

conscience

('kɒnʃəns)

Forms: 3- conscience, 3-6 concience, 4-6 conciens, -cyens, -sience, -syence, -syens, -sciens, -scyence, (5 consions, 6 concyence, conchons, consyenes, sconsyence, 7 contience).

[a. F. conscience (cunscience) 12th c. (= Pr. consciencia, cossiencia, Sp. conciencia, It. coscienza), ad. L. conscientia privy of knowledge (with another), knowledge within oneself, consciousness, conscience, f. conscient- pr. pple. of conscire, f. con- together + scire to know; thus conscire alii to know along with another, to be privy with another to a matter, thence, conscire sibi to know with oneself only, to know within one's own mind.

In ME. conscience took the place of the earlier term inwit in all its senses; cf. OHG. giwiz̥za, Ger. gewissen, conscience. The word is etymologically, as its form shows, a noun of condition or function, like science, prescience, intelligence, prudence, etc., and as such originally had no plural: a man or a people had more or less conscience. But in sense 4 it came gradually to be thought of as an individual entity, a member or organ of the mental system, of which each man possessed one, and thus it took a and pl. So my conscience, your conscience, was understood to mean no longer our respective shares or amounts of the common quality conscience, but to be two distinct individual consciences, mine and yours. Where the word has continued to be used without the article, as in 'the dictates of conscience', orig. parallel to 'the dictates of prudence' or 'of common sense', the prevalent tendency is to personify Conscience as 'this Deity in my bosom'. In the 15-16th c., the word appears to have been often, by reason of its final s sound, associated with plurals like wits, brains, bowels, as patience is still in dialects. Cf. the illiterate spellings consions, conchons, etc.: hence apparently conscion- in conscionable, conscioned, conscionless.]

I. Inward knowledge, consciousness; inmost thought, mind.

†1. a. Inward knowledge or consciousness; internal conviction. Obs.

c 1325 E.E. Allit. P. A. 1088 For I dar say, with conciens sure His lyf wer loste an-vnder mone. 1382 Wyclif Heb. x. 2 The worschippers clensid oonyes, hadden no conscience of synne ferthermore. 1533 More Let. to T. Cromwell Wks. 1424/2 For the conscience of mine own true faithful hart and deuocion toward him. 1561 T. Norton Calvin's Inst. ii. 78 Discouraged and throwen down with conscience of his own miserie. 1633 Bp. Hall Hard Texts 227 A good man shall enjoy the conscience of his own integrity. 1651 Hobbes Govt. & Soc. xvi. §1. 262 Mankind, from conscience of its own weaknesse. 1667 Milton P.L. viii. 502 Her vertue and the conscience of her worth. 1711 Steele Spect. No. 153 2 The Conscience of a good Fame. 1719 De Foe Crusoe (1840) I. 104 Without sense of good, or conscience of evil. 1744 Harris Three Treat. iii. xi. (1765) 200 A Conscience of having done nothing, but what is consonant to our Duty. a 1745 Swift Serm. Test. Consc. Wks. 1745 VIII. 233 The word Conscience properly signifies, that knowledge which a man hath within himself of his own thoughts and actions. [1869 Swinburne Ess. & Stud. (1875) 221 The conscience of this sharpens and exasperates the temper of his will.]

†b. Internal or mental recognition or acknowledgement of something. Obs.

1382 Wyclif 1 Cor. viii. 7 Sothli summe with conscience of ydol til now eten as thing offrid to ydols [Cranm., Genev. some hauing conscience because of the idol; 1611 with conscience of the idole; Rev. V. 1881, some, being used until now to the idol]. 1528 Tindale Wicked Mammon Wks. (Parker Soc.) I. 92 Without conscience of God, and without knowledge of the true intent of fasting.

†c. Knowledge, feeling, sense. Obs. [So in Lat.]

1563-87 Foxe A. & M. (1684) III. 50 His judgement in religion was grounded upon no firm conscience of doctrine.

