

# REFLECTION OF CONSCIENCE IN PEOPLE OF THE XX AND XXI CENTURIES

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**Abstract:** The relevance of the study is due to the need for a conceptual analysis of the transformation of such a human phenomenon as conscience in the period of the XX-XXI centuries. In this regard, the purpose of this study is to determine the main features of the reflection of conscience in the public consciousness of the XX – XXI centuries and its key functional characteristics. The main scientific methods for studying the issue are basic general scientific methods of analysis, synthesis, induction, deduction, comparative, systematic, which allow a thorough approach to the presentation of the topic and create a structured picture of moral and ethical transformations. The article reveals the fundamental approaches to the interpretation of conscience in modern historiography. The results of the research can be actively used not only in modern philosophical science, as a substantiation of the main approaches to the interpretation of the actual perception of conscience, but also in related humanities to confirm historical, moral, ethical, psychological and other changes in the process of social evolution.

**Keywords:** Conscience. Moral and ethical values. Consciousness. Freedom. Social norms.

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**Resumen:** La relevancia del estudio se debe a la necesidad de un análisis conceptual de la transformación de un fenómeno tan humano como la conciencia en el período de los siglos XX-XXI. En este sentido, el propósito de este estudio es determinar las principales características del reflejo de la conciencia en la conciencia pública de los siglos XX - XXI y sus características funcionales clave. Los principales métodos científicos para estudiar el tema son los métodos científicos generales básicos de análisis, síntesis, inducción, deducción, comparativos, sistemáticos, que permiten un acercamiento exhaustivo a la presentación del tema y crean una imagen estructurada de las transformaciones morales y éticas. El artículo revela los enfoques fundamentales de la interpretación de la conciencia en la historiografía moderna. Los resultados de la investigación pueden utilizarse activamente no sólo en la ciencia filosófica moderna, como fundamentación de los principales enfoques para la interpretación de la percepción real de la conciencia, sino también en las humanidades afines para confirmar cambios históricos, morales, éticos, psicológicos y de otro tipo. en el proceso de evolución social.

**Palabras clave:** Conciencia. Valores morales y éticos. Conciencia. Libertad. Normas sociales.

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**Abstract:** The relevance of the study is due to the need for a conceptual analysis of the transformation of such a human phenomenon as conscience in the period of the XX-XXI centuries. In this regard, the purpose of this study is to determine the main features of the reflection of conscience in the public consciousness of the XX – XXI centuries and its key functional characteristics. The main scientific methods for studying the issue are basic general scientific methods of analysis, synthesis, induction, deduction, comparative, systematic, which allow a thorough approach to the presentation of the topic and create a structured picture of moral and ethical transformations. The article reveals the fundamental approaches to the interpretation of conscience in modern historiography. The results of the research can be actively used not only in modern philosophical science, as a substantiation of the main approaches to the interpretation of the actual perception of conscience, but also in related humanities to confirm historical, moral, ethical, psychological and other changes in the process of social evolution.

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### INTRODUCTION

In the XXI century, the question of moral and ethical values has become more acute than ever. This is primarily due to active social contacts, when a person is constantly in a socialized environment, where interaction is regulated by certain social and cultural norms, which, in turn, have undergone a long process of formation. However, recently, the social norms and values rooted in the people's minds are increasingly being questioned and criticized by representatives of the new way of thinking, who are trying to rethink the old ideals, forming a more democratic and freedom-loving way of thinking. Accordingly, conscience,

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as the main moral indicator for a person, is a key mechanism that gives an understanding of the metamorphosis processes that force the existing social structure to change. Naturally, most of the social norms and values that exist in the XXI century are necessary for a person's peaceful and comfortable coexistence within the framework of socialization. At the same time, there is a frivolization and pluralization of value approaches that previously served as universal principles of human ontology (Stojarová; Felbermayr, 2022). The purpose of this work is to determine the basic principles of the work of conscience in people of the XX and XXI centuries. In accordance with this, the society of the epoch of the XX and XXI centuries is the object of research.

Many researchers, studying the question of conscience as a special human phenomenon, focus on its social nature. Conscience is formed as a consequence of living in a society where reflection and self-regulation of behavior are important aspects of survival in a group. Conscience involves building relationships with the world in a special way (Chari, 2016), where a person, in the process of interacting with other people, develops an acceptable model of behavior that allows them to effectively coexist in a social environment. The need for interaction provoked the emergence of conditional rules and norms, the observance of which would guarantee a stable order, and its violation led to appropriate sanctions, whether it was public censure or more serious punishments. Another issue is the formation of institutions that ensure the regulation of social interaction, which act on the basis of generally accepted values. Such a conditional consensus has long served as the basis for a balance between the freedom of one's own actions and the violation of another person's boundaries (Jacobs, 2017).

