

BOOK REVIEW

The Social Conscience by Michel Glautier

Reviewed by the Author

This article presents a synopsis of a recently published book entitled [The Social Conscience](#)^[1], which discusses the nature of the social conscience and the moral values that it embodies. Seeking to do what is right, motivated by a sympathetic awareness of others, driven by the instinct to care and acknowledging the necessity to share, the Social Conscience expresses innate moral values. In these troubled times, satisfactory solutions to economic and social problems will not be found through either capitalism or socialism. The Social Conscience is the third way to defining social policy that reconciles economic progress, social justice and individual freedom.

The terms soul and conscience point to two aspects of being through which the divine has its expression in the human. The first refers to the spiritual embodiment of being that is eternal and is its undeniable reality in the doctrinal theology of most religions. The soul is the expression of the permanence of life that is eternal and undying. It leaves the body on death. The second refers to the influence on human thinking of moral values, which are both beyond and within us and are instrumental in shaping behaviour and in passing judgement on conduct. To Plato, these moral values are the realities of the invisible world. They constitute the doctrinal platform of religious beliefs. They are incorporated in the rules of the Common Law and Roman Law, as well as Rabbinical and Koranic Law. Many would share the view that *homo sapiens* may be distinguished from other species by the action of moral values on behaviour and that, whatever else he may be, man's true identity is that of a moral being.

From the foregoing it may be seen that soul and conscience have very different meanings. Both refer to phenomena that are intangible and cannot be made the subject of scientific enquiry, where the logic of reason requires tangible proof of their presence. The term soul describes a phenomenon that is mystical and exists only in faith, faith being the evidence of things not seen. By contrast, the term conscience identifies being by reference to moral values that have their perceived evidence in behaviour and may be used to provide acceptable explanations for behaviour, even though apparently not in conformity with the logic of reason. The names of those who were awarded posthumously the Victoria Cross recall the ultimate sacrifice of those who made the wilful choice of laying down their own lives to save the lives of others, proving in

this manner the force and significance of moral values in human experience. Given that the basic instinct is the preservation of one's own life, how else could such surrender of life be explained? It follows that the scientific method irrefutably is relevant to the development of behavioural theories that admit the presence of moral values or sentiments.

Finally, it remains to consider the influence level of moral values on behaviour and how far conscience is a determinant stronger than all other influences. Accordingly, it may be asked whether moral values are innate, whether they are the product of rational thinking, or whether they are optional and the result of choice. The possibility that moral values may be optional in conscience, would suggest the coexistence of good and evil in human nature and so-called 'dark nature' as having substantial influence in explaining deviant behaviour.

Conscience as 'what is right'

At the individual level, conscience is a personal experience that describes the particular manner in which moral values are understood and manifested. It refers to the way in which an individual takes stock of his acts by referring them to a special criterion in which conscience has its true meaning. The absolute reference standard to which conscience refers is 'what is right' as the validation and justification for all thoughts and acts.

'What is right' implies a context in which such a judgement may be made. It supposes also that its contradiction exist, which may be stated as 'what is wrong'. Both 'what is right' and 'what is wrong' are alternatives, the first being preferable to the second. An understanding of the implications of these alternatives supposes that there are norms that point to 'what is right'. These norms are the moral values that constitute the value system that is peculiarly our human self, which are mysterious as to their origin but are acknowledged in the ability to reflect and distinguish right from wrong.

'What is wrong' is revealed by the knowledge of 'what is right'. Conversely, 'what is right' cannot be known from 'what is wrong', for 'what is wrong' supposes the prior knowledge of 'what is right'. Hence, it is necessary to seek elsewhere the meaning of 'what is right'. It is at this critical point of reflection that faith becomes belief and belief acquires conviction and proof follows upon the evidence that behaviour brings out. In this seemingly miraculous way faith becomes the evidence of things not seen and conscience is the determinant agent in the process. Conscience is at once the faith and the conviction through which 'what is right' is revealed.

Thus, conscience is driven by sentiment that has its root in faith, expressed in belief and transformed into the conviction, which is the knowledge of 'what is right'. The innate conscience through which the human submits and surrenders to the divine is founded on a reverence of Life, Love and Truth. The moral values that define 'what is right' are derived from these symbols of all that is real, permanent and universal. Thus, Life is symbolic of all that exists and is the energy that has created and sustains all things; Love is symbolic of that universal caring through which all that is good is freely provided; Truth is the supreme knowledge through which 'what is right' has its meaning.

