

## **Prototypical Vignettes of Stages in Normal Conscience Development**

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[January 27, 2002]

### **External Conscience (under age 7)**

The child at the External Stage of conscience functioning has a well developed security empathy-oughtness connection with his parents. He is dependent on parents and extenders of their authority, e.g., teachers and other caretakers, for moral rules. He likes to please and avoid punishment. He values pleasure, security, freedom from harm, certainty of consequences, and shared activities. He responds to parent disapproval with sensitivity and a drop in mood. Wrongdoing arouses wishes to undo his mistakes. Reparation consists of quick apologies and promises of reform. Healing, i.e., the restoration of am-good-feel-good state of moral-emotional equilibrium, occurs within minutes.

### **Brain-Heart Conscience (ages 7 to 11)**

The child at the Brain-Heart Stage of conscience functioning accepts moral instruction from parents and other adults based on trust in their knowledgeable ability. Although he continues to be dependent on adults for guidance, he has an internalized set of moral rules to guide his own behavior. He values adult authority, individual rights, and fairness in relationship to peers. Using internalized rules, he is able to anticipate disapproval from authority figures and registers morally induced physiological responses at the surface of his body, e.g., fidgetiness, warm skin, pounding heart. He takes responsibility for wrongdoing and tries to make up for transgressions. Healing is experienced as reparation plus celebration, e.g., now we can be friends again! Moral-emotional equilibrium is usually reestablished within a day's time. Moral volition involves mastery and sufficiency, i.e. doing things well.

### **Personified Conscience (ages 12-13)**

The emerging teenager at the Personified Stage of conscience functioning appreciates adult authority for the goodness of their intentions even when rules are disagreeable. Perception of conscience is described in anthropomorphic terms and dialogues with conscience occur. The young teenager values maintaining a good relationship with authority, establishing a personal reputation of goodness, and achievement. He is able to identify with others' needs and feelings. Wrongdoing is curtailed through anticipation of disapproval from conscience as well as people in his environment. Moral anxiety and drop in mood after wrongdoing prompt introspection, i.e. asking himself "why", as well as reparation. Psychophysiological reactions to wrongdoing are recognized as being internal, i.e. gut-level. Reparation involves expression of sorrow, making restitution, and undertaking prosocial actions. Restoration of the am-good-feel-good state of moral emotional equilibrium may take two or three days to achieve. Healing involves increased expressiveness and feelings of interconnectedness. Virtuous striving becomes part of moral volition.

### **Confused Conscience (ages 14-15)**

The midadolescent at the Confused Stage of conscience functioning begins to look at moral issues from different angles. Moral authority includes adults with opinions divergent from parents, peer group opinion, and spokespersons from the popular culture, e.g. lyricists. While diversity in moral authority is being explored, the midadolescent nonetheless values being a law-abiding citizen, preparing for future

responsibility, and pursuing conflict resolution. Moral dilemmas may throw him into a sustained state of anxiety and moodiness (short of clinical syndromes) characterized by withdrawal, introspection, and longing for peace. He speculates about the sensitivity of body systems to moral distress. Increased self-consciousness makes the steps of reparation more difficult than at earlier ages, especially direct encounters with a person he has wronged. Healing is experienced as an enrichment of moral identity-- becoming a better person. Moral volition is directed toward emulating moral heroes and pursuing moral ideals.

### **Integrating Conscience (beginning at age 16 or 17)**

The older adolescent takes pride in the independence of his moral ideas and efforts to practice them. He recognizes that there may be good within evil and evil within good. He values hierarchical organization, feelings of responsibility toward community and future progeny, and the interrelatedness of humankind. He masters anxiety in behalf of pursuing moral goals, thereby transforming the anxiety into courage and commitment. He examines his own mood fluctuations for indications of moral distress. He attempts to prevent psychophysiological distress through moral planning and control. After wrongdoing, he recognizes that complete reparation may be impossible, necessitating learning how to live with past wrongdoing. This recognition leads to feelings of tolerance for other wrongdoers. Healing is experienced through a broadened life-span perspective. Moral volition is directed toward individual responsibility.

