

# CONSCIOUSNESS AND ETHICAL JUDGMENT IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF GHAZALI AND KANT

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this paper is to contribute to a better understanding of conscience and its role in ethical judgment and action. Conscience is the last resort to judge human actions. It is generally known and accepted that man is bound only by his conscience. It is precisely for this reason that it is necessary to consider what can really be considered a judgment of conscience. This is especially important today, when it is often emphasized that consciousness is a subjective norm and that it itself must be normed. Since conscience is not always accurate, special care is given to the education of conscience. The question of conscience in the context of ethical judgment and action is a topic that has been a philosophical concept since ancient times, but we, in this paper, will focus on the thoughts of Imam Ghazali, one of the Muslim philosophers and theologians who have had an evident influence on Western philosophy, as well as Kant's, as one of the philosophers who has mostly focused on the ethical issues of philosophy.

*Keywords:* Conscience, ethics, judgment, education of conscience.

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## **1. Introduction**

In life, a person has to make many decisions, and when making decisions, he refers to his conscience, which is expressed by sayings such as: "my conscience does not allow me to do this", "I acted in accordance with my conscience". However, one must ask how aware we are of the true role of conscience in moral decision-making and action. Conscience is certainly a voice that must be heard, but is it a sufficient norm of morality? The experiential fact that emerges in the statement "my conscience follows me because I have done so" shows that conscience can be wrong. Although obviously a person cannot make decisions except in accordance with his conscience, it is necessary to consider that this is a subjective norm of morality. Conscience cannot be the last and only norm of moral order, because for a correct conscience it is necessary to rely on the objective and universal norms of moral order. "If conscience were also the norm of morality, we would have no opportunity to challenge the correctness of someone's moral action. Any reference to someone's own conscience as the norm of morality would exclude the possibility of criticism." In addition, there are more and more cases of negligence or "numbing" of conscience. In the race for material gain, many people contain the Machiavellian formula that at the end justifies the means, and sensitivity to the voice of conscience is often interpreted as weakness and a path to failure. This is why it is necessary to ask repeatedly questions about the role of conscience in ethical judgment and action.

What is conscience, its nature, where does it originate (is it born or acquired), what value does it have, does it have value in terms of being morally sanctioned, if it makes mistake, what are the reasons that lead to the mistake, what are the ways to get rid of them?

The concept of conscience, which in Muslim moral philosophy is named as *Wijhdan*, is defined as a hidden feeling in the heart that enables people to distinguish good from evil. The equivalent of this concept in Western languages is "conscientia" in Latin and "conscience" in French and English.

Conscience is the most important mechanism of self-control in making and not making a person good and bad, right and wrong. Conscience exerts an internal pressure on the person to do good and avoid evil and brings people to face very serious consequences such as peace of conscience and repentance.

Although there are many different approaches to the origin of consciousness, there are basically two main approaches. The first of these is the approach that argues that consciousness is innate. This concept is mainly based on religious basis. It is therefore assumed to be common to all men. According to this approach, since the source of consciousness is innate and divine, all humans have a consciousness that emanates from the same divine light. This means that there is no conflict between different consciousnesses. In fact, consciousness is cultivated and developed with the knowledge of the same source and is endowed with the same values.

The second approach to the source of consciousness is that it is based on views that suggest that consciousness is formed in a process, under the influence of various factors. Some of the philosopher's base consciousness on sense and experience, some base it on heredity and some on reason. As a result, three different views appear in this approach. The first is the view expressed as the evolutionist view. According to them, consciousness has a quality that develops through an evolutionary process, is transmitted from ancestors to children and is based on heredity. The second view is the view that grounds consciousness in experience, which we can define as the associative view. The third and final view is the rationalist view that bases consciousness on reason.

Of the two basic views on the origin of consciousness, the idea that consciousness is innate emerges as the more dominant approach. Most moralists and thinkers emphasize that conscience is infallible and has an important value in terms of carrying moral sanctioning power. Some moralists talk about the fact that conscience can fall into error because of factors such as ignorance, emotions and inclinations. However, it is said that the conscience, which does not sever the connection with the divine source, continues to be enlightened by the revelation, and is trained and strengthened, will not make any mistakes, and will even undertake the task of a high judgment.

On consciousness based on different sources, the research done in the 20th century is like a compromise of the views of the past. The overall result of these studies is that each of the factors that earlier thinkers and moralists individually influenced an important role in the formation of consciousness.