Hence, conscience is a threefold verity that is the consciousness of life, the experience of love and the knowledge of truth. All that denies or diminishes this threefold verity is 'what is wrong'. The 'dark nature' that seems to invade conscience by denying 'what is right' results inevitably as intolerable discomfort and as a sense of guilt from which there is no escape, save by making the amend of coming to terms with one's conscience.

Conscience as Social Conscience

The Social Conscience is a shared conscience, which embodied in each one of us, is the collective of all individuals seeking to do 'what is right'. Its force resides in consensus. Its strength lies in the moral values that it claims as its own and that endow the Social Conscience with unique and permanent authority. It is this Unity of Conscience that is the significant symbol of identity. It is the embodiment of that Truth, which the Ancient Scriptures and Jesus proclaimed, namely that consciousness is in Universal Oneness in which the Self has its being. Having long been at the centre of faith, this understanding has moved to the centre of scientific thinking through Field Theory, in which the universe and all creation, even though defined as matter, is perceived as existing as a field of universal energy.

The consensus towards which religion and science are moving is closing the historical schism between the invisible and the visible world and between a spiritual and a material interpretation of existence. Transformed from a personified deity into depersonalised and universal energy that is so intimate to existence as to be the very substance of it, that transcendental energy or force, appears as the much-sought Holy Grail that is our understanding of being.

Consequently, in this new understanding, the Social Conscience assumes another and extraordinary dimension by the recognition of the life force that is expressed and maintained universally in all things, providing the totality of all needs.

Hence, being is manifested in universal caring. This suggests that caring is not simply a transient emotion that is purely circumstantial, but a natural instinct that has its reality as a moral value. Some aspects of this truth are seen in particular relationships in which caring is naturally present, notably the care and devotion of a mother for her child. Such love is an extraordinary force, which is brought into existence only when a female, of whatever species, is transformed into a mother. It is a remarkable demonstration of that Oneness, in which the being of one is totally found in that of another.

The Social Conscience lies emphatically in caring for others and expands into universal caring, in which the individual experiences his being beyond himself and through others and all things. The ever-widening experience of being that is the Social Conscience is an expanding circle in which awareness is the sole limiting factor. Its essential requirement lies in the presence of a sympathetic awareness of others and of all things. The gateway through which that awareness is realised is the necessity of sharing, which is the fulfilment of being.

Family values and moral values

The origins of society are to be found in the type of social structures that developed with two principal intentions, namely the maintenance through reproduction of the specie and providing protection against danger in all its forms. For most species, and certainly *homo sapiens*, nature invested the sexual act between male and female as the way through which new life is created and endowed the female with the supreme responsibility of giving birth to new generations. The male and female shared mutually the role of protecting the young, the male usually by reason of greater physical strength providing protection against external aggression.

Modern society remains family-based, despite all the economic and social changes of recent times, which have affected attitudes towards the importance of the formal family in law and the freedom movement that has sought to destroy the traditional family and its values.

In effect, family values have been under attack from ultra-liberal groups, which see family values as reactionary and as reflecting religious values that are considered as outdated and irrelevant to modern society. The construct that opposes family values by identifying them with religious values has not acted against the basic wish of sexual partners, even same sex partners, to give legal effect to a permanent union that would provide some protection to partners, particularly in such matters as property interest and financial support. In effect, legalised arrangements under law that have given effect to such demands, aim at putting concubinage on the same legal footing

as formal marriage.

Religion has invested the formal marriage with sanctity, principally through the moral values that are considered as essential to the creation of happy and lasting relationships within which children might be brought up as wholesome human beings, who have enjoyed the benefits of a stable emotional background. Belief in religious values is not a necessary concomitant to family values. Religious values look beyond marriage, or any other structure, to the eternal verities of being. Religious values in this sense are those moral values that are assumed to have divine origins, which Plato saw as being the realities of the Invisible world and that society has accepted as essential standards of morality. They are a reverence for life, an insistence on truth and a commitment to love.