Conscience is a person's moral regulator. It allows one to evaluate one's own actions from the standpoint of inherent values. Actions in accordance with internal beliefs lead to satisfaction of the personalized ego, when confrontation with one's principles leads to self-criticism, and, in some cases, self-destruction (Miethlich, 2022). This is confirmed by the experience of the XX century, the period of two world wars and a number of other military conflicts, in which the aspect of conscience has been little studied in modern scientific literature. Conscience has a direct connection with the community of life circumstances and solidarity in maintaining social relations (Yildiz, 2018). Thus, the question of the complexity of moral choice in wartime conditions is being updated. The execution of the orders of the top management is a necessary condition for the fulfilment of one's duty as a citizen and a soldier. Conscience fixes obligations, the fulfilment of which is a necessary condition for the fulfilment of one's social role. At the same time, such a duty forces a person to take extreme measures that contradict basic values, such as, for example, the human life's value, the inviolability of property, etc. (Chung, 2003) The question of moral choice is the prerogative of conscience, personal priorities and general necessity.

A person's conscience is formed under the influence of their social environment. Basic values and norms are learned in early childhood using examples from the environment (Komilova et al., 2023). They form a set of principles that a person will adhere to in life. These principles may change, or they may remain in the form of preserved firm beliefs. In both situations, consciousness is formed, in which conscience occupies an important place as the ability to analyze, as value judgements aimed at developing specific and motivating moral knowledge (O'Shea, 2018). This leads to the formation of a personality with individual characteristics. However, a distorted perception of reality, a distortion of moral principles leads to a deformation of conscience. Conscience is also a sign of mental health, if a person owns generally accepted moral values and acts in accordance with them. If a person's moral guidelines are faulty, values are not correlated with socially recognized norms. Then, their consciousness is distorted. But conscience, as an indicator of values, forces them to act in accordance with their own beliefs (Matoo, 2020). Based on this, it is possible to come to a conclusion about the theoretical (justification of the peculiarities of the transformation of social consciousness in the XXI century) and practical (correction of the behavior of modern society in accordance with the basic universal values) benefits of this work.

In the course of the research, the main general scientific methods were used: analysis, synthesis, induction, deduction and systematization. Research methods were used in a comprehensive manner to study the topic in depth. By analyzing the scientific literature, different views on the phenomenon of conscience and its transformation during the XX – XXI centuries were explored. The synthesis method enabled the summarization of the analyzed material and the formulation of individual conclusions. Induction and deduction were used to test general hypotheses on specific examples, and vice versa, to formulate generalizations based on the analysis of facts. Systematization ensured the structuring of data and research results. The complex use of these methods makes it possible to comprehensively study the issue of reflection of conscience in the social practices of the XX and XXI centuries. The use of the achievements of various branches of scientific knowledge made it possible to approach the study of the issue, starting from several positions, which include the consideration of conscience as a neurobiological feature of human consciousness, philosophical abstraction and a social construct.

The research involved several key aspects, including defining the purpose, primary objectives, specifying the subject and selecting appropriate scientific research methods. In this early stage, theoretical groundwork was undertaken to lay the foundation for future work. Establishing the significance of the research in terms of its relevance, originality, and both practical and theoretical importance allowed for a concentrated exploration of particular aspects within the subject matter. The theoretical significance deepened our comprehension of the nature of this phenomenon and the mechanisms, behind its development, which were influenced by sociocultural factors. Meanwhile, the practical significance lies in the potential

application of study results to amend the modern society's moral and ethical foundations, according to universal values and streamline social interaction processes through a better understanding of the cause-and-effect relationships between people's actions and their outcomes.

Throughout the research process, comprehensive practical preparations were undertaken. This entailed the exploration of pertinent literature related to the research topic, with a specific focus on relevant aspects. The search for such literature was accompanied by a thorough analysis, which involved the identification of common themes and patterns in various scholars' perspectives. These methods led to the development of a plan for subsequent work, which included two primary areas of focus: firstly, the clarification of fundamental concepts concerning the perception of conscience within the humanities, and secondly, an examination of the historical evolution of the moral and ethical underpinnings of conscience, as well as its manifestation in individuals during the XX and XXI centuries.

During the last stage, the research was concluded by recording the results and summarizing the findings. At this stage, the gathered information was organized and interpreted cohesively, aligning it with the theoretical and practical significance of the study. The research has resulted in the observation that issues, pertaining to conscience, are characterized by their individuality and susceptibility to debate, all while harboring the capacity to impact political, economic, cultural and social dynamics. Exploring the primary sources behind the development of human conscience represents a vast field of study, laying the groundwork for humanity's ongoing evolution.

