

CONSCIENCE: GOD, MAN AND SOCIETY

BY CHARLES C. JOSEY

Webster defines conscience as "the consciousness of the moral goodness or blameworthiness of one's own conduct, intentions, or character, together with the feeling of obligation to do right or to be good." This faculty of man has generally excited admiration. The writer of Genesis refers to it as a godlike quality. Our first President spoke of it as "a spark of celestial fire." Rousseau regarded it as "the voice of the soul."

Less favorable attitudes, however, have been expressed regarding conscience. One cynic has stated that "Conscience is the still small voice that makes you feel still smaller." Dr G. Brock Chisholm has been quoted as saying, "Your conscience is what your mother told you before you were six years old." That the view attributed to Dr Chisholm is widely held is indicated by the fact that 61% of 343 students, representing five different colleges and universities, accepted as true the statement, "Conscience is best regarded as a conditioned attitude."

The belief that conscience is a conditioned attitude, the introjection of the mores, ideals, and prejudices of the society in which one happened to have been reared, like other instances of extreme environmentalism, is based on a superficial and false view of human nature and of the individual's relation to society. Since it is contributing to the moral confusion of our age and to social and personal disintegration, it should be subjected to critical examination.

The error of extreme environmentalism is its neglect of universal, fundamental, and central causes for peripheral ones, which can be measured and manipulated, even though they may be relatively of little importance. Social scientists and psychologists easily fall into this error. Indeed, it comes dangerously close to being inherent in scientific method when applied to the study of man. Science is naturally concerned with differences and their causes. It therefore tends to neglect underlying causes and to concentrate upon those factors which make a difference. Since all men make moral judgments, one might infer a common quality in man responsible for this universal phenomenon. But this inference is of little interest to the environmentalist, who prefers to stress the fact that moral judgments differ from culture to culture, and to attribute the

differences to differences in culture. Differences between moral judgments found within a culture are attributed to class differences, to family background, or to some chance experience. The fundamental fact that we make moral judgments is neglected in the effort to account for differences.

If a study were made of the consciences of dogs and children reared in the same home, differences in their consciences would focus attention upon differences between canine and human nature. We would then be impelled to learn more about the characteristics of man in which his conscience is rooted. As it is, the needs, propensities, capacities, self-awareness, and perceptions of man are neglected, and the individual is treated as a mass of putty to be moulded by society, which, as far as the extreme environmentalist is concerned, might as well reflect canine as human nature.

According to the theory that conscience is a conditioned attitude, parents and others teach the child that certain acts and attitudes are wrong and that others are right. These teachings the child passively accepts, and will continue to hold long after his parents are dead. No consideration is given the possibility that a child might eventually classify acts into right and wrong, even if his parents did not teach him. Babies walk a few days earlier than they would otherwise because of the encouragement they receive from their parents. But no one would claim that babies walk because their parents teach them, or that they continue to walk as adults because of childhood indoctrination.

Nor does the above theory emphasize as it should the fact that some attitudes are easily inculcated and persist and that some are difficult to inculcate and do not persist. Consider, for example, the widespread aversion toward masturbation. Is this a conditioned attitude? Granted that a child may be taught that masturbation is shameful, disgusting, and sinful, and that the child continues to hold these attitudes as an adult and passes them on to his children. Why is this attitude so easily imparted, and why does it persist? We are told that a child introjects the attitudes of his parents because of his love for, fear of, and identification with his parents. For the same reason, he may introject the attitudes of his parents toward dancing and card playing, but when he becomes older he may discard them. Why the difference? Is it because society condemns masturbation much more severely and universally than it does dancing? If so, why the difference in social attitudes? Perhaps one attitude is more deeply rooted in human nature than the other.

A consideration of courage may throw some light upon this possibility. Every culture prizes courage, and adults everywhere seek to inculcate this virtue in the young. But is courage the result of their efforts, or is it more properly regarded as rooted

in human nature and needs? The courage to stand up for one's convictions is necessary for a sense of personal worth. To ignore one's convictions and values because of cowardice is to reduce oneself to a nonentity. It is to become the mouthpiece for the opinions of others. It is to become a tool to be used by more courageous persons. The lack of courage, therefore, degrades a person in his own eyes, as well as in the eyes of others. Because courage is a fundamental need, essential to self-respect and personal dignity, the individual readily responds to the encouragement of his parents and of the group to be courageous.

For the same reason, the individual readily accepts the attitudes of his parents and of the group regarding masturbation. Everyone wants to become a well-integrated person and to enjoy feelings of personal worth and dignity. Sex, because of its strength and intensity, is a threat to order, unity, and harmony of life and as a consequence is a frequent source of anxiety. The individual senses the fact that it may become a tyrannical and degrading passion. Furthermore, reflective examination of sexual behavior as a physiological activity reveals nothing in it that ennobles or elevates life, or that enhances feelings of personal worth and dignity. For it to have these consequences, it must be combined with love, tenderness, and idealism and be sanctioned by society. Because these truths are dimly or unconsciously felt, the child responds to the teachings of his parents, and continues throughout life to view with aversion masturbation and sexual looseness, in spite of the efforts of "sophisticated" psychologists and marital counsellors.

