

SHORT COMMUNICATION

The Perspective of Conscience for Health Professionals in Various Religions Worldwide

Abstract

The concept of conscience among health professionals is decreasing worldwide in the current context. The theoretical aspect of conscience was explained by the renowned third-century philosopher Aristotle, while the practical side was discussed by the thirteenth-century philosopher Thomas Aquinas. This short note explores the view of conscience across various religions around the world. The nature of the mind and its functions, such as mindfulness and contemplation, are central to Buddhist ideas about conscience. In Hinduism, the material part of a person (prakriti) and the nonmaterial part (purusha) together form the full person. Hindu texts including the four Vedas, the Puranas, the Laws of Manu, the Bhagavad Gita, the Ramayana, and the Mahabharata provide profound insights into morality, ethics, human behaviour, well-being, and righteous conduct. In the New Testament of the Holy Bible, conscience is viewed as an internal guide for future actions. In Islam, the Holy Quran and the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) serve as key references for conscience.

Key words: Conscience, Health professionals, Hinduism, Buddhism, Holy Bible, Holy Quran, The Sunnah, Historical perspective

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Introduction

Conscience is the core aspect of a health professional to live in conformity with moral goodness, and it is the reflection of a

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Thorakkal Shamim (BDS, MDS)¹

1- Dental Assistant Surgeon, Department of Dentistry, Government General Hospital, Manjeri, India

Correspondence:

Thorakkal Shamim
Dental Assistant Surgeon, Department of Dentistry, Government General Hospital, Manjeri, India

e-mail: shamu3duad@gmail.com

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person's character (Conscience: Position Paper of the Catholic Medical Association, 2022, pp. 230-231). The theoretical aspect of conscience (happiness achieved through a life of virtue) was narrated by the acclaimed philosopher of the third century Aristotle (Aristotle, 1941), and the practicality of conscience (consequence of erroneous and right conscience in human life) was described by the Thirteenth-century philosopher Thomas Aquinas (Aquinas, 1998). The paper reflects the historical perspective of conscience in various religions worldwide, which may be useful to health professionals in the current scenario, where the concept of conscience is declining among health professionals in medical schools.

Buddhist Perspective on Conscience

The Buddhist religion emerged in the 5th century BC. The nature of the mind (calm and well-directed mind) and its functions (mindfulness and contemplation) are a central concern of Buddhist thought concerning conscience (Anālayo, 2013, pp. 473-476). *The Seven-Point Mind Training* and *Vipassana* are the practices to cultivate self-purification and contemplation in Buddhism (Marques, 2012). The essential elements in Buddhism for conscience are brevity, destiny, non-harming, ethics, compassion, mindfulness, honest living, charity, interdependence, constructive outlook, alliance and justice (Marques, 2012).

Hinduism's Perspective on Conscience

The Hinduism religion took shape in the 6th century BC and the four Vedas (Rig-Veda, Yajur-Veda, Sama-Veda and Atharva-Veda), the Puranas, the Laws of Manu, the Bhagavad Gita, the Ramayana, and the Mahabharata provide profound insights into morality, ethics, human behaviour, well-being, and righteous conduct (Singh, Raina, and Oman, 2023, pp. 195-209). The material component of a person consists of *prakriti* (nature/cosmos), which is comprised of three traits: *sattva* (purity), *rajas* (energy), and *tamas* (inertia) (Sedlmeier, and Srinivas, 2016, p. 343). Persons with superior *sattva* (purity) are expected to have a positive outlook, compassionate stance, self-discipline, tranquillity, adaptability and well-being (Sedlmeier, and Srinivas, 2016, p. 343). The nonmaterial component of a person is *purusha*, meaning true person or true self or pure consciousness, together with *prakriti*, which constitutes the person in its full sense (Sedlmeier, and Srinivas, 2016, p. 343).

Christian Perspective of Conscience

The New Testament of the Holy Bible surfaced in the late 2nd century A.D and it defines conscience as “*subjective human faculty that recognizes right and wrong and thus bears witness to a person's standing before the law.*” (VanDrunen, 2021, pp. 39–56). The conscience is viewed as an internal guide for future actions (Willis, 2021, pp. 23–38). It is considered as a path for future moral choices, highlighting self-reflection of past actions and built-in structure for architecting prospective steps (Willis, 2021, pp. 23–38).