Social Conscience and social policy

Seeking 'what is right' as a basis for policy, defining 'caring' as its objective and insisting on 'sharing' as the means of achieving its purpose, social policy is an act of government that has to be judged strictly in terms of moral values. The tendency of governments, claiming to be democratically elected and seeking to maintain the support necessary to remaining in power, to define policy in terms of expediency is a major cause of the social crisis of our times. Reconciling economic progress, social justice and individual freedom, which Keynes declared to be the real policy objectives of government, requires that caring and sharing should be the spirit in which these objectives are secured. It is not an argument for socialism, communism or other political credo that would replace freedom with bureaucracy, economic progress through exploitation, social justice by tyranny. It is an argument for creating circumstances making possible changes in attitude towards others and all things. It must result in the removal of inequalities in the distribution of wealth and income that the market economy creates by placing at the pinnacle of priorities the optimization of shareholder value in corporate decision-making. This may be achieved by extending the notion of shareholder value to include all who have participated in the creation of wealth. It implies that social justice may be realised through mechanisms that do not diminish the importance of entrepreneurship, but admits that sharing the result of human effort is a question of equity.

The Social Conscience also implies being accountable to ourselves and to others for our actions. This principle is now accepted both in government and in business through the notion of good governance, both at the corporate and government level. It is to this end that accounting and financial reporting practices have their roots in stewardship accounting. In effect, corporate

managers are employees and corporate directors are stewards acting as agents for shareholders and having delegated authority under legislation that clearly defines their accountability. The evidence of widespread corruption, as revealed in frequent instances of massive corporate fraud, shows how far the freedom accorded to the market economy has made a mockery of the principle of stewardship accounting based on transparent accountability. Self-interest manifested in widespread corruption and wrongdoing at all levels of society, contradicts the very principle that free trade works to the common good, as asserted by Adam Smith and classical economic theory.

Social policy is a responsibility of government. The Social Conscience is a mandate for government action for empowering a caring society. It represents the true will of the people in demanding government should also continually seek 'what is right', that it should be fully accountable in that regard. The democratic deficit that has corrupted the ideals of democracy, defined as government by the people, for the people and with the people, has resulted in the political process itself being corrupted by its agents to their own sectarian and personal interests.

The Social Conscience, seeking always 'what is right', is the effective jurisprudence on which the legal system relies. It lends authority to law. It defines freedom as existing under law and limits freedom to that which is rightful. There cannot be individual rights that transgress the rights of others. Accordingly, the law also imposes duties. The duty of care is stated in both Civil and Criminal Law. For these reasons, the law is and should be the supreme authority. Hence, the observance of the law is the first duty of the citizen.

At a time of much misgiving about the future of society, the sentiment of many is that radical changes in attitudes are needed. Money value has replaced moral values in the market economy and in the private lives of the majority, who have enthusiastically joined the consumer society. The destructive effects of this evolution are seen in the breakdown of families, debt levels that cannot be sustained and widespread criminal behaviour.

There can be no greater task and more noble purpose for education than instilling in children the awareness of 'what is right' and the moral values that are implicit in discriminating right from wrong. Education provides the only means for achieving these ends. It is the duty of a nation to ensure that the aims of education empower a caring society that reflects moral values in action and conscience. Children should have the opportunity of attaining adulthood with the ability of discriminating right from wrong, contributing to society through their own particular talents as

confident citizens.

Conclusion

Fostering a sympathetic awareness of others is the beginning of love in action. Teaching that honesty and sincerity is essential in all relationships, whether at home, school or work, is the beginning of truth in action. Having a reverence for life in all its forms will ensure the permanence of our civilization and the environment that is our heritage. Faced with endless daily choices, it is through a sympathetic awareness of others, expressed in the caring instinct that individuals are guided as to the right decisions to take and the best course of action to follow in any circumstance.

The Social Conscience is the soul of a nation that unites mind and heart in the wisdom and the moral values that justify its action. As such, it is the irresistible force that is able to deal with all difficulties, to dispel doubt, to defeat opposition and to restore confidence in the hope that it inspires and on which humanity depends.

© Michel Glautier, Lausanne 2007

[\[1\]](#) Glautier Michel, "The Social Conscience", Shephard-Walwyn (Publishers) Ltd., London 2007