Man, in common with all living things, is animated by the urge of self-actualization. This urge should not be regarded as something mysterious. We need and desire health, self-respect, social status, to love and to be loved, beauty and harmony, wisdom and understanding, and loyalty to and zestful pursuit of worthwhile goals. These and the actualization of our creative capacities are essential to our happiness and wellbeing. As the oak, that is implicit in the acorn, draws the sapling in its direction, so do these qualities implicit in the child draw him in their direction. Or expressed differently, the sapling is so made that it reaches out to the food and moisture in the soil and to the carbon dioxide and sunshine in the atmosphere and builds them into a magnificent oak. Similarly, man is so made that he seeks to attain the qualities of life essential to his self-actualization. When he attains them, he is happy. When he fails, he suffers. In the strivings of man, in his successes and failures, in his enjoyment and suffering, we have the fundamental basis of the distinction between good and evil, and of the feeling of obligation to do the right.

Because man suffers and enjoys, because he plans and antici-

pates, and because he perceives himself as taking an active part in determining what he is to become, he will inevitably approve or disapprove of his actions. If they are in harmony with his values and ideals, and if their consequences are good, he will approve. If they do not reflect his values and ideals and if their consequences are frustrating, he will regard them as evil. A person does not need instruction or social indoctrination to thus react, or to experience feelings of moral obligation. The capacity to suffer and to enjoy and to see a relation between one's intentions and one's acts and their consequences is quite sufficient.

The happiness of self-actualization, of course, involves satisfactory social relations, for only in a society can a person satisfy his need to love and to be loved, or gain security, or experience the satisfaction of cooperation, friendship, and mutual trust. Furthermore, these satisfactions cannot be attained in a lawless society, or in one in which lying and stealing are rampant. Hence, we readily accept the teachings of our parents that we *should be truthful and respect the property rights of others*. But this does not mean that our attitudes as adults toward lying and stealing are relics of childhood indoctrination, nor even of social pressure. They are more fundamentally due to an appreciation of what is essential to our own good and to the good of society.

In saying this, we do not wish to deny the importance of satisfactory social relations to the individual. Upon such relations, feelings of wellbeing, comfort, and personal worth depend. When a person fails to attain them, he experiences frustration, deprivation, and depression, which in extreme cases may cause death. But these needs, reactions, and attitudes are not the results of indoctrination or of learning. We do not learn to suffer when deprived of air. We take the good, cool air for granted, but when we are deprived of it we suffer. We do not learn to become dependent on society for love, security, mental stimulation, and for an arena of significant action. We are by nature dependent on it for these things, and when our relations with it are impaired, we suffer depression, feelings of worthlessness, and anxiety.

However important harmonious social relations may be, we cannot always approve the behavior and attitudes of the group to which we belong. Our nature impeis us to take a more comprehensive and objective view of moral problems than that sometimes held by our group. We are rational beings who may identify ourselves with the human race, and not merely with our community, tribe, or nation. For this reason, we may challenge the mores and behavior of our group on the ground that they are endangering the good of mankind, including our own. For example, those who have not been led into believing that the dignity, peace, freedom, happiness, and survival of mankind can be secured by their nation perfecting and accumulating weapons,

with which it can destroy all mankind, are driven to condemn the behavior of their own group as wrong, sinful, and utterly immoral. A man is a man before he is a citizen of a nation, and in his reflective moments he is apt to feel, if not to act, accordingly.

The identifications of man may be more inclusive yet. Some persons act and feel as though they are parts of an awe inspiring, value creating cosmos, as indeed they are. For is there a more significant characteristic of the universe than the emergence of values: life, consciousness, goodness, and beauty? And in this process man has a significant rôle to play. In him the goodness, beauty, and creative might of the universe come to conscious expression, and he may work with it or impede it. The religious refer to the will of God. And, because they feel it is important to obey the will of God, they may act contrary to the will and mores of their group. Expressed in psychological terms, this means that the best he knows, his love of truth and goodness, his compassion, and his reverence for life and for the mysterious cosmic womb, out of which all that we cherish have come, compels him to act contrary to the evil and destructive demands of a group, blind to its own good as well as to the good of mankind.

Though the effort to play one's rôle as a man and as a being who feels that he has a significant cosmic rôle may conflict with the need and desire to enjoy harmonious relations with society, and become a source of many painful conflicts of conscience, it is also an important source of moral and spiritual progress. To regard oneself as a robot, which has been indoctrinated with society's ideals and prejudices, would seriously constrict one's moral outlook, and be a death blow to the feelings of personal worth and dignity, born of the conviction that man is a free, rational, moral being who can take an active part in determining what he is to become. Passive acceptance of society's demands and ideals would mean moral stagnation and eventual chaos. For the courage to resist and to sharpen our moral perceptions, we need to believe that there is an objective right, and that it is important to discover it and to act accordingly.