Islamic Perspective on Conscience

The development of Islam as a faith flourished with Muhammad (PBUH)'s assignment in Mecca and Medina at the start of the 7th century CE. The Holy Quran and the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) may nurture the collective moral conscience to resolve conflicts and induce a peaceful atmosphere in healthcare settings (Kirazli, 2024). Quranic verses “*obligation to `pilgrimage is made in appointed months. Whoever devoted to accomplishing pilgrimage, let them stay away from intimate relations, foul language, and arguments during pilgrimage. Whatever good you do, Allah `fully` knows of it. Take `necessary`*”



provisions 'for the journey'—surely the best provision is righteousness.” (Quran, Surah 2, Verse no. 197, 2025). “Neither their meat nor blood reaches Allah. Rather, it is your piety that reaches Him. This is how He has subjected them to you so that you may proclaim the greatness of Allah for what He has guided you to, and give good news to the good-doers”. (Quran, Surah 22, Verse no. 27, 2025). “As for those who are 'rightly' guided, He increases them in guidance and grace them with righteousness”. (Quran, Surah 47, Verse no. 17, 2025) “O mankind! Indeed, we created you from a male and a female, and made you into peoples and tribes so that you may 'get to' know one another. Surely the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous among you. Allah is truly All-Knowing, All-Aware” (Quran, Surah 49, Verse no. 13, 2025). “And by the soul and 'the One' Who fashioned it, then with 'the knowledge of' right and wrong inspired it! Successful indeed is the one who purifies their soul, and ruined is the one who corrupts it!” (Quran, Surah 91, Verses no. 7–10, 2025) The aforesaid Quranic verses depict Taqwa (righteousness, piety, purification of soul, and fear of God) as the essence of conscience in Islam. According to the Sunnah reported by Abdur Rahman ibn Mu'awiyah, “A man asked the Prophet (PBUH) regarding lawful and unlawful stuffs in life and The Prophet replied that the individual should follow their heart and Whatever the heart rejects, abandon it”. This Sunnah elucidates that the person with a pure, clean heart may follow righteousness in all aspects of life (Jami'ul'Ulumi WalHikam, Hadith: 27; Kitabuz Zuhd, Hadith: 1162; Faydul Qadir, Hadith: 7846).

Nafs (self), *Qalb* (Essence, “heart of hearts”), *Aql* (Cognitions, reason, intellect), and *Ruh* (Spirit, life force) are the domains of conscience in Islam (Skinner, 2019, pp. 1087-1094). The seven developmental stages of the *nafs* are typically presented in the following order:

1. The Commanding Self (*Nafs Al Ammara*): At this stage, the self is dominated by worldly cravings and tends to act without reflection or hesitation.
2. The Blaming Self (*Nafs Al Lawwama*): At this stage, self-aware individuals start recognizing their moral failings and seeking repentance.
3. The Inspired Self (*Nafs Al Mulhamah*): At this stage, the good traits start to develop, like gratitude, empathy, and modesty.
4. The Secure Self (*Nafs Al Muttma'ina*): At this stage, the level of self-control and detachment from worldly desires is achieved.
5. The Content Self (*Nafs Al Radiyah*): At this stage, one finds deep inner peace and satisfaction, regardless of life's ups and downs.
6. The Gratified Self (*Nafs Al Mardiyah*): At this stage, deep commitment to living following divine principles is achieved.
7. The Complete Self (*Nafs Al Kamilah*): This stage is the total surrender to God's will. (Chittick, 2011, pp. 11-35). Consequently, a full fruition of human nature was consummated with a composed body, mind, and soul; or an evolving and dynamic manifestation of the heavenly bliss or the absolute being (Chittick, 2011, pp. 11-35).

Conclusion

Therefore, the proper understanding of conscience in various religions around the globe may help the health professional to instill an ethereal internal monologue, atonement and persuading the righteously trajectory to abandon vices.

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