Islamic moralists talk about the fact that just as conscience has certain duties towards man, man also has certain duties towards his conscience. For example, tasks such as correcting the conscience and ensuring its maturity, listening to the voice of conscience when it presents a stable and reliable view of good (husn) and evil (kubh), seeking the truth of causes that cause peace or pain of conscience may be counted among the duties of a person in relation to conscience.

Conscience, which is expressed as a spiritual faculty that distinguishes good from bad and beautiful from ugly in philosophy and ethics, is also defined as "the ability to evaluate and determine the moral value of human actions and behaviors." The power to decide good and bad, the power of self-questioning, which is mentioned in the definition, is called "moral conscience." Thanks to this conscience, a person evaluates or condemns both his own actions and the actions of others. It is at this point that it is important to determine whether it has moral value and whether it has moral sanctioning power.

## **2. The term of consciousness**

First, consciousness appears to us as "an inner light, which in certain cases arises in our consciousness. In this light, with greater or lesser clarity, not inference, but with some feeling and intuition, we understand the moral quality of a certain action, that is, we become aware that the act we are about to do is good or bad. The philosophical view of consciousness highlights its identity as the "voice of being" and "the foundation of humanity itself " (Scheler, Hartmann, Heidegger, Jaspers). The strong affirmation of consciousness can be

read in Kant, who makes a turn from a purely metaphysical understanding to an ethical understanding with his famous statement: "Two things fill me with fear and growing admiration—the starry sky above me and the moral law within me. Kant emphasizes conscience as "the voice of the inner law which man does not give to himself, but discovers in himself", arguing that human beings, free and rational, govern themselves and as such must be guided by a universal moral law in the form of a categorical imperative based on which we must act. He further argues that it is precisely human dignity that stands out in the morality of conscious action. Morality is the condition in which a mental being can only be an end, for only with the help of morality is it possible for one to be a law-making member in the realm of ends. (Kant, 2016;172).

The anthropological concept observes consciousness as being based on being (Eckhardt), as something that "is placed in man" (Buber) and that which "determines what must be done". Fromm states that humanistic consciousness is "knowledge of self" and "knowledge of the highest purpose". Man moves toward this goal and is in harmony with his being when he strives for value and virtue. They are "responsibility to existence" and a person feels safe, happy, and calm in them. Such a humanistic consciousness, based on being, is in harmony with the whole of man's being and man's sense of love for himself and others, which represents the fulfillment of the meaning of life. It represents that privileged space of freedom that no one can take away from a man, if he himself does not give it up. It is the place where man meets the Truth even when he wants to avoid it, so no one can completely ignore the moral law that God himself has written in our hearts. (Fuçek, 2006;119).

The role of conscience is to try to ethically justify a future act (in this case we are talking about a battle, that is, about conflicts of conscience) and to morally evaluate an act already performed (if a person has done something based on in his belief that was present before the act, that act will bring him pleasure, otherwise his conscience will condemn him, ie he will feel "guilt". (Krstić, 1984;297)

The term "vijhdan" which is considered as a name for "conscience" in the literature and culture of Muslim thought, in linguistic terms means to find, to enrich, to love, to be sad, to be angry, comes from the Arabic root "v- xh-d". (Demir, 2013;43/101). Sami Frashëri in his work Kamus-i Turki, has defined conscience as a feeling with the heart, a secret feeling that separates good from bad, rejoices from good and suffers from evil. (Sami, 2004;1486).

In Islamic philosophy, conscience is understood as the direct concept of the principles of right and wrong, or the nature of good and evil as the sense of good and evil that exists in a person and the ability to distinguish them from each other. Some of the Muslim ethical philosophers have called conscience: "the voice of the Creator", "moral sense", "a mental faculty". In Islamic ethics, one cannot talk about a moral life without this ability, which is also expressed with different concepts such as "stimulating voice" and enables the individual to distinguish the consequences of his moral actions. Because moral values (good and bad) and conscience, which can distinguish these values, reveal the criterion of whether an action is moral or not. (Bilgiz, 2007;24)

In some verses it is mentioned as a feeling and moral ability that appears in people because of good will and good behavior, and pain and suffering because of bad behavior. (Nisa: 4; 17-18). From such an internal and conscious calculation, it is said in some other verses, the need for repentance also arises in man. Also, the word nafs, which is mentioned in many verses of the Qur'an, also contains the meaning of the word conscience.