In the context of the question related to the reflection of conscience among people of the XX-XXI centuries, it is impossible not to note the fact that the scientists' positions vary, and their number is comparable to the number of researchers themselves dealing with this issue. However, it is clearly possible to trace general patterns in the sources of the formation of social morality, in the processes of the formation of conscience and in its transformations during this period. The outlined circle of methods is the basis for the formation of an idea about the unique phenomenon of human essence – conscience. Its interaction with a person's inner beliefs gives rise to reflections on the complexity of historical processes and their ambiguity, which is manifested in the polarization of judgements regarding certain events. A person's judgements, based on conscience and internal beliefs, become the basis for one's actions. Accordingly, the change in reality is associated with a person's individual approach to reality, which is formed, during all their life, under the influence of various factors. In this context, the question of freedom of conscience arises, where each person has the right to determine their will, without encroaching on another person's same right. The boundaries of conscience are also a controversial issue that requires more detailed consideration.

## **1 THE ESSENCE AND NATURE OF CONSCIENCE**

From ancient times, the concept of conscience has intrigued philosophers, scholars and thinkers alike. This enigmatic idea, with its multifaceted structure and controversial origins, has always been a subject of profound discussion and research. In our exploration, we will delve into the intricate world of conscience, aiming to uncover its essence and significance in human decision-making and behavior.

The variety of approaches to the definition of conscience is explained by the complexity of its structure, the controversial origin and a number of other aspects. However, in scientific circles, it is considered that conscience is a social construct that is formed under the influence of moral and ethical norms. Conscience is not an arbitrary decision made in an isolated self-referential way, but the result of a prudent choice made taking into account generally accepted moral and social norms (Veles, 2009). It is the fulcrum of the fundamental production process of subjectivity and individuality (Chari, 2016). It is essentially intuitive and manifests itself based on a sense of connection with the surrounding world and interaction with it.

In fact, its formation occurs under the influence of the environment and the moral principles and norms already existing in it. At the same time, most of the moral foundations were formed during natural selection in order to optimize the human ability to live in groups. Thus, conscience is interpreted by neuroscientists as a necessary element for social life, which generates judgements that reflect a certain group's standards. This fact is presented in evolutionary biology as a demonstration of the ability of conscience and established norms to connect groups (Christakis, 2019), ensuring their effective functioning. The idea of conscience, as the ability to absorb social norms and apply them to regulate life processes, contrasts with the philosophical idea of how a person is able to distinguish bad from good, which, in fact, is the prerogative of conscience.

## **2 CONSCIENCE AND FREEDOM OF CHOICE**

Making choices between right and wrong, justice and injustice, good and evil is a person's ability to distinguish life's essential moral aspects. However, the concept of conscience carries many contradictions and different interpretations. Some view it as an intuitive ability to evaluate actions, while others believe that conscience arises from practical reflections based on widely accepted moral norms. This section will attempt to uncover the essence of conscience and its role in the process of making moral decisions, as well as define its connection with the freedom of choice and responsibility towards society and oneself.

Conscience is often explained by a person's ability to separate right from wrong, justice from injustice, good from evil, etc. Contrary to the position of perception of conscience, as an

intuitive ability to evaluate actions (Chari, 2016), there are beliefs that conscience is the result of practical judgements based on generally accepted moral norms. It is through conscience that a person tries to organize their own choice in accordance with the requirements of moral and ethical ideals. Thus, it appears in the researchers' eyes not as a feeling that pushes (or, conversely, warns) to action, but as a conscious choice through judgements about the ratio of the significance of a certain goal and means on the way to achieving it within specific circumstances (Veles, 2009). In fact, conscience is the link between human rationality and freedom of choice, as a result of which responsibility for the decision comes (Jacobs, 2017).

Conscience serves as an indispensable guidepost within the intricate realm of human behavior and moral decision-making. It operates as an internal moral compass, steering individuals toward actions that align with their ethical principles and values, while cautioning against those that transgress the boundaries of what is considered virtuous and right. One of the primary functions of conscience is to instill a profound sense of responsibility within individuals. It impels them to acknowledge the consequences of their actions, not only for themselves but for others and society as a whole. This heightened awareness of the potential repercussions of their choices serves as a powerful deterrent against actions that may harm or infringe upon the others' well-being. Conscience also plays a pivotal role in the human capacity to distinguish between good and evil. It operates as a moral barometer, helping individuals differentiate between actions that are virtuous, ethical, or just, and those that are morally reprehensible or harmful. This ability to discern between right and wrong is essential for the maintenance of a just and harmonious society. Furthermore, conscience serves as a crucial mediator in the ongoing tension between personal freedom and social responsibility. While personal freedom is a cherished and fundamental aspect of individual autonomy, an unchecked pursuit of absolute individualism can have detrimental consequences for society. Conscience acts as a counterbalance, helping individuals navigate this delicate equilibrium by prompting them to consider the broader implications of their choices on the collective welfare.

