinforcing because reward comes from the very act and therefore it persists indefinitely. Morally good acts like those of justice, truthfulness, love, service, prayer, etc., can become self-reinforcing provided a person properly understand their nobility and significance, appreciate them and do them. Gradually he may come to do them for the joy of it. This is important in moral training. So, it is not enough just to give rewards and punishments (on which behaviourism lays stress) for proper moral development, but the child should also be appropriately enlightened about moral values and principles, helped to appreciate them and encouraged to practise them from that perspective.

Conscience according to behaviourism is an internalized (moral) control acquired by virtue of the rewards and punishments one has received. This is quite in tune with the general stand of radical behaviourism that 'a person is the product of the history of the rewards and punishments he has received.' Therefore, our choices are not free but dictated by reinforcements. Consequently, there is no saint or sinner. A 'saint' is one whose good acts happened to be reinforced and he repeated them with pleasure during the course of his life; a 'sinner' unfortunately is one whose bad acts happened to be reinforced and he repeated them with satisfaction. None of them can be praised or blamed because there was no personal responsibility. (These imply deeper philosophical issues which are not our concern here). As regards moral development and conscience, this theory gives certain insights into effective ways of training children in (moral) behaviour. Apart from that, it is too superficial and empirical because conscience is more than a controller of moral responses acquired through rewards and punishments.

4. Character Studies

Another type of moral development investigation is character studies. Though a very early character study was that of Hartshorne and May in 1920s, best known is that of R. Peck and R.J.

Havighurst,[12] which we briefly discuss here. They describe moral character as a 'persisting pattern of attitudes and motives which produce a rather predictable kind and quality of moral behaviour.' It is a special aspect of personality, having a rather stable influence on moral behaviour, which implies a close relationship among personality, moral character and moral behaviour. About this Kay says, 'our conduct follows naturally from the kind of people that we are.'[13] Their original research was a seven year longitudinal study on 120 subjects between the ages 10 and 17 in the USA. The following behavioural traits of the subjects were assessed by their teachers and peers: 1. impulse control, 2. conformity to group patterns, 3. conformity to moral code, 4. range of moral horizon (range of one's sense of moral obligation — to a few or many), 5. locus of control (self or others), 6. internalized principles, 7. capacity for guilt/shame and 8. rationality (reasonable — realistic judgment and effectiveness of choice).

4.1. Character Types

In the light of data gained from the above assessment, researchers classified the subjects into five character types and assigned them to the following five stages. 1) Amoral (infancy): He follows his own whims and impulses without consideration for others. He thinks he is the centre of everything and others are means of gratification; he behaves like a child. He seems to have no internal principle or conscience. 2) Expedient (early childhood): He is basically self-centred, conforms to social norms for his own advantages and gratification of needs. He is concerned about his reputation and considers others' welfare to attain his own; does not seem to have proper internal principle or conscience. 3) Conforming (late childhood): He is a conformist. 'Do what others do or what one is supposed to do' is his principle. Non-conformity makes him anxious and does not appear to possess genuine internal principles. 4) Irrational-conscientious (later childhood/adolescence): Has a rigid internal moral code and its strict application; there is no place for flexibility. 5) Rational-altruistic (youth and adulthood): He is reasonable and realistic in evaluating situations and actions. Similarly, he is concerned about others as well as himself. He has a stable, but not very rigid, set of moral principles; he has a

[12]R. Peck and R.T. Havighurst, *The Psychology of Character Development*, New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1960.

[13]W. Kay, *Moral Development*, London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1972, 191.

firm/mature conscience and is constructive. According to the authors, this is the most mature moral level they have found. At the same time, the authors agree that there was no pure type among their subjects; most of them were combinations of two or even three types and were assigned to the most approximate type.[14]

4.2. Associated Findings

It was also found that mutual love, trust and approval among family members, consistency in discipline and guidance, democratic (as against autocratic/authoritarian) family atmosphere contributed much to shaping mature character. On the contrary, lack of mutual love and trust, severity in discipline and norms led to hostility and guilt feelings. Peer interaction also influences the development of character by its acceptance of mature characters, and criticism and rejection of immature characters. Another finding was that an individual's character was largely laid down between the ages 10 and 16. This is based on findings on consistency in children's moral development between these ages: there was a correlation of .78 between the ages of 10 and 16, .80 between the ages of 10 and 13, .98 between 13 and 16. After this period one may become more and more that type of person he already is. Theoretically, one can change also later. But prolonged and deep-going influences to effect a character change later is rare.[15]

Conclusion

We close with a brief and 'loose' synthesis. As seen in the foregoing discussion, the nature, function and formation of conscience is complex. Conscience *fundamentally* is the human capacity to feel, think, judge, react and respond to situations in the light of one's moral values and principles; this capacity needs to be actualized into a maturely *functioning* conscience, which involves various factors and processes seen above. Fundamental to formation of a mature conscience is parental love and care. Facilitating appropriate value-conceptions and motivations is also important because conscience is not only an affective entity. Diverse dimensions and functions shall not be disparate in a mature conscience, but integrated into a character marked by rationality, responsibility and altruism.

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[14]Peck and Havighurst, *The Psychology of Character Development*, 180ff.

[15]Peck and Havighurst, *The Psychology of Character Development*, 190.