In the definitions made for conscience, in Islamic moral philosophy, the focus is mainly on the fact that it is an internal ability that distinguishes wrong and right, evil, and good, feels pain from evil and pleasure from good. At the same time, conscience is a human faculty that judges and questions someone's actions and distinguishes between good and bad. With these qualities, consciousness appears before us as a decision-making mechanism that people turn to during actions.

God-given conscience is an inner and spiritual force that guides man to the truth and separates good and evil from each other. Because of this force/power, people feel pleasure or pain for their actions and behaviors.

This situation makes people do virtuous actions and avoid evil. Consciousness, which is called "the scale of the heart" and "an enlightening feeling", also creates a sense of responsibility in people. Here, consciousness reminds a person of the harmony in the universe and requires that the person be in balance with himself and with what happens. about him. (Tokmakoglu, 2012;37)

### 3. The meaning of subconsciousness in imam ghazali<sup>1</sup>

Imam Ghazali discusses the issue of conscience as an ethical and active judge in his work *Ihja-u Ulumi'd-din* (The Revival of Religious Sciences) where he emphasizes that just as in the human soul there is a certain natural ability with which man realizes the principles of the theoretical sciences, which we call intelligence or reason, so in the human soul there is a certain natural faculty of the first active principles, which are the natural principles of natural law. This ability belongs to primary consciousness. Primary conscience is, therefore, the innate faculty of the human mind by which it recognizes basic moral principles. The moral judgment of the primary consciousness is never directly related to a concrete action, it is general and thinkable only in the form of principles.

Ghazali interprets the term *vijhdan* as conscience in a narrower sense. Starting from the etymology of the word *vijhdan* (finding, attraction), Ghazali will consider it as knowledge or knowledge in some connection with another, knowledge about someone or something to whom or to whom this should be applied knowledge. Even the etymological meaning of the word "conscience" says that it is an action of reason, an action of a rational being who applies his knowledge to persons, things and himself. In addition to the understanding of conscience in terms of spiritual potency, Ghazali also sees it as an act of human reason. In other words, he emphasizes the context of consciousness education.

Consciousness applies general principles to an individual action or situation. Consciousness is nothing but the application of deep knowledge to a specific act... Consciousness applies the knowledge of primal consciousness, as well as the knowledge of the higher mind, to an individual act to be judged. However, based on the fact that the act is individual, and the primary conscience exists as a general judgment, one cannot apply the judgment of the first conscience to an act unless something individual is assumed. Therefore, consciousness is always the application of some knowledge to a given situation. According to Ghazali, this application of knowledge occurs in three ways: "First, by acknowledging that we have or have not done an action ... in which case we say that conscience 'testifies.' Second, by making a judgment through conscience that it can do or not to do something; in this case we say that the conscience 'incites' or 'binds.' Third, judging from the conscience that an action is good or bad; in this case we say that it 'justifies' or 'accuses' or "condemns." Conscience denotes an act of reason, but it is not a special power (like reason and will), nor ordinary and permanent knowledge which man has already acquired and possesses forever. (Gazali, 1990;3/125)

Consciousness is always the application of some knowledge, and knowledge in consciousness includes three levels: a priori knowledge, personal belief, and situational knowledge. Therefore, conscience applies instinctive a priori knowledge to concrete action in each situation by differentiating it based on personal beliefs of the religious worldview and concretizing it based on knowledge of the scientific situation. If the analysis shows, says Ghazali, that conscience is the understanding of the moral good, ie. of general

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<sup>1</sup>Imam Ghazali was born in 1058 in the city of Tus in Horosan. He received his first lessons from Ahmed bin Muhammed ar Razikani, then he went to the city of Jurjan and took lessons from Abu Nasr al Ismali. In this period he was influenced by Abu'i Hasan Ash'ari in theological thought and by Imam Shafi'i in matters of Islamic practice. After the death of his teacher, he went to meet the vizier of the Grand Seljuk State, Nizamulmulk. He proved his superiority by giving better answers than other scholars during a meeting. In 1091, she was appointed as the main teacher at the Nizamiye Madrasa in Baghdad. He soon gained a great reputation there. Ghazali, then, was included in *tasawwuf* and concentrated in this field. Because of this interest, he left his post at the madrasa, left Baghdad and settled in Damascus. From the year 1106 he led a Sufi life with his followers in Teqe, which he had built after his return to Tus. Died in Tus, Iran in 1111. Egyptian scholar Abdurrahman Beduin stated that Ghazali wrote 457 works. 75 of his books have survived to this day. *Ihja-u Ulumi'd-din* is the best known and greatest work of Ghazali. In this work he deals with the topics of Islamic moral philosophy and *tasawwuf*. Taylan, Necip, *Gazzalinin Dusunce Sisteminin Temelleri*, Istanbul 1989.