The concept of the limits of freedom, as viewed through the lens of conscience, underscores how personal liberty and self-determination must be tempered by moral and ethical considerations. Conscience reminds individuals that their actions should not only serve their self-interest but also adhere to the ethical standards and principles that guide their interactions with others. In this way, conscience fosters a sense of social responsibility, emphasizing that personal freedoms must coexist with a broader commitment to the community's well-being and rights. In essence, conscience is the guardian of our moral boundaries, challenging us to reflect on our actions, make choices that align with our values, and strike a harmonious balance between individual autonomy and collective responsibility. It is a cornerstone of ethical decision-making and societal cohesion, reminding us that our

choices have consequences that ripple through the intricate fabric of human relationships and communities.

So, one separates one's own choices and decisions from external circumstances. They become the center of personal moral judgements and acts based on the position of the absoluteness of their own freedom. In this case, the question arises about the limits of one's freedom. Conscience should become such internal boundaries. The sources of knowledge, on the basis of which a person produces a thought process that is subjected to secondary processing by the conscience, can serve as science, experience, history, law, religion, culture, traditions. These are the main sources of public moral and ethical values and norms, which are regulated by the relevant authorities. Freedom of conscience is a fundamental humane right. The idea of people as equal subjects of social relations is the basis for harmonious development (Mahoney, 2021). It is a democratic basis for building a society where everyone has the right to self-expression. However, freedom imposes a serious social responsibility, in which personal freedom can be cancelled only if harm is done to others. Unacceptable, in this context, remains the practice of domination without consent, which leads to subordination and deprives freedom of choice, respectively. There is no need to reflect on one's own actions through the apparatus of conscience. That is why the question of the reflection of conscience among the people of the XX century, a difficult period in the political and socioeconomic sense, remains unresolved (Seo *et al.*, 2021).

It is necessary to dwell in more detail on one of the key elements that form the conscience. As mentioned earlier, one of such important components is religion. Traditional theistic practices serve as a sufficient basis for reinforcing the role of conscience in a person's life (Cottingham, 2018). Most religions basically contain the postulates of tolerance, mutual assistance, tolerance and the promotion of virtue. The moral values, laid down by religious practices, retain their effectiveness from two extreme positions: faith and conviction in the correctness of a sinless lifestyle for reconciliation with internal foundations formed also under the influence of religion, which sets the direction based on the experience of previous generations, as well as fear of punishment for sinfulness. Sins are actions that violate moral norms, reveal a distortion of the will and cases of superbia (Hennig, 2010). They are the product of a deviation from internal moral principles, which leads to a confrontation with individual beliefs. Thus, religion sets the direction for the formation of its own moral and value orientations based on existing dogmas. It helps in the formation of conscience to avoid the erroneous exaltation of human freedom and raising it to the absolute.

### 3 REFLECTIONS OF CONSCIENCE IN THE 20TH AND 21ST CENTURIES

World history attests that the concept of conscience has always been a subject of profound philosophical contemplation and scientific inquiry. From the dawn of civilizations

to the present day, conscience remains a complex and multifaceted topic that intrigues scholars, philosophers and thinkers alike.

Considering conscience as practical judgments based on internal value-moral criteria, it should be noted that conscience in the representation of people of the XX and XXI centuries differ, but the basic principles of the world community's modern strategy for the society's humanization and democratization originate from the XX century and continue to develop in modern society. The XX century, of course, is filled with events that have radically changed the world and human consciousness as a whole. In modern society, peaceful coexistence is a goal and a great value, which creates the need for each individual to act according to moral and ethical and generally accepted value principles (Yildiz, 2018). At the same time, the positions of cultural relativism and pluralism form tendencies to individualize positions, which, in turn, leads to differentiation and polarization of opinions regarding basic moral values.