To regard conscience as a conditioned attitude would weaken the feeling of obligation to help the morally wayward. Indeed, it would make the offer of such help impertinent, thereby making its acceptance quite unlikely. It would thus prevent us from helping one another morally at the very time that we keenly need such help.

The rejection of the more speculative parts of this essay would not seriously weaken the argument that conscience is far more than a social product or conditioned attitude. All that the argument requires is to point to the obvious fact that man is a conscious being, who perceives himself as capable of taking an

active part in fashioning and directing his life. From this follows inevitably self-blame and the feeling of having acted wrongly when he permits some outside influence or inner passion or weakness to cause him to act contrary to his dominant values and aspirations. As a rational being, man cannot be comfortable or feel that he has acted rightly unless he acts consistently with his values, attitudes, and beliefs.

A person's beliefs, values, and attitudes are admittedly partly the result of social indoctrination. We are suggestible and we like to act, feel, and believe as those about us. One's values and attitudes are also partly due to the social structure of the society in which one lives. A person will not develop a keen interest in becoming the president of a great corporation where there are no corporations. They are also partly due to human nature and to the urge of all living things to attain perfection. Finally, they are partly the result of his own nature, of his own specific capacities and tendencies, of his own observations of good and evil, and of his own reflections, meditations, and evaluations. But whatever the source of one's values, beliefs, and attitudes, the individual seeks to organize them into a coherent system and to act accordingly. Conscience is the thermometer which registers tension within this system and the tension between it and an action or proposed action.

Our beliefs about human nature are of more than theoretical importance. They profoundly influence the quality of our lives. What we believe about conscience may sharpen or deaden it. Conscience is neither supernatural nor infallible, but it is far more than a conditioned attitude or social deposit. It is the moral sensitiveness of a rational being, who must take an active part in directing his own life and who can reflectively evaluate his course of action. It is an automatic signal that a person is on or off the course set by his own nature and highest self. Conscientiousness may refine it; moral indifference, cowardice, passion, and greed may smother it. In view of its importance in the life of man, it is far better to regard it as "a spark of celestial fire" than as a conditioned attitude or as the introjection of social attitudes. It is also nearer the truth.

THE JEWISH ROLE IN THE AMERICAN ELITE

BY NATHANIEL WEYL

This article deals with the quantitative rôle of Jewry in American leadership as revealed by surname-frequency analysis.¹ The Jewish rôle is much larger than that indicated in prior articles. The reason for the increase is that I am now using a smaller and more selective roster of Jewish family names, eliminating those heavily mixed with non-Jewish elements.²

Finding purely Jewish names is difficult. When the Jews of Europe took surnames in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, they usually appropriated those current in the countries where they lived, but assigned esoteric meanings to them. A Gentile might be called BRILL because he made or wore spectacles; if a Jew chose the name it was because he claimed descent (*Ben*) from Rabbi Judah Lowe (hence BRJL). BAUM and BLOCH are similar rabbinical anagrams. KAUFMANN may mean, not merchant, but "Jacob born in the month of Ab" and BERNSTEIN may either refer to amber or to descent from the fifth son of Jacob. Since there are no vowels in Hebrew script, the latter can be inserted arbitrarily when Hebrew words are rendered in modern European languages. For example, a large proportion of the GORDON's in the United States are not Scots but Jews; in this instance, the name indicates that the bearer came from the town of GRoDNo (formerly in Eastern Poland, now in Byelorussia).³

A pure sample of Jewish names could have been obtained by confining one's self to those of Hebrew or Yiddish origin such as COHEN, KATZ, LEVIN, LEVINE, LEVY and

¹ The method used is explained in my "Ethnic and National Characteristics of the U.S. Elite," *THE MANKIND QUARTERLY*, Vol. I, No. 4, April 1961, pp.242-7.

² The retained names (using the Social Security six-letter coding system) are: ABRAHAM, BERMAN, BERNSTEIN, COHEN, EPSTEIN, FRIEDMann, GOLDBERG, GOLDSTEIN, GREENBERG, ISAACS, KAPLAN, KATZ, LEVIN, LEVINE, LEVY, MARCUS, ROSEN, ROSENBERG, ROSENTHAL, RUBIN, SHAPIRO, SILVER, SOLOMON, STERN, WEINBERG, and WEINSTEIN.

³ Article on "Names" in *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, Funk & Wagnalls, New York, 1905, and in the *Universal Jewish Encyclopedia*, New York City, 1942. Of less value is Konrad Krause, *Die jüdische Namenwelt*, Essener Verlag, Anstalt, 1943.