†2. a. Inmost thought; mind, 'heart'. Obs.

c 1340 Gaw. & Gr. Knt. 1196 þe lede lay Compast in his concience to quat þat cace myȝt Mene oper amount. c 1500 Lancelot 1462 If yow has maad Thi confessionne And in thi conciens thinkith perseuere. 1529 Wolsey in Four C. Eng. Lett. 10 Ye knowe in your lernyng and consyens. c 1540 Pilgr. T. 197 in Thynne Animadv. App. i, Dessyryng him to show me what he thought, in his conciens whan he had sought. 1611 Shakes. Cymb. i. vi. 116 'Tis your Graces That from my mutest Conscience, to my tongue, Charmes this report out.

†b. to speak or tell one's conscience: to speak one's mind, express one's own conviction. Obs.

1563-87 Foxe A. & M. (1684) III. 467, I am not bound to tell you my Conscience of your demands. 1599 Shakes. Hen. V, iv. i. 123 By my troth, I will speake my conscience of the King.

†3. Reasonableness, understanding, 'sense'. Obs. rare. (Cf. in all conscience, 10.)

1607 Shakes. Timon ii. ii. 184 Why dost thou weepe, canst thou the conscience lacke, To thinke I shall lacke friends.

II. Consciousness of right and wrong; moral sense.

4. a. The internal acknowledgement or recognition of the moral quality of one's motives and actions; the sense of right and wrong as regards things for which one is responsible; the faculty or principle which pronounces upon the moral quality of one's actions or motives, approving the right and condemning the wrong.

Opinions as to the nature, function, and authority of conscience are widely divergent, varying from the conception of the mere exercise of the ordinary judgement on moral questions, to that of an infallible guide of conduct, a sort of deity within us. Popularly, the word is often used for the whole moral nature; for its gradual individualizing and personification in this sense, see note in etymology.

a 1225 Ancr. R. 306 Wiðinnen us suluen, ure owune conscience, þet is, ure inwit, uorkuliinde hire suluen mid þe fure of sunne. a 1300 Cursor M. 26747 (Cott.) [Þai] will noght wit scrift þair conscience ma clene. c 1325 Metr. Hom. 32 And my conciens gan me meld, It schawed thar ful openlye That I led mi lif wrangwislie. 1340 Hampole Pr. Consc. 6574 þe tende payne es gnawyng with-in Of conscience þat bites als vermyn. c 1400 Rom. Rose 6452 That prest may never knowe the conscience aright Of hym that is undir his cure. 1477 Earl Rivers (Caxton) Dictes 1 Whiche grace droof me by reson and conscience. 1513 More Rich. III Wks. 58/1 Such as had wit & had no scrupilouse conscience.

1555 Eden Decades 96 His gilty conscience put him in feare. 1581 Marbeck Bk. of Notes 248 The conscience verilie is the knowledge, iudgement, & reason of a man, whereby euerie man in himselfe, and in his owne minde, being made priuie to euerie thing, yt he either hath committed or not committed, doe either condemne or acquite himself. 1596 Shakes. Merch. V. ii. ii. 1. 1602 – Ham. iii. i. 83 Thus Conscience does make Cowards of vs all. a 1602 W. Perkins Disc. Conscience Wks. (1603) 619, I say that conscience is a part of the mind or understanding, to show that conscience is not a bare knowledge or judgement of the understanding (as men commonly write), but a natural power, faculty, or created quality, from which knowledge and judgement proceed as effects. 1651 Hobbes Leviath. xxix, A man's conscience and his judgment is the same thing, and, as the judgment, so also the conscience may be erroneous. 1667 Milton P.L. iii. 195 And I will place within them as a guide My Umpire Conscience. 1690 Locke Hum. Und. i. iii. §8 Conscience is nothing else but our own Opinion or Judgment of the moral Rectitude or Pravity of our own Actions. 1725 Butler Serm. ii, This faculty of conscience was placed within to be our proper governor; to direct and regulate all under principles, passions, and motives of action. This is its right and office: thus sacred its authority. 1735–8 Bolingbroke On Parties 8 Conscience alone determines their Conduct. 1823 Byron Island i. vi, Man's conscience is the oracle of God. 1858 Froude Hist. Eng. III. xvi. 360 Liberty of conscience has become a law of modern thought. 1872 E. Peacock Mabel Heron ii. 17 With several twinges of conscience. 1882 J. H. Blunt Ref. Ch. Eng. II. 30 The conscience of the country turned against him. 1884 T. Fowler Progr. Morality 29 In any tenable sense of the term, conscience stands simply for the aggregate of our moral opinion re-inforced by the moral sanction of self-approbation and self-disapprobation. 1885 Martineau Types Eth. Theory II. 50. Mod. The conscience of the country is now awake to the wrong.

