

Conscience and Guilt

"The conscience becomes seared by the will resisting the affirmations of reason. The conscience is now generally supposed to be a function of the reason. Whether it is regarded in this light or not, it is certain that it becomes seared when the will opposes itself and continues opposed to the decisions of the reason."

" When you can trifle with your time; spend it in reading plays, and novels, mere slang in newspapers, or in any other way, squander an hour or a moment of your precious time, without compunction, your conscience is already seared."

Charles Finney (1841)

The words of that old preacher make me wonder what he would make of spending time in Second Life !

I'm not sure how the will resists the "affirmations of reason." Sounds like we are two people - a bad part and a good part with the bad part winning sometimes. Speaking of conscience and guilt reminds me of my earlier life as an evangelical Christian. Perhaps we have to think in Christian terms of original sin to even understand the idea of conscience? But the *vinaya* of Buddhism was a series of rules designed to help monks to live together and no doubt needed some kind of guilty feeling if one transgressed the rules.

A conscience is a useful tool for leaders to instil in people, since followers, hopefully, will internalize rules and obey them and this is much easier than having others enforce the rules and watch for transgressions.

What about those who exhibit little conscience? Psychologists are now citing environmental factors as helping to create sociopaths:

"The following are environmental factors which psychiatrists/psychologists, say create a sociopath:

- *Studies show that 60% of psychopathic individuals had lost a parent;*
- *Child is deprived of love or nurturing; parents are detached or absent;*
- *Inconsistent discipline: if father is stern and mother is soft, child learns to hate authority and manipulate mother;*
- *Hypocritical parents who privately belittle the child while publicly presenting the image of a "happy family"*

<http://sociopathic.net/?p=162>

So perhaps modern fragmented society is helping to produce more people with little conscience and we will have more rampant shootings and other conscienceless behaviour until we decide to do something about this.