

THE THREE LEVELS OF ETHICS

(a digest of pp. 4–13 of Louis Monden's *Sin, Liberty, and Law* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1965))

LEVEL OF
INSTINCT
(heavily “animal”)

law
—from without
—as taboo
obligation
—alien

conscience
—ambivalent feeling of
warning

sin—material
transgression
guilt—feeling of
having acted
wrongly
punishment—a
mysterious power
will avenge

**contrition/confession/
firm resolve**—”Too
bad I ever ran that
risk; I’ll never do
such again.”

MORAL LEVEL
(conscious
self- realization)

law
—from within
—one’s own nature
(one’s sense of total
self-development) as
the source of
obligation

conscience
—deep, self-conscious
power of
discrimination
(discernment)

sin and guilt—one’s
free will acts against
one’s conscience
punishment—a self-
inflicted wound

contrition—inner
acknowledgement
confession—not vital
but helpful
firm resolve—“I will
make up for missed
occasions of self-
development”

CHRISTIAN-
RELIGIOUS LEVEL
(partnership with
God)

law
—invitation to love
obligation
—vocation
—counsel
—beatitude

conscience
—love as a power of
discriminating, a
communion of
feeling and thinking

sin—a refusing to be
for the other
guilt—specific
religious refusal
punishment—an
enduring invitation
to love (as the
torment of one who
rejects it)

contrition—an appeal
to mercy
confession—the sign,
the opening word of
the renewed
dialogue
forgiveness (exists at
this level only)—an
answer to the
contrition and the
resumption of the
love relationship
**reparation (and
resolution)**—real
moral growth