principles and judgments of action in the individual, this does not mean that it is a question of two consciousnesses, but of two forms or two phases of the same consciousness. At the same time, it should be emphasized that both forms are different anyway, so in the tradition of thought they have rightly received different names. (Gazali, Ihjau Ulumi'd-din, 1990;3/129)

According to Ghazali's teachings, conscience is infallible as the knowledge of the most general moral principles, otherwise morality loses all foundation. The conscience does not judge what (to) do in terms of the operational concretization of the intended goals. It is a matter of prudence. However, due to the influence of a certain worldview (divine revelation) and empirical knowledge (science), the possibility of error opens up. An error can also occur when a principle is incorrectly applied. Consciousness can be wrong for two reasons: either our knowledge is not correct or in judging what should be done we have been insufficiently careful, too quick, without serious observation. When Imam Ghazali says that the cause of a wrong conscience can often be ignorance, he points out the difference between controllable and uncontrollable ignorance. Surmountable ignorance refers to something that is within the limits of our abilities, and we are obliged to correct this ignorance. We must hold accountable the individual who acted wrongly due to insurmountable ignorance. In contrast, intractable ignorance is caused by factors beyond our control. Does such a conscience make us guilty? Ghazali's answer is positive for the following reason: conscience can err from insurmountable ignorance. There "even the strongest will is powerless". A persistent will be able to move the mind to investigate again. But even after that further and repeated rational investigation, reason will always find itself, finally, in the same situation: it will either have to or it will not be able to understand, whether they will want to or not. Good or bad is originally found only in the Qur'an. Our will is guided by the judgment of reason, and what is decisive is not only the distinction between something that is good and that which is evil in itself, but also how reason understands it. It is possible for reason to accept as good something that is inherently evil through ignorance. In that case, it is a wrong consciousness that binds as well, but not by itself, rather by chance. Thus, Ghazali concludes that "the right conscience is framed by itself and the wrong one only by chance." A conscience that is in error due to insurmountable ignorance does not lose its dignity. But in this regard, Ghazali warns that "this cannot be said when a person does not care to seek the truth and the good and when the conscience becomes almost blind due to a sinful habit". In such a case, the individual has failed to do everything in his power to obtain true knowledge of his conscience and must therefore be held responsible for following a wrong conscience. That is, that individual is willingly ignorant of something that his conscience compels him to know. When it comes to insurmountable ignorance, he states that "when a person is really very little informed or where the knowledge of reality is knowingly or maliciously hindered or denied, a person sins against the freedom of his conscience". However, each person is responsible for his own knowledge and nurturing his own conscience. If ignorance is the result of our negligence, a guilty conscience does not excuse us. Moreover, "illusions can increase the feeling of guilt, especially when a person does not want to know whether an act is permitted or not, because if he found out, he would have to give up his goal." (Gazali, Ihjau Ulumi'd-din, 1990;2,3/75,87)

#### **4. Kant and his outlook for consciousness**

Kant discusses conscience in his introduction to the doctrine of virtue. It belongs, in addition to the moral feeling, love for one's neighbor and self-respect, to such moral qualities that are not mandatory and "someone who lacks them cannot even be forced to have them" (Kant, 2016; 185). The reason lies in the fact that "morality is based on them as subjective and not objective conditions of sensitivity for the notion of duty" (Kant, 1999; 185). In other words, for Kant, conscience is a natural mental disposition that makes people susceptible to the operation of notions of duty. Every human being, as a moral being, initially carries a conscience within himself and has no duty to acquire it: "The obligation to have conscience would mean as much as the obligation to recognize duties. For conscience is a practical mind that warns a person in every

case of the law of his duty to acquit himself or to condemn himself, so it does not refer to an object, but only to the subject (by his act he provokes a moral feeling), therefore it is an inevitable fact, not an obligation and a duty" (Kant, 2016; 86). Kant defines conscience as an inner court. Conscience is a courtroom in which reason is the lawmaker, the power of judgment is the prosecutor, and the mind is the judge: "Every the notion of duty contains an objective obligation by law (as a moral imperative that limits our freedom) and belongs to practical reason to give the rule, but the internal calculation of an act as a matter subject to law belongs to the power of reason, which as a principle the subjective consideration of the action legally judges whether it was committed as an offense (as an action subject to the law or not; then follows the conclusion of the mind or judgment, the connection of the legal effect with the action (punishment or innocence) and all this happens in a judicial process, before a moral person who gives power to the law, called a court (forum). The consciousness of the inner court in man ('before which his thoughts accuse or justify each other') is conscience" (Kant, 2016; 222).