The most researched topic in historiography remains the question of conscience and values during the First and Second World Wars. They formed a special way of thinking among people of this period. The human life's basic value was leveled by the need to fulfill duty, which called into question the so-called moral or natural law. This law is an external moral standard that is supported by people due to their rational nature (Jacobs, 2017). The conflict between duty and morality makes you come to a difficult choice and perform actions that are not comparable with generally accepted norms. Most moral dilemmas are situations in which it is impossible to meet all the requirements and, at the same time, which put supposedly universal principles in conflict with each other. This casts doubt on the supporters' position of absolutism in moral reasoning (Christakis, 2019). Therefore, in the XX century, freedom of choice was often limited by the inability to act according to one's own conscience and reason, for example, because of the established totalitarian system and dictatorship, where a person, obeying the regime, is guided not by a set of personal moral values, but by fear, or obeys the ideology of the dominant force, adopting its moral guidelines. Obedience and submission, as models of behavior, do not require the subject's supremacy of conscience or the personal responsibility for the decision made. In discussing this issue, it is worthwhile to provide some historical examples to better illustrate these concepts. For example, the citizens' obedience and submission were key features of totalitarian regimes in the 20th century. In Nazi Germany, citizens were obliged to obediently follow orders of the regime, even if these orders contradicted their moral principles. A similar situation was observed in the Soviet Union, where citizens were required to obey the Communist Party absolutely. Another example is the Japanese society of the Tokugawa Shogunate, where subjects had to obey the shogun and the upper classes without question. Obedience was seen as a virtue.

The people's moral values in subordination have little influence on society, while the leader's personality is of decisive importance for the formation of value orientations of the dominant ideology (Hou *et al.*, 2023). In addition, in the conditions of wartime, unquestioning obedience is an obstacle to the activation of the moral stimulus (a factor that influences a person's moral choices and behavior by activating their moral beliefs and values), which gives rise to the primacy of the collective consciousness (shared beliefs and values in a group or society) over the individual. The distortion of values leads to a transformation of consciousness, despite the fact that even if the actions, committed by a person, are not defined by law as crimes, but contradict the humanity's values (a factor that encourages people to act on the basis of their moral values and beliefs), cause discomfort in conscience. For example, the tragedy of the Second World War is generated, in one aspect, by a sense of injustice in the countries that were defeated during the First World War, and by the desire to restore conditional justice and revanchist sentiments. Thus, duty acted as an incentive to action, ignoring the society's moral values, such as the life's value and each person's freedom. One of the concepts is the perception of history through obedience and disobedience, where disobedience is the determining dynamics of social development and transformation of the life's existing way (Yildiz, 2018; Indra, Malik, Akbar *et al.*, 2021).

In the XXI century, the situation with a conscience is changing towards the individualization of the concept of moral guidelines and reflexive judgement. Thus, pluralism contributes to the disunity of moral and religious beliefs, where no institution has the kind of power to determine orthodoxy (O'Shea, 2018). In conditions when there are no general standards, but only recommendations for individual independent moral judgments, it is more difficult to come to an agreement, a kind of consensus, which, at the moment, is not the truth, but a truce in a conflict of interests. The opinion that the main functions of conscience stem from its role in ensuring personal integrity and freedom of choice becomes much more doubtful when there is an emphasis on individualism or neutrality.

It is worth comparing the perception of conscience during war in the 20th and 21st centuries. In the 20th century, during the world wars, conscience was often suppressed by a sense of duty and the need to follow orders without question. Human life was often devalued in the face of a «higher purpose.» In the 21st century, in my opinion, thanks to the society's humanization and the development of human rights, conscience is beginning to play a more important role. There is an understanding of every life's value, even the enemy's life. The military is increasingly questioning the immorality of certain orders. Also, in the 21st century, with the development of the media and social networks, society learns about war crimes faster, which makes the military take more account of the voice of conscience. The fear of being investigated becomes a deterrent.

#### 4 PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF CONSCIENCE

Modern society grapples with numerous moral and ethical issues in which conscience plays a pivotal role. Examining the scientific literature on this matter leads to the conclusion that there is no unanimous consensus regarding the portrayal of conscience among individuals in the XX-XXI centuries. The scientists' views are divided regarding both the nature of conscience itself and its manifestations during this period. First of all, it is worth mentioning an interesting approach to the interpretation of professional conscience, outlined by such scientists as J. Veles (2009) and K. Mattoo (2020). On the example of important areas of professional activity, they prove the relevance of moral and ethical issues. They argue that, for example, for doctors, the presence of moral values is a necessity, which serves as a prerequisite for allowing the society's members to trust them blindly. They also emphasize that the presence of a moral conscience is a person's necessary attribute, since a person's type of activity acquires an ethical choice. A person decides which actions should be carried out, which should not, based on the final goal. Actions, of course, entail consequences, and they cannot exclude the ethical side of the question of the means to achieve these goals, since they relate to the moral side of the perfect choice based on the analysis of existing circumstances. Owing to conscience, as J. Velez (2009) writes, a person is able to organize their choice, subordinate it to certain laws, and not act chaotically.