b. (with a and pl.)

1382 Wyclif 2 Cor. v. 11 Sothli I hope and in zoure consciencis vs for to be knowun [1388 that we ben opyn also in zoure consciencis]. 1483 Cath. Angl. 75 A Consciens, consciencia. 1548–9 (Mar.) Bk. Com. Prayer Offices 34 They whose consciences by synne are accused. 1610 Shakes. Temp. ii. i. 278, I feele not This Deity in my bosome: Twentie consciences That stand 'twixt me and Millaine, candied be they, And melt, ere they mollest! 1669–70 Marvell Corr. Wks. 1875 II. 307 Under pretence of tender consciences. a 1853 Robertson Serm. Ser. iii. xvi. 200 We come into this world with a moral sense; or to speak more Christianly, with a conscience. 1863 Sat. Rev. 199 Paley once said, as an excuse for signing a document in the teeth of his expressed convictions, that he was not rich enough to keep a conscience.

c. for conscience sake [modern grammarians have introduced the apostrophe, conscience', to indicate the possessive relation: see sake]: for the sake of, out of regard to, conscience.

1526 Tindale 1 Cor. x. 25 What soever is solde in the market, that eate, and axe no questions for conscience sake [so 1611, 1881]. 1607 Shakes. Cor. ii. iii. 36 The fourth would returne for Conscience sake. 1647 Clarendon Hist. Reb. (1702) I. ii. 87 All men would have submitted to it for Conscience sake. 1715 De Foe Fam. Instruct. i. iv. (1841) I. 92 You will suffer for conscience-sake. 1748 Hartley Observ. Man ii. iv. 372 Good Men ought to submit to the Ecclesiastical Powers that be, for Conscience-sake. 1876 Mason Eng. Gram. (ed. 21) 28 Sometimes the possessive case in nouns that end in s, x,

or ce, is merely marked by placing an apostrophe after the word But this practice is now nearly obsolete, except in a few common instances, as, 'for conscience' sake', 'for goodness' sake'.

d. good conscience: an approving conscience; a consciousness that one's acts, or one's moral state, are right; †also formerly, a well-regulated or sound conscience, one which judges correctly (obs.). bad, evil conscience: an accusing or condemning conscience; a consciousness of having done wrong, or of being in a wrong moral state.

a 1340 Hampole Psalter lxxxviii[i]. 13 Thabor and hermon in þi name ihesu sall glade thorgh goed consyence. 1382 Wyclif 1 Tim. i. 19 Hauynge feith and good conscience. 1523 Will of Burwell (Somerset Ho.), Persones of right or of good conscience. 1573 G. Harvey Letter-Bk. 9, I wil do as men of best consciences do. 1611 Bible Transl. Pref. 6 This seemeth to argue a bad cause, or a bad conscience, or both. 1625 Burges Personal Tithes 24 A good conscience will sooner suspect his owne heart of couetousnesse, then his Pastors. 1631 T. Powell Tom of all Trades 161 There is no coward to an ill conscience. 1649 Bp. Hall Cases Consc. i. ii. 24 A good conscience therefore will tell you that if you have made a prey of him you are bound to make restitution. 1744 Harris Three Treat. Wks. (1841) 80 What is that comfort of a good conscience? 1827 J. Wilson Noctes in Blackw. Mag. Apr. 476 That sweet sound sleep that is the lot o' a gude conscience.

