

To abandon the struggle for private happiness, to expel all eagerness of temporary desire, to burn with passion for eternal things—this is emancipation, and this is the free man's worship.

Russell, *A Free Man's Worship*

- 50 Anyone who has successfully undergone the training of learning and recognizing the truth about himself is henceforth strengthened against the dangers of immorality, even if his standard of morality should in some respect deviate from the common one.

Freud, *General Introduction to Psycho-Analysis*, XXVII

- 51 One might compare the relation of the ego to the id with that between a rider and his horse. The horse provides the locomotive energy, and the rider has the prerogative of determining the goal and of guiding the movements of his powerful mount towards it. But all too often in the relations be-

tween the ego and the id we find a picture of the less ideal situation in which the rider is obliged to guide his horse in the direction in which it itself wants to go.

Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, XXXI

- 52 If we state the moral law . . . as the injunction to each self on every occasion to identify the self with a new growth that is possible, then obedience to law is one with moral freedom.

Dewey, *Ethics*, Pt. II, XV, 5

- 53 The office of the moral law is that of a pedagogue, to protect and educate us in the use of freedom. At the end of this period of instruction, we are enfranchised from every servitude, even from the servitude of law, since Love made us one in spirit with the wisdom that is the source of Law.

Maritain, *Freedom in the Modern World*

9.5 | Conscience

According to its etymology, the word "conscience," deriving as it does from *conscire*, should have almost the same meaning as "conscious," indicating awareness or knowledge. But that is not the meaning of the word as it has come to be used in discourse about moral problems. In that context, it is used either to signify a sense of right and wrong, whether innate or acquired; or to signify the inner voice that determines the judgment an individual makes concerning what he should or should not do, or approve of, in a particular case.

Conscience does not displace but rather applies the principles or rules of the moral law, which is discussed in Section 9.3. Such principles or rules are universal or general formulations applicable to a wide variety of individual cases, some of which clearly fall under the rule and some of which involve

aspects that might make them exceptions to the rule. Conscience is needed to make the judgment that considers the principle or rule in relation to this or that particular case, deciding either that the case calls for conformity to the rule or that the case justifies dispensation from it.

One quotation that the reader might expect to find here—Hamlet's statement that "conscience doth make cowards of us all"—has been placed elsewhere because, when it is read in the context of the whole "To be or not to be" speech, the meaning is clearly that it is a certain kind of knowledge, not the moral conscience, that causes us to become overtimid or overcautious when contemplating suicide.

Among the quotations assembled below, the reader will find some that discuss freedom of conscience and the right of private

judgment in moral matters. These should be read in connection with related passages that have been placed in Section 13.2 on FREEDOM OF THOUGHT AND EXPRESSION: CENSORSHIP. The reader will also find, in quotations taken from Freud, the discussion of psychological phenomena that are related to con-

science—remorse and a sense of guilt. Other passages from Freud on the sense of guilt will be found in Section 12.4 on CRIME AND PUNISHMENT. In Freud's theory of the matter, the reader will learn, the repressive structures of the superego represent the voice of conscience.

- 1 The best audience for the practice of virtue is the approval of one's own conscience.

Cicero, *Disputations*, II, 26

- 2 Where there is a bad conscience, some circumstance or other may provide one with impunity, but never with freedom from anxiety.

Seneca, *Letters to Lucilius*, 105

- 3 There is nothing so preoccupied, so distracted, so rent and torn by so many and such varied passions as an evil mind. For when it cherishes some dark design, it is tormented with hope, care and anguish of spirit, and even when it has accomplished its criminal purpose, it is racked by anxiety, remorse and the fear of all manner of punishments.

Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, XII, 1

- 4 Conscience is said to witness, to bind, or stir up, and also to accuse, torment, or rebuke. And all these follow the application of knowledge or science to what we do, which application is made in three ways. One way in so far as we recognize that we have done or not done something: *Thy conscience knoweth that thou hast often spoken evil of others*, and according to this, conscience is said to witness. In another way, so far as through the conscience we judge that something should be done or not done, and in this sense, conscience is said to stir up or to bind. In the third way, so far as by conscience we judge that something done is well done or ill done, and in this sense conscience is said to excuse, accuse, or torment. Now, it is clear that all these things follow the actual application of knowledge to what we do.

Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, 79, 13

- 5 The laws of conscience, which we say are born of nature, are born of custom. Each man, holding in inward veneration the opinions and the behavior approved and accepted around him, cannot break loose from them without remorse, or apply himself to them without self-satisfaction.

Montaigne, *Essays*, I, 23, Of Custom

- 6 *King Richard*. Conscience is but a word that cowards use,

Devised at first to keep the strong in awe:

Our strong arms be our conscience, swords our law.

Shakespeare, *Richard III*, V, iii, 309

- 7 *Macbeth*. Better be with the dead,
Whom we, to gain our peace, have sent to peace,
Than on the torture of the mind to lie
In restless ecstasy.

Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, III, ii, 19

- 8 Another doctrine repugnant to civil society is that whatsoever a man does against his conscience is sin; and it dependeth on the presumption of making himself judge of good and evil. For a man's conscience and his judgement is the same thing; and as the judgement, so also the conscience may be erroneous. Therefore, though he that is subject to no civil law sinneth in all he does against his conscience, because he has no other rule to follow but his own reason, yet it is not so with him that lives in a Commonwealth, because the law is the public conscience by which he hath already undertaken to be guided.

Hobbes, *Leviathan*, II, 29

- 9 *God*. And I will place within them as a guide
My Umpire *Conscience*, whom if they will hear,
Light after light well us'd they shall attain,
And to the end persisting, safe arrive.

Milton, *Paradise Lost*, III, 194

- 10 *Adam*. O Conscience, into what Abyss of fears
And horrors hast thou driv'n me; out of which
I find no way, from deep to deeper plung'd!

Milton, *Paradise Lost*, X, 842

- 11 A good conscience is never lawless in the worst regulated state, and will provide those laws for itself, which the neglect of legislators hath forgotten to supply.

Fielding, *Tom Jones*, XVII, 3

- 12 Surely if there is any thing in this life which a man may depend upon, and to the knowledge of which he is capable of arriving upon the most in-

disputable evidence, it must be this very thing,—whether he has a good conscience or no.

Sterne, *Tristram Shandy*, II, 17

- 13 Whenever a man talks loudly against religion, always suspect that it is not his reason, but his passions, which have got the better of his creed. A bad life and a good belief are disagreeable and troublesome neighbours, and where they separate, depend upon it, 'tis for no other cause but quietness' sake.

Sterne, *Tristram Shandy*, II, 17

- 14 I need only consult myself with regard to what I wish to do; what I feel to be right is right, what I feel to be wrong is wrong; conscience is the best casuist; and it is only when we haggle with conscience that we have recourse to the subtleties of argument.

Rousseau, *Emile*, IV

- 15 There is . . . at the bottom of our hearts an innate principle of justice and virtue, by which, in spite of our maxims, we judge our own actions or those of others to be good or evil; and it is this principle that I call conscience.

Rousseau, *Emile*, IV

- 16 *Johnson*. Conscience is nothing more than a conviction felt by ourselves of something to be done, or something to be avoided; and in questions of simple unperplexed morality, conscience is very often a guide that may be trusted. But before conscience can determine, the state of the question is supposed to be completely known. In questions of law, or of fact, conscience is very often confounded with opinion. No man's conscience can tell him the right of another man; they must be known by rational investigation or historical enquiry. Opinion, which he that holds it may call his conscience, may teach some men that religion would be promoted, and quiet preserved, by granting to the people universally the choice of their ministers. But it is a conscience very ill informed that violates the rights of one man, for the convenience of another.

Boswell, *Life of Johnson* (May 1, 1773)

- 17 Conscience is not a thing to be acquired, and it is not a duty to acquire it; but every man, as a moral being, has it originally within him. To be bound to have a conscience would be as much as to say to be under a duty to recognize duties. For conscience is practical reason which, in every case of law, holds before a man his duty for acquittal or condemnation; consequently it does not refer to an object, but only to the subject (affecting the moral feeling by its own act); so that it is an inevitable fact, not an obligation and duty. When, therefore, it is said, "This man *has* no conscience,"

what is meant is that he pays no heed to its dictates. For if he really had none, he would not take credit to himself for anything done according to duty, nor reproach himself with violation of duty, and therefore he would be unable even to conceive the duty of having a conscience.