The moral norm is not mandatory for execution, it only serves as a guide, a direct source of information that determines a person's actions (Chung, 1995). Conscience, as a moral regulator, directs them so that the individual can overcome their natural instincts and subordinate them to their will, learning to control them. Hence, the concept of conscience arises as a reaction to an impulse, outlined by N. Yildiz (2018). According to his position, the motivation to live in society for a person is associated with the awareness of the inability to survive alone and, in the process of socialization, there is a tendency to seek approval from others, which requires the individual to revise their own moral values and adjust them in accordance with public ones. In certain circumstances, a person receives an impulse – a kind of call to action that can be analyzed through the apparatus of conscience. The response to a challenge can be either satisfaction – finding a compromise with internal attitudes, or dissatisfaction. The second situation entails much more serious consequences, since it forces a person to either enter into a conflict with their beliefs, give in and reproach themselves for the committed action, or listen to their own feelings, and, possibly, get consequences of a different kind.

Human life is constantly accompanied by choices. In the modern world, people often choose their own goals, but the source of these choices depends on a number of circumstances. The totalitarian regimes, which are characteristic of the history of the XX century, were a means of suppressing individuality in all its manifestations, eliminating initiative, creativity

and, most importantly, traditional morality (Lakomý; Alvarez-Galvez, 2022). Of course, it cannot be argued that all the values that existed before the XX century were associated with the conditions of morality. That would be a mistake. However, totalitarianism managed to eliminate the humanity's manifestations in front of an impartial political system that existed by means of creating a new ideology. Social relations were built in such a way as to suppress conscious responsibility to official duty or bureaucracy (Yildiz, 2018), i.e. conscience and honour were automatically equated with duty. In the XXI century, there were shifts in the direction of individualization of consciousness. The liberalizing processes, taking place on the verge of centuries, have influenced the public consciousness, which has adopted the values of humanization, toleration and equality. There is a rethinking of the nature and value of conscience by demonstrating that conscience is not a political construct, nor a way of manipulating debt obligations, but an individual evaluative perception of the situation (O'Shea, 2018). The social context forms individuality and conscience, and it was in the XXI century that it gained relative freedom of identification. While there are numerous benefits associated with this trend, such as increased personal freedom and self-fulfillment, there are also potential drawbacks and challenges to consider. In a highly individualized society, people may become more focused on their own pursuits and less inclined to build strong social bonds. This can lead to feelings of isolation and loneliness, as genuine human connection may take a backseat to personal goals and self-interest. Meanwhile, the individualization of consciousness in the 21st century carries the risk of polarizing society, as the lack of common values makes it difficult to reach a consensus. In addition, excessive individualism can lead to a weakening of social responsibility and a break from traditional values. Individualized consciousness is also vulnerable to manipulation by the media and other forces. Thus, along with freedom of choice, individualization poses certain threats to social consensus and cultural continuity (Plimmer, 2023). Excessive individualism can, sometimes, manifest as narcissism, where individuals become overly self-centered and lacking in empathy. This can harm relationships and hinder cooperation. While the individualization of consciousness offers numerous benefits, such as personal freedom and self-discovery, it is important to strike a balance between individualism and collective well-being. Finding ways to promote a sense of community, empathy, and shared values alongside individual empowerment, is a complex challenge that society must grapple with in the 21st century.

## **5 CONSCIENCE AS AN INSTRUMENT OF MANIPULATION AND SPECULATION**

However, it is worth noting that conscience, in the period under study, acquired the features of an instrument of manipulation and speculation of moral values (Nejaime; Siegel, 2019). It is worth considering specific examples of such a transformation. The proliferation of social networks and digital media has increased the ability to manipulate public opinion and

influence the masses' conscience. Fake news, filters and algorithms can create the illusion that each person sees only what is in line with their own conscience. Political actors and groups can use various methods, including demagoguery, stereotypes and psychological tricks, to manipulate the citizens' conscience and gain support for their ideas or parties. Advertising companies may use psychological tricks and underhanded strategies to manipulate the consumers' conscience and encourage them to make purchases. These trends can lead to conscience becoming less objective and more susceptible to manipulation and speculation, as people are exposed to more information that influences their beliefs and decisions (Załoski, 2023). Increasingly, it has become an occasion for expressing discontent and indignation in politics, economics and culture. The pretentiousness of such statements lies in the manipulation of consciousness, where the facts of contradiction to generally accepted moral values aggravate the conflict situation, generating a controversiality of views. A person's ability to think rationally is clouded by the flow of information, which reached its apogee in the XXI century. The paradigm shift, in the information age, changes the psychological parameters of reality (Schafer, 2018). In the era of information and communication technologies, human consciousness is more vulnerable and acquires a more flexible character. The mass media form a way of thinking. The flow of information received by a person, who is not capable of constructive analysis, deforms consciousness and distorts the original set of moral and value orientations. Therefore, in the conditions of modern technological development, it is necessary that the human consciousness be formed in relation to the basic principles of natural law and the basic values of human existence.