III. Conscientious observance or practice; tenderness of conscience.

†5. Conscientious observance or reverence of, or regard to. Obs.

1382 Wyclif 1 Pet. ii. 19 Forsothe this is grace, if for conscience of God any man suffrith sorewes. 1483 Plumptre Corr. p. xcv, Any article which by reason of consions of right oweth or should be reformed. 1606 G. W[oodcocke] tr. Hist. Ivstine 113 b, Preferring the concience of their oath made to his father, before their latter promise. 1607 Topsell Four-f. Beasts (1673) 585 If they have any conscience of publique good. 1654 Whitlock Zootomia A v, They (in meer Conscience to publike Benefit) have depriv'd themselves of so great a Propriety. 1671 H. M. tr. Erasm. Colloq. 102 It's a wicked thing, for the conscience of the day, to suffer our brother to perish.

†6. a. Practice of, or conformity to, what is right, equity; regard to the dictates of conscience; conscientiousness. Obs. or arch.

1393 Gower Conf. I. 62 An ypocrite is this, A man which feigneth conscience. 1538 Starkey England iv. 121 Bycause hyt leynyth to equityte and consyence I wyl graunt thys to you. 1591 Lambarde Arch. (1635) 16 Not onely according to meere Right, and Law, but also after Equitie and good Conscience. 1604 Shakes. Oth. iii. iii. 203 Their best Conscience, Is not to leaue 't vndone, but kept vnknowne. 1611 – Wint. T. iv. iv. 660, I cannot with conscience take it. 1638 Hamilton Papers (Camden) 53, I ame sure in them itt proceeds not out of conseince, bot meirlie [they] durst not for feare irritat the Couenanters. 1767 Blackstone Comm. II. 328 A had the legal possession of the land, but B was in conscience and equity to have the profits and disposal of it. 1772 Mackenzie Man of World i. xv, Some folks, to be sure, would take more, but I love conscience in these matters. 1869 Swinburne Ess. & Stud. (1875) 283 They both impress us with a belief in the care and conscience with which their scenes were wrought out.

†b. to do one's conscience: to act according to one's sense of right. Obs.

1691 T. H[ale] Acc. New Invent. p. xcviij, Magistrates are great Blessings if they dare do their Conscience.

†7. Tenderness of feeling, tender-heartedness.

c 1385 Chaucer L.G.W. 1253 Dido, O sily wemen fful of pite, of trouthe, of conscience. c 1386 – Prol. 150 Al was conscience and tendre herte. 1393 Gower Conf. III. 200 Pompeie sigh his pacience And toke pite with conscience.

†8. a. Tenderness of conscience with regard to an act, scruple; also compunction, remorse. Obs.

c 1400 Mandeville (1839) xxiii. 249 þei han gret conscience and holden it for a gret synne to casten a knyf in the fuyr. 1467 Paston Lett. No. 573 II. 303 Master Brakley owt for to be in gret consyens for syche thyngs as he had doone and seyde in proving of Sir John Fastolfys wyll. 1475 Bk. Noblesse 34 King Lowes haveng grete conscience that he heelde bethout title of right the duchie of Normandie. 1523 Ld. Berners Froiss. I. ccclxxxi. 641 But the bysshop had conscience to let hym dye. 1608 Hieron A defence iii. 102 You haue so misused these things that we can no longer continue them, without great conscience.

†b. A matter of conscience; something about which scruples are or should be felt: cf. 11. Obs.

1557 North tr. Guevara's Diall Pr. 83 b/2 To kepe two wiues among the christians, is a great conscience. Ibid. 174 a/1 To a prince there can be no greater shame, nor conscience, then to beginne warres to mainteine his owne pleasure.