I pass by the manifold subdivisions of conscience, and only observe what follows from what has just been said, namely, that there is no such thing as an *erring* conscience. No doubt it is possible sometimes to err in the objective judgement whether something is a duty or not; but I cannot err in the subjective whether I have compared it with my practical (here judicially acting) reason for the purpose of that judgement; for if I erred I would not have exercised practical judgement at all, and in that case there is neither truth nor error. *Unconscientiousness* is not want of conscience, but the propensity not to heed its judgement. But when a man is conscious of having acted according to his conscience, then, as far as regards guilt or innocence, nothing more can be required of him, only he is bound to enlighten his *understanding* as to what is duty or not; but when it comes or has come to action, then conscience speaks involuntarily and inevitably. To act conscientiously can, therefore, not be a duty, since otherwise it would be necessary to have a second conscience, in order to be conscious of the act of the first.

The duty here is only to cultivate our conscience, to quicken our attention to the voice of the internal judge, and to use all means to secure obedience to it, and is thus our indirect duty.

Kant, *Introduction to the Metaphysical Elements of Ethics*, XII

- 18 Conscience is an instinct to pass judgment upon ourselves in accordance with moral laws. It is not a mere faculty, but an instinct; and its judgment is not logical, but judicial. We have the faculty to judge ourselves logically in terms of laws of morality; we can make such use as we please of this faculty. But conscience has the power to summon us against our will before the judgment-seat to be judged on account of the righteousness or unrighteousness of our actions. It is thus an instinct and not merely a faculty of judgment, and it is an instinct to judge, not in the logical, but in the judicial sense.

Kant, *Lectures on Ethics*, Conscience

- 19 He who has no immediate loathing for what is morally wicked, and finds no pleasure in what is morally good, has no moral feeling, and such a man has no conscience. He who goes in fear of being prosecuted for a wicked deed, does not reproach himself on the score of the wickedness of his misdemeanour, but on the score of the painful consequences which await him; such a one has no conscience, but only a semblance of it. But he who has a sense of the wickedness of the deed itself, be

the consequences what they may, has a conscience.

Kant, *Lectures on Ethics*, Conscience

- 20 Conscience is the representative within us of the divine judgment-seat: it weighs our dispositions and actions in the scales of a law which is holy and pure; we cannot deceive it, and, lastly, we cannot escape it because, like the divine omnipresence, it is always with us.

Kant, *Lectures on Ethics*, Conscience

- 21 We may speak in a very lofty strain about duty, and talk of the kind is uplifting and broadens human sympathies, but if it never comes to anything specific it ends in being wearisome. Mind demands particularity and is entitled to it. But conscience is this deepest inward solitude with oneself where everything external and every restriction has disappeared—this complete withdrawal into oneself. As conscience, man is no longer shackled by the aims of particularity, and consequently in attaining that position he has risen to higher ground, the ground of the modern world, which for the first time has reached this consciousness, reached this sinking into oneself. The more sensuous consciousness of earlier epochs had something external and given confronting it, either religion or law. But conscience knows itself as thinking and knows that what alone has obligatory force for me is this that I think.

When we speak of conscience, it may easily be thought that, in virtue of its form, which is abstract inwardness, conscience is at this point without more ado true conscience. But true conscience determines itself to will what is absolutely good and obligatory and is this self-determination.

Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, Additions, Pars. 136–137

- 22 A man could not have anything upon his conscience if God did not exist, for the relationship between the individual and God, the God-relationship, is the conscience, and that is why it is so terrible to have even the least thing upon one's conscience, because one is immediately conscious of the infinite weight of God.

Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, I, 3B

- 23 The conscience really does not, and ought not to monopolize the whole of our lives, any more than the heart or the head. It is as liable to disease as any other part. I have seen some whose consciences, owing undoubtedly to former indulgence, had grown to be as irritable as spoiled children, and at length gave them no peace.