Kant also discusses conscience when he talks about man's duty to himself. Kant distinguishes within the class of duties to self, moral duties, and imperfect duties to self in a pragmatic view. But there is one duty to oneself that is fundamental to Kant, and that is the duty that man has to himself as a natural judge of himself. This task is closely related to consciousness. It is our duty to place all our actions before the inner judge within us and listen to the judgment of conscience that frees us or condemns us. Kant realizes that the notion of duty to self can be misinterpreted to mean that one can free oneself from such duties when one feels like it. This is why he emphasizes that the moral lawgiver in us is somehow not the same person as the subject bound by that law. For Kant, conscience is an intellectual quality, but also a moral one, because it is an idea of duty. It is special in that "a person is compelled by his mind to do his work as if by order of another person, even though it is something he does with himself" (Kant, 2016;222).

As with Ghazali and Kant, we grapple with the question of whether conscience can be wrong. Both Ghazali and Kant believe that a wrong conscience is impossible. Since, for Kant, conscience is separate from moral judgment, he claims that this judgment can be wrong without conscience being wrong. That is, for Kant, conscience is more of a process of moral reflection that is used by moral judgment to make a judgment about an action. For him, a guilty conscience is absurd, i.e., "foolishness". For in an objective judgment whether something is a duty or not, of course one may sometimes err; but I cannot be deceived in a subjective judgment if I have compared it with that practical (here judgmental) mind to arrive at that judgment, because then practically I would not even judge; and in that case there would be neither illusion nor truth" (Kant, 2016; 186-187).

## **5. Conclusion**

It is seen that the concept of consciousness is often used similarly or synonymously with concepts such as nature, heart, will, morality. However, consciousness, unlike all these concepts, expresses a special ability that exists in human beings. The close connections and relationships between these concepts have often led to their use as synonyms.

Our main purpose in the study is to question the issue of sanctions, which is one of the most fundamental problems of morality, and whether conscience, which is one of these enforcement powers, can be a moral sanction. We discussed this issue by giving the elementary approaches of Imam Ghazali, as a representative of ethics in Islamic moral philosophy, as well as Immanuel Kant, in the moral philosophy of the new time.

The issue of expressing the value of conscience as a moral sanction has been the subject of different approaches, opinions, and evaluations. In our view, consciousness, like mind and intelligence, is an innate ability that human beings are born with, but which continues to develop after birth, can become stronger or weaker. For this reason, it can be said that it takes its source from nature, from emotions and from experiences. In other words, conscience can also be described as a tool that binds people to the commands of

Allah and ensures their continuity. Man retains this interest and connection before and after he comes into the world and continues to develop in terms of his duties and preferences.

It can be said that one of the most important reasons for errors in interpretations about the source of consciousness stems from the evaluation of consciousness as knowledge. Consciousness, however, is a dynamic, distinctive, and motivational ability that people are born with. It is necessary to distinguish between the character traits that man has by nature as a species. What is meant by character traits here refers to the creation of human beings, which has the potential to distinguish between beautiful and ugly, right, and wrong, good, and bad.

Although conscience is considered an innate ability to distinguish right from wrong, it can be difficult to make choices about complex moral issues. Just as the eye needs light, it also needs the illumination of divine light, knowledge, and experience. For this reason, the education of conscience plays an important role in human morality. A person cannot be a moral person just by having knowledge of good and evil. Along with the knowledge of good and evil, an active conscience must be activated by training it to put it into practice.

If the consciousness is not subjected to an education, it also has the possibility to lose its way and weaken under the influence of external factors. Since a consciousness exposed to the negative effects of ignorance, inclinations and emotions cannot fulfill its basic functions, the preferences of this consciousness lose their value. The preferences of the conscience, which avoids negative external influences and develops with divine and experiential knowledge, preserve their quality of being values and at the same time, with the peace or suffering it gives, it continues to be an active guide, judge, and sanctions in people's lives.

In addition to the moral dimension of consciousness that informs right and wrong, the existence of a dimension that requires us to apply the moral knowledge gained through this dimension is vital to the existence of morality. If there were no inner feeling called conscience, morality could not go beyond being a theoretical body of truth.

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