IV. Phrases (from II and III).

9. upon, in (one's) conscience: by one's sense of right, upon one's word, truly. So in asseverations by, in, on, o' my conscience. Also, as a mere exclamation of surprise, etc., my conscience! or simply {conscience!} (Sc.).

c 1290 S. Eng. Leg. I. 120/469 Ich hadde lothz bi mi concience don holi churchen wov3. 1393 Gower Conf. II. 108 But upon youre conscience, Min holy fader, demeth ye. 1593 Shakes. 3 Hen. VI, iii. iii. 113 Now Warwicke, tell me euen vpon thy conscience Is Edward your true King? 1601 – Twel. N. iii. i. 33 In my conscience sir, I do not care for you. 1613 – Hen. VIII, v. iv. 42 O' my conscience twenty of the Dog-dayes now reigne in 's Nose. 1655 W. F. Meteors ii. 17 Some merrie fellow which of his conscience thinketh them not to be above three yards about. 1818 Scott Rob Roy xxiii, 'Ah!—Eh!—Oh!' exclaimed the Bailie. 'My conscience!—it's impossible—and yet—no! Conscience, it canna be!'

10. in (all) conscience, †of (all) conscience: in reason or fairness, by all that is right or reasonable (colloq.).

1568 Abp. Parker Corr. (1853) 326, I cannot of conscience favour them therein. 1592 Day Eng. Secretarie i. (1625) 109 What in conscience the poore man is then able to pay, in respect of the other charges. 1608 Shakes. Per.

iv. ii. 23 They are too unwholesome, a conscience. 1623 Mabbe tr. Aleman's Guzman d' Alf. 240 It is time inough, of conscience. c 1645 Howell Lett. I. 295 This is enough in conscience. 1649 Bp. Hall Cases Consc. i. iii. 29 The seller is bound in conscience to intimate unto the buyer these faulty qualities. 1650 B. Discolliminium 2 He seems to be a Gentleman of too much understanding, of all Conscience. 1701 Swift Contests Nobles & Com. Wks. 1755 II. i. 15 It is too soon in all conscience to repeat this error again. 1768 Sterne Sent. Journ., Hotel at Paris, I have enough in conscience, Eugenius, said I. 1797 E. Bonhote Rambles Mr. Frankly I. 52 'And enough too, of all conscience', exclaimed I. 1886 Besant Children of Gibeon ii. xxvii, The matter, which was bad enough in all conscience.

11. a matter of conscience: a matter in which conscience is concerned; hence to make (a thing) a matter of conscience: to treat or deal with it conscientiously or according to the dictates of conscience. to make (a) conscience (obs. or arch.): to make it a matter of conscience, to have scruples about, to scruple. So †to think it no conscience; also †to have (a) conscience: see 8.

1526 Tindale Rom. xiv. 23 He that maketh conscience [1611 doubteth] is dampned if he eate. 1579 Lyly Euphues (Arb.) 92 Thou hast thought it no conscience to betray me. 1586 Let. Earle Leycester 25 Therefore have we litle reason to trust her in that, wherof shee maketh so small a conscience. 1625 Purchas Pilgrimes ii. 1276 They will make more conscience to breake a Fast, than to commit a Murther. 1671 H. M. tr. Erasm. Colloq. 69, I make conscience to say thou lvest. 1685 H. More Cursory Refl. 21 For my part, I should make a conscience in abusing the World with such Trash. 1685 Baxter Paraphr. N.T. Matt. xxvii. 6 Arch-hypocrites make conscience of Ceremony, and make no conscience of Perjury. 1722 De Foe Plague (1754) 12 If he be one that makes Conscience of his Duty. 1788 Priestley Lect. Hist. i. ii. 24 A man who made no conscience of any villany. 1856 Emerson Eng. Traits ix. 146 [He] makes a conscience of persisting in it.