T. Jacobs (2017), in his research, provides another concept of the formation of conscience in the modern world. He speaks about the spread of emotivism, in which ethical statements are not in the nature of logical judgements, but serve exclusively as an expression of emotions. T. Jacobs (2017) focuses on the fact that emotivism has spread widely in Western culture, securing the status of the highest moral judge for conscience. In his perception, conscience is reduced to confidence in the correctness of one's own choices. In this regard, it is important to remember about such a phenomenon as a lie, which, according to generally accepted moral norms, contradicts conscience. But, in certain situations, people resort to it, based on internal motivation to justify the act. However, conscience cannot serve as an excuse for behavior. It is a way of internal legitimization of the decision made to choose a certain model of action. A lie, in this context, is interpreted as a statement against conscience, which should be discussed in more detail.

## **6 THE COMPLEX RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LIES, CONSCIENCE AND PERCEPTION OF REALITY**

A lie is a statement that contradicts what the speaker knows, and conscience is one's awareness of this fact (Hennig, 2010). Based on this, it follows that deliberate perjury

determines the understanding of what is right and what is not. In this case, conscience manifests itself as an awareness of the gap between what was said and objective reality. The problem lies in the interpretation of the very objective reality. There is no unambiguous perception of it in the people's minds, however, the distortion of reality in verbal form is a lie. The concealment of the truth, through the embellishment of facts, formally belongs to the category of lies, but it is less subject to remorse, for example, even in the modern world. Trust has become not a self-evident fact, but a convention, the observance of which exposes a person to the risk of being deceived. Lies, in many ways, have led to a transformation of the society's consciousness, where people can no longer take facts on faith, but require evidence and confirmation. People often lie to protect themselves from trouble or punishment. This can apply to situations where they feel their status, career, or personal life are at risk due to the revelation of the truth about their actions. Sometimes, people lie to preserve their reputation or image. They may exaggerate their achievements or emphasize their strengths to appear better than they really are. Deception can be a means to achieve personal or professional goals. People may exaggerate their accomplishments to gain more fame, money, or influence. In many cases, lying can be driven by social factors, such as pressure from peers or conformity to social norms. People may lie to meet their social group's expectations or to avoid exclusion. Changes in society, such as the proliferation of social media and digital media, can impact perceptions of truth and trust. These changes can make information more easily manipulated, leading to a general distrust of information sources and the validity of facts. (Symons, 2023).

Interesting from the point of view of statistical data is the work developed by M.A. Wheeler et al. (2019), who engaged in the study of the so-called moral language, based on the analysis of the number of moral and ethical terms. They conditionally divide the people's approximate moral character of the XX century into five main stages, which, in their opinion, demonstrate the remoralization and polarization of moral values. Thus, the use of words that convey general moral principles (for example, good, evil, and others) significantly decreased in the period from 1900 to the 1980s. At the same time, morality based on power, emphasizing respect for hierarchy and traditions, reached its peak in the 60s. However, such a quantitative analysis does not give the whole picture of the transformation of the perception of conscience.

## **7 CONSCIENCE, FREEDOM AND THE DYNAMICS OF MORAL TRANSFORMATION IN THE 20TH AND 21ST CENTURIES**

The concept of truth and the role of conscience in determining it have long been subjects of profound philosophical inquiry and societal reflection. The intricate interplay among truth, lies and the human conscience has captivated the scholars', philosophers' and thinkers' minds throughout history. In our exploration of this complex web of ideas, we

embark on a journey to unravel the connections among honesty, deception and the moral compass that guides our actions.

An important aspect of this study is the understanding of freedom of conscience. As mentioned above, in the XX century, this freedom was limited by external circumstances. Michael Hughes (2014) writes about a similar effect. He points out that the mentality of the period of nonconformist consciousness, at the beginning of the century, is characterized by the tension between the hereditary traditions of respect for personal freedom and a new sense of the benefits of power, which, first of all, is manifested in questions about peace and war. Despite the variety of scientific approaches to this issue, the work by Edmund Leites (1988) remains relevant. He reveals the convergence of three topics: changes in the ways of moral education in European culture, the manifestation of new ways of interaction between conscience and law, as well as the general continuity of cultures. This was the direction continued by Anita Chari (2016), who expressed the connection between having a conscience and the ability to apply it. It is this ability to interact with conscience and understand it that makes it possible to respond constructively to oneself and the environment. Conscience, in this sense, serves as a regulator not only of moral beliefs, but also of physiological processes, and contributes to the correlation of bodily needs with conscience. Along with this, A. Chari writes about the affective and somatic nature of its origin, without excluding its cognitive features, which confirms the thesis about the formation of conscience under the influence of experience.