### **Levels of Psychopathological Interference to Conscience Functioning**

Psychopathology adversely affects conscience functioning to the degree that it interferes with a person's sense of oughtness about the pursuit of goodness. Although specific syndromes may adversely affect specific conscience domains, the following levels of interference were designed to reflect cumulative impairment across domains on children and adolescents. The interrelationship between development and psychopathology is an obvious problem in constructing such a scale. In clinical work facilitating development and alleviating distressing symptoms are also linked as coordinating goals.

#### **Level 0 No detectable interferences**

##### **Level 1 Interference: Occasional lapses in conscience functioning.**

The individual's pursuit of goodness is generally reflected in age-appropriate respect for self, authority, and peers. However, lapses in conscience functioning may occur after which the individual provides a number of justifications: temporary failure to exercise moral vigilance; temporary "corruption" by peers; loss of willpower due to a fear-inducing situation; or a playful desire to experiment with behavior outside of accepted standards. Temporary ambivalence about inherent goodness or pursuing goodness appears to undergird these episodes. At these times, praise for moral goodness may be experienced as embarrassing, while getting away with wrongdoing may be perceived as exciting. A persistent feeling of guilt may accompany the return to one's moral senses. Reparation and healing may then involve a protracted amount of withdrawal, introspection, and personal reform.

##### **Level 2 Persistent doubt, ambivalence, and moodiness regarding the pursuit of goodness**

This level is characterized by a persistent moodiness whenever a moral issue is raised. The individual finds himself persistently failing to live up to internalized standards (external standards for younger children). He is uncertain about whether the bad mood leads him to bad behavior or the reverse. He may persistently feel influenced by "bad" companions. A moral lethargy exists. He may report that he fails to think before acting. His conscience may be perceived as lazy- sleeping when it should be working. Severe doubt about inherent goodness may make him react to praise for right doing by claiming that it was "stupid". He still values the pursuit of goodness sufficiently to feel that he must construct psychological

defenses to hide from his own wrongdoing. Even if his wrongdoing is not publically known, he may justify it with excuses to himself, e.g., "it's a bad habit I've gotten into", as well as blaming others. He may lie to himself and others about the seriousness of his wrongdoing.

### **Level 3 War breaks out between good and evil within the self**

This level is characterized by the replacement of doubt and despair about the desirability of pursuing goodness with the conviction that there is a war between good and evil going on inside oneself. In the midst of a terrible mood, the individual begins to see himself as bad most of the time. Wrongdoing may be attributed to being too depressed to care. Transgressions that are not publically known are responded to with chronic irritability and meanness toward everyone. Aggressive outbreaks may occur. Loss of moral willpower is explained as being related to depression. A history of wrongdoing is used to prove the badness of self. However, there is just enough regret over failures in the pursuit of goodness that psychological defenses are still necessary to justify wrongdoing. If praised for doing something good, the individual may respond by doing something bad, e.g., pick a fight. Alcohol and drugs may be used to blot out moral reality.

### **Level 4: Good and Bad begins to split apart with pursuit of badness gaining in power**

This level is characterized by the conviction that an evil force has overtaken goodness in the individual's life. He may argue that he had to have been born bad because of all the bad things that have happened to him in his lifetime. These bad fortunes are used as a justification for hatred directed toward everyone and everything. He may feel so confused about morality that he doubts having a conscience at all. Loss of moral willpower is related to confusion. The confusion is particularly pronounced if he is praised for doing something good. Wrongdoing is persistently exciting and makes him feel good. Lying makes him feel at ease. Increasingly dangerous actions are undertaken. A do-bad-feel-good setting is equated with moral-emotional equilibrium. If his view of himself as driven by an evil force is experienced as an intermittently altered state of consciousness, he may have no understanding of his own aggressive outbursts when he returns to his former state of consciousness.

### **Level 5: Pursuit of badness reigns**

This level is characterized by satisfaction in defining oneself as a bad person. The control of the Evil Force has won; the conscience, if it formerly existed, has been destroyed. Badness is way of life. Loss of moral willpower to pursue goodness is explained as being due to the evil in the world. The individual may intellectually know what goodness and conscience are, but claim no personal connection to them. He may identify a transition in his moral life from good to evil as related to a specific event which made him no longer care about right and wrong. Being praised for a good deed may be experienced as such an insult that he feels like destroying the world. Nonetheless, if wrongdoing is not publically known, he may feel constantly on the lookout for those against himself. He still prefers to not be punished. One bad deed is followed by a plan for the next one.