Thoreau, *The Christian Fable*

- 24 I fully subscribe to the judgment of those writers who maintain that of all the differences between man and the lower animals, the moral sense or conscience is by far the most important. . . . It is

summed up in that short but imperious word *ought*, so full of high significance. It is the most noble of all the attributes of man, leading him without a moment's hesitation to risk his life for that of a fellow-creature; or after due deliberation, impelled simply by the deep feeling of right or duty, to sacrifice it in some great cause.

Darwin, *Descent of Man*, I, 4

- 25 The moral sense follows, firstly, from the enduring and ever-present nature of the social instincts; secondly, from man's appreciation of the approbation and disapprobation of his fellows; and thirdly, from the high activity of his mental faculties, with past impressions extremely vivid; and in these latter respects he differs from the lower animals. Owing to this condition of mind, man cannot avoid looking both backwards and forwards, and comparing past impressions. Hence after some temporary desire or passion has mastered his social instincts, he reflects and compares the now weakened impression of such past impulses with the ever-present social instincts; and he then feels that sense of dissatisfaction which all unsatisfied instincts leave behind them, he therefore resolves to act differently for the future,—and this is conscience.

Darwin, *Descent of Man*, III, 21

- 26 It is not because men's desires are strong that they act ill; it is because their consciences are weak. There is no natural connection between strong impulses and a weak conscience. The natural connection is the other way. To say that one person's desires and feelings are stronger and more various than those of another, is merely to say that he has more of the raw material of human nature, and is therefore capable, perhaps of more evil, but certainly of more good. Strong impulses are but another name for energy. Energy may be turned to bad uses; but more good may always be made of an energetic nature, than of an indolent and impassive one. Those who have most natural feeling are always those whose cultivated feelings may be made the strongest. The same strong susceptibilities which make the personal impulses vivid and powerful, are also the source from whence are generated the most passionate love of virtue, and the sternest self-control. It is through the cultivation of these that society both does its duty and protects its interests: not by rejecting the stuff of which heroes are made, because it knows not how to make them.

Mill, *On Liberty*, III

- 27 The internal sanction of duty, whatever our standard of duty may be, is one and the same—a feeling in our own mind; a pain, more or less intense, attendant on violation of duty, which in properly cultivated moral natures rises, in the more serious cases, into shrinking from it as an impossibility.

This feeling, when disinterested, and connecting itself with the pure idea of duty, and not with some particular form of it, or with any of the merely accessory circumstances, is the essence of Conscience.

Mill, *Utilitarianism*, III

28 I regard the bad conscience as the serious illness which man was bound to contract under the stress of the most radical change which he has ever experienced—that change, when he found himself finally imprisoned within the pale of society and of peace.

Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, II, 16

29 What means does civilization make use of to hold in check the aggressiveness that opposes it, to make it harmless, perhaps to get rid of it? Some of these measures we have already come to know, though not yet the one that is apparently the most important. We can study it in the evolution of the individual. What happens in him to render his craving for aggression innocuous? Something very curious, that we should never have guessed and that yet seems simple enough. The aggressiveness is introjected, *internalized*; in fact, it is sent back

where it came from, i.e., directed against the ego. It is there taken over by a part of the ego that distinguishes itself from the rest as a super-ego, and now, in the form of *conscience*, exercises the same propensity to harsh aggressiveness against the ego that the ego would have liked to enjoy against others. The tension between the strict super-ego and the subordinate ego we call the *sense of guilt*; it manifests itself as the need for punishment. Civilization, therefore, obtains the mastery over the dangerous love of aggression in individuals by enfeebling and disarming it and setting up an institution within their minds to keep watch over it, like a garrison in a conquered city.

Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, VII

30 This increased sensitivity of morals in consequence of ill-luck has been illustrated by Mark Twain in a delicious little story: *The First Melon I ever Stole*. This melon, as it happened, was unripe. I heard Mark Twain tell the story himself in one of his lectures. After he had given out the title, he stopped and asked himself in a doubtful way: "Was it the first?" This was the whole story.

Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, VII

9.6 | Good and Evil

The terms good and evil are used in other contexts than those of ethical or moral discourse. According to *Genesis*, God surveying his creation judged it to be good, very good. Similar judgments are made by human artists, expressing their estimation of the excellence or perfection of the work produced. In this meaning of the word, beauty, excellence, or perfection represents a goodness inherent in the very being of the thing judged good, without regard to its bearing on human conduct or its value for human life. Such goodness is sometimes called "ontological," in contradistinction to the moral goodness of the things that are good for man or good in his behavior. It is in this ontological sense that a mouse is said to be more

good than a pearl, though a pearl is more valuable to man.

As the reader will find in the quotations below, the human good or the good for man is sometimes discussed in the singular and sometimes spoken of as a class of goods. The reader will find passages that consider "the Good," or that assert that the only morally good thing in the whole world is a good will. On the other hand, the reader will find enumerations of the variety of goods, discussions of the order of goods and of the relation of one good to another, and different classifications of goods, such as the threefold division of them into external goods, goods of the body, and goods of the soul.

One distinction that is made by the an-

cients has great importance for later discussion. It is the distinction between the real and the apparent good. While acknowledging that men always regard as good that which they in fact desire, Socrates calls attention to the fact that they can be mistaken in their judgment, for what they desire may in fact not be good for them or to their advantage. It is generally admitted that the notion of the good and the notion of the desirable are correlative, but the question remains whether we call something good because we desire it; or ought to desire it, whether we do or not, because it is in fact good for us; or both. Fundamental differences in the approach to moral philosophy emerge from different answers to this question.

The quotations below touch on many other points: whether pleasure is the only good or just one of the goods; the goodness of God and the problem of the existence of

evil in the world that He created; our knowledge of good and evil and the diremption between knowing what is good and seeking it; the inherent or natural goodness of man and the sources or origin of his propensities for evil. Other discussions of the theological aspects of this subject will be found in Section 20.5 on GOD and in Section 20.13 on SIN AND TEMPTATION. Psychological aspects of it are treated in Section 4.4 on DESIRE and Section 4.7 on PLEASURE AND PAIN; and also in Section 5.7 on WILL: FREE CHOICE. The reader is also referred to Section 16.6 on BEAUTY AND THE BEAUTIFUL for the relation of goodness to beauty; and to Section 11.2 on WEALTH AND POVERTY for the economic discussion of value and for the consideration of economic goods. In this chapter, Section 9.7 on RIGHT AND WRONG, Section 9.8 on HAPPINESS, and Section 9.10 on VIRTUE AND VICE deal with matters closely related to themes treated here.

1 And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good.

Genesis 1:31

2 So I returned, and considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun: and behold the tears of such as were oppressed, and they had no comforter; and on the side of their oppressors there was power; but they had no comforter.

Wherefore I praised the dead which are already dead more than the living which are yet alive.

Yea, better is he than both they, which hath not yet been, who hath not seen the evil work that is done under the sun.

Ecclesiastes 4:1-3

3 For all this I considered in my heart even to declare all this, that the righteous, and the wise, and their works, are in the hand of God: no man knoweth either love or hatred by all that is before them.

All things come alike to all: there is one event to the righteous, and to the wicked; to the good and to the clean, and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not: as is

the good, so is the sinner; and he that sweareth, as he that feareth an oath.

This is an evil among all things that are done under the sun, that there is one event unto all: yea, also the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead.

Ecclesiastes 9:1-3

4 *Philoctetes.* The Gods . . . find their pleasure in turning back from Death the rogues and tricksters, but the just and good they are always sending out of the world.

Sophocles, Philoctetes, 447

5 *Hecuba.* Goodness can be taught, and any man who knows what goodness is knows evil too, because he judges from the good.

Euripides, Hecuba, 600

6 *Chorus Leader.* I hate all evil men who plot injustice,
Then trick it out with subterfuge. I would
Prefer as friend a good man ignorant
Than one more clever who is evil too.

Euripides, Ion, 832