From the point of view of this study, it is also interesting and important the philosophical approach to the interpretation of conscience. N. Yildiz (2018) identifies two main aspects of conscience. The first aspect is *synderesis* – an inner sense of moral principles, on which moral judgements, and the second aspect is the general principles of moral values are based. The essence of this approach is manifested in the binary structure of the formation of conscience. On the one hand, it is formed as a result of personal reflexive judgements. On the other one, under the influence of external factors (generally accepted values and norms, the legal framework, culture, religion, etc.). As a result of this mixed nature, conscience is subject to error, since it is directly related to reasoning and general moral judgements, which may contain fundamentally erroneous postulates. However, modern progress, in promoting freedom of choice and conscience, has elevated the role of this freedom, which is perceived not as a privilege, but as the foundation, the basis of human law (Sandra et al., 2022). Such an individualized conscience is the prerogative of independently determining the criteria of good and evil, which deprives it of universality. This approach, where each person has their own truth, allows not to limit one's own views, but creates moral disunity (Jacobs, 2017). A person represents themselves, their ideas, judgements and values by means of their activity. They are actions that are an indicator of moral consciousness (Hester, 2020). The disunity of these views and positions creates conditions for the need to establish a policy of tolerance that

equalizes everyone in the eyes of the law. Collective and individual interests can be cultivated by a policy of equality that applies to religious, cultural and other values (Giubilini, 2021). It is the concept of cultural relativism that refers to the assessment of open judgements in the internal dynamics of the society's development. On the other hand, the formation of universal human rights and social solidarity on an intercultural basis makes the existence of conscience inevitable (Soranyi, 2014).

At the same time, the opinion that the value of conscience comes from its role in ensuring personal inviolability is largely questioned by scientists, since it emphasizes individualism to the extent that it does not provide unlimited freedom, but is subject to control by various institutions, social norms and moral values (Marbrook, 2017). However, it cannot be argued that conscience is, in this case, a limiter, rather, it serves as a moral regulator, which is formed under the influence of external and internal factors, allowing to construct a unique personified identity (Jaycox, 2020). This study is limited to a theoretical approach to the interpretation of conscience and the processes of its transformation in the society's consciousness of the XX – XXI centuries, however, it reveals the main features of the formation of modern conscience based on the historical retrospective of the XX century.

## CONCLUSIONS

In the course of the work, the key features of the formation of conscience among people of the XX – XXI centuries were established. The scientific authors', regarding the transformation of the perception of conscience in the period under study, were identified. The most important features of conscience as an indicator of social development, formed in the process of socialization, were identified. Conscience is a social construct of an individual character that performs regulatory, evaluative and corrective functions. Its reflection in people has changed over time, which is explained by changes in the political structure, social, economic, cultural and other processes. As a result of the individualization of consciousness in the XXI century, there is a personalization of internal interaction with conscience. Moral guidelines are formed not from mandatory generally accepted social norms, but according to legislative acts and independently selected models of behavior, authorities and moral guidelines. The research provides for further development of the topic, which can be carried out in several directions: a more detailed study of the sources of conscience formation, the processes of correlation of internal values with external challenges, mechanisms of response to impulses that generate controversy of internal receptions, etc. Thus, the practical significance of this work lies in the effective application of its results for understanding the processes of social activity in the modern world, based on the position of cause-and-effect relationships between actions and their consequences.

For a person living in a society, it is not enough to act on the basis of their likes and dislikes. Guided by conscience in making decisions, a person analyses all the components: external conditions, the ratio of goals and means to achieve it, the results of the decision made and their impact on others. One of the most important points in the understanding of conscience, is the awareness of a person's ability to react sensitively to the surrounding world, i.e. the ability to empathy. It is what makes it possible to evaluate one's actions from the perspective of influencing others, assess the consequences and make decisions. In the modern world, the question of conscience is often touched upon not only in scientific research, but also in popular culture, which forms a liberalized way of thinking based on tolerance, equality and other moral values. Without moral judgement, a person would be deprived of the freedom of choice that one would consider correct in a given situation, and the choice of means to achieve the goal would not be questioned. Based on this, freedom of conscience and freedom of choice are human nature's important principles, which were developed in the twentieth and, to a greater extent, the XXI century. Accordingly, it is conscience that acts as the basic condition for the social groups' functional coexistence.

The novelty of the study lies in a comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon of conscience, taking into account socialcultural transformations in the 20th and 21st centuries. Unlike existing works that consider conscience exclusively from a philosophical standpoint, this paper combines an interdisciplinary approach, analyzing conscience as a philosophical concept, social construct and psychological phenomenon. Particular attention is paid to the impact of information technology on the transformation of conscience in modern society, which is an insufficiently covered aspect. Thus, the novelty lies in the synthesis of philosophical, sociological and psychological approaches to the study of conscience, taking into account the modern technological context.

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