

Moral Reasoning Cheat Sheet

Level 1: Pre-conventional: (no internalization of morals)

Stage 1: (Punishment and Obedience) People base their moral decisions on the fear of punishment. Right and wrong is determined by what is punished. People base their moral decisions on the fear of punishment, and thus avoid punishment. Children obey because adults tell them to obey.

Examples:

- I won't cheat because I will get caught.
- I won't steal because I will go to jail.
- I won't speed because I will get a ticket.

Stage 2: (Individual self-interest) Right and wrong is determined by what is rewarded. Moral thinking is based on rewards and self-interest--profit motive. Right and wrong is determined by what is rewarded or profitable. Children obey when it is in their best interest to obey.

Examples:

- I will cheat because I will get a better score on the exam.
- I won't tell mom you broke the vase if you don't tell on me for stealing candy.
- I will tell mom you lied because it makes me look better.

Level 2: Conventional (some internalizations of morals)

Stage 3: (seeking approval or avoiding disapproval) Right and wrong is determined by seeking approval or avoiding disapproval of people who are close to you (such as your parents and friends). Good behavior is that which pleases others in the immediate group or which brings approval.

Examples:

- I won't cheat on the test because my parents will be ashamed of me.
- I will steal because it will make me look cool in front of my friends.
- I will give to charity because everyone will think highly of me.

Stage 4: (Law and Order) Right and wrong is determined by society's rules, and laws, which should be obeyed rigidly to maintain law and order through formal or informal codes of conduct. Moral judgments are based on understanding and the social order, law, and duty. In this stage, the emphasis is on upholding law, order and authority, doing one's duty, and following social rules. One is obligated to follow societies' rules.

Examples:

- I won't speed because it is against the law. If everyone speeds, then our laws are meaningless.
- You must not shoplift because it is illegal.
- We must follow the workplace rules so there is order at the job.

Level 3: Post conventional (full internalization of morals)

Stage 5: (Interpretation of the law) Right and wrong is determined by society's rules, which are viewed as fallible, rather than absolute. As a member of society, you have certain obligations to fulfill. In some instances, the law may not apply to a particular situation, especially if it violates some values, such as freedom, individual rights.

Examples:

- Laws that prohibit people from stealing and breaking in someone's house are important, but if your survival is at stake, it is okay to break into a cabin in the wilderness for survival with the intent of compensating the owner later (as in the Alaska bush).
- I ran a red light because it was 12 midnight, no one was around, and there was an emergency at home.

Stage 6: (Universal ethical principles) Right and wrong is determined by ethical abstract principles that emphasize equality and justice. The person has developed moral judgments that are based on universal human rights. When faced with a dilemma between law and conscience, a personal, individual conscience is followed.

Examples:

- Lying to the Nazis about the Jews in the basement is alright if it is going to save an innocent life.
- It's okay not to prosecute American soldiers for war crimes because it would be bad for American morale.
- Laws that restrict access to the court system should be abolished because they impair a person's access to justice.