12. to have the conscience: to consider or hold it right (to do something); hence ironically, to have the assurance or effrontery (to).

1690 Dryden Amphytryon (T. s.v. Cool v.), I saw him knocking at the gate; and I had the conscience to let him cool his heels there. 1856 R. A. Vaughan Mystics (1860) I. vi. iii. 170 He had the conscience to expect that we magistrates would meddle in his dispute and take his part. Mod. He actually had the conscience to ask the question in my own house.

13. case of conscience: see case n.1 7. court of conscience: see court.

V. Transferred applications.

†14. = bellarmine. Obs.

a 1643 W. Cartwright Ordinary, Like a larger jug that some men call A bellarmine, but we a conscience.

15. Mech. = breastplate 3 b.

1874 Knight Dict. Mech., Conscience, a plate resting against the drill-head and enabling the pressure of the breast or hand to be brought upon the drill. A palette.

VI. 16. Comb. a. objective, as conscience-pacifying, †-wasting, ppl. adjs.; b. instrumental and locative, as conscience-harried, -haunted, -pricked, -ridden, -smitten, -stricken, -struck, ppl. adjs. c. attrib., as conscience-qualm, -scruple; conscience clause, a clause in an act or law to ensure respect for the consciences of those affected, spec. one providing for the withdrawal of children in public schools from religious teaching disapproved by their parents; conscience money, money sent to relieve the conscience, e.g. in payment of a tax previously evaded, esp. in connexion with the income-tax; also, money paid to ease one's conscience; conscience-wise adv., in relation to conscience.

1870 W. E. Forster Sp. Ho. Com. 17 Feb., After a limited period we attach what is called a *conscience clause. 1888 Spectator 30 June 875 So long as the conscience clause is strictly enforced, and all parents are allowed to withdraw their children from the moral and religious education given if they disapprove it.

1662 Earl of Orrery State Lett. (1743) II. 379 If they be not faithful to the *conscience-engagement.

1726 De Foe Hist. Devil ii. vii. (1840) 262 A timorous, *conscience-harried wretch.

1848 Thackeray Van. Fair xliv. 396 One reads in the columns of the Times newspaper queer announcements from the Chancellor of the Exchequer, acknowledging the receipt of £50 from A.B. as *conscience-money, on account of taxes due. 1885 H. Conway Family Affair i, Those tender-minded persons who send conscience money to the Chancellor of the Exchequer. 1907 Westm. Gaz. 3 Dec. 2/3 Those who have to contribute the tax in the form of 'conscience money'. 1961 P. Ustinov Loser ii. 35 Two men he had never seen before rose from their tables and paid the difference. It was conscience money.

1671 J. Flavel Fount. Life ii. 32 *Conscience-pacifying and soul-quieting Blood.

1860 Pusey Min. Proph. 447 Just to satisfy their *conscience-qualms.

1898 G. B. Shaw Perf. Wagnerite 64 Our guilty and *conscience-ridden generations. 1959 J. Cary Captive & Free 207 How typical she was. So nice, so gentle, so conscience-ridden, ripe for the slaughter.

1880 Browning Dram. Idylls, Pietro, Pricks which passed for *conscience-scruples.

1849 Miss Mulock Ogilvies (1875) 37 *Conscience-smitten for the little notice she had taken of her cousin.

1816 Jane Austen Emma II. xvi. 302 She was more *conscience-stricken about Jane Fairfax than she had often been. 1819 Shelley Cenci iv. ii. 39 Ye *conscience-stricken cravens.

1830 Scott Jrnl. 24 June, A kind of necessity which seems to haunt *conscience-struck men.

1646 Fuller Wounded Consc. (1841) 278 The committing of a *conscience-wasting sin.

1702 Vanbrugh False Friend ii, He never goes without a dram of *conscience-water about him, to set matters right again.

1845 T. W. Coit Puritanism 205 Their ancestors, *conscience-wise considered, were better men than they are.