

# Stealing: morality and modern moral philosophy essay sample

[Sociology](#), [Ethics](#)



10 brought shocking news to sport-crazed New England. The assistant of Bill Belichick, the super-star head coach of the New England Patriots, was caught videotaping defensive signals of the opposing team, against the rules of the National Football League. In a quick resolution, Belichick and the team were heavily fined and penalized with a loss of draft choices.

Have the “ selfless” team-spirited Patriots taken an ethical hit? Should fans no longer look up to Belichick and owner Bob Kraft as role models of the right way to build a sports dynasty? Or is this the moral equivalent of a parking ticket in a sport where competitive intelligence is as vital as a healthy quarterback? Getting an edge over the competition is inherent in sports. Are there instances when stealing signs is OK? Does that apply to other types of unethical conduct? In order to make heads or tails of this issue, let’s explore both the legal and ethical parameters of when it is acceptable to get information about another team and its players. Let’s be clear on our terms. Most people, fans as well as players, accept the need for rules. Even if we like to bend the rules, we want the referees to be fair, if for no other reason than we want the other side to follow the rules as well. So being “ legal” in sports means following the rules of the sport. What about “ ethics?” In sports, as well as in business, what is ethical is not often so clear.

We believe in fairness and that one side should not have an unfair advantage over the other. But we also believe in winning, and being aggressive sometimes means pushing the rules to the limit, even if that means sometimes going too far. Balancing fairness and success is hard, but our heroes are those who manage to do both. Part of winning is gathering

competitive intelligence by getting clues as to what the other side is about to do. In sports what's legal and what's ethical clash confusingly as key values come into conflict. As baseball Hall of Famer Frank Robinson once said, "There's nothing wrong with trying to find an edge. That's smart. That's not cheating." Baseball commentator Greg Couch noted that "sign-stealing was invented the day after signs were accepted into the fabric of the game. There is a saying in baseball that if you aren't cheating, you aren't trying." So if stealing signs is part of the game, and therefore part of the ethos of sport, how do we know when it goes over the line? With regard to stealing information, often the only way to know where the line is drawn is by seeing where the officials have put it. Here are some examples of types of competitive intelligence categorized by whether they are ethical and/or within the rules.

Legal| Against the Rules

Unethical| What if a coach stumbles upon the other team's playbook accidentally left in a public space? Should the team scour the book for clues, or is that unsportsmanlike? Retailers have been known to post phony job openings to lure competitors' employees into interviews in hopes of obtaining competitive information.| What about bringing one's former team's playbook to a new position, or bribing coaches to divulge information? Or, if a coach or player continues to violate rules after repeatedly warnings.

Actions that are both against the rules and against the ethics of even aggressive sports fans engender Bronx cheers.| Ethical| In sports, trying to steal the pitchers' signs and the coaches' signals is part of the game. Teams

study films and get as much of a competitive edge as possible. In business, competitive intelligence gained from public sources is expected.

Videotaping signs. If it's OK to get the signs without technology, why is it unethical to get them with technology? The problem is when the action explicitly violates the rules. We have a grudging respect for the rules though we are most ambivalent when the rules are perceived to be ethically neutral. A violator is not necessarily ostracized. They pay the fines as just a cost of doing business. However, even "technical" violators can creep into unethical territory if they flaunt their lack of respect for the rules. Aggressive heroes can quickly become disgraced cheaters. So what about the Patriots and Bill Belichick? Playing close to the edge is not an ethical problem according to the culture of sports. Coaches are supposed to be thorough in their preparation. Videotaping the opposing coach doesn't seem to violate any ethical standards in and of itself. When is the line crossed? Videotaping opposing coaches is against the rules, and Belichick, along with other coaches, was warned in an internal memo from the league to stop the practice. Should an ethical coach have stopped after being reminded that the practice is against the rules, or does the ethics of the sports culture permit more aggressive behavior to be acceptable?

Is the delicate ethical balance between technical violator and cheater not crossed by ignoring a warning? Many would say that ignoring a warning that rules were being broken is crossing the ethical line in the sand. However the reality in sports, as well as in many organizations, is that nudging the balance between the right thing to do and winning too close to the moral

side runs the risk of having the rules ignored because they don't reflect the reality on the field. Aggressive players need aggressive enforcement. So the legal line was crossed when the taping continued after the warning.

However, while some commentators were upset by this violation of the sanctity of sport, many treated this issue as being as heinous as someone showing off a glove compartment full of unpaid parking tickets. The ethical line, as defined by the football culture, was seemingly crossed only when Belichick and the team were fined and the incident became public. Apologies were given and assurances made that the practice wouldn't happen again.

At this point, even hardcore players and fans agreed that the practice shouldn't continue. If it does happen again, then Belichick would definitely cross into the cheater camp in the eyes of other professionals as well as fans. The lesson? Ethics and compliance work together. Ethics and compliance officers need to be aware of not only where particular legal lines should be drawn, but also where there are gaps between the legal lines and the ethical lines. And if the gaps are too far apart, then work is needed to close them if compliance is to be taken seriously. Sometimes achieving compliance requires more than warnings or even threats of punishment. Only when the violator crosses the fuzzy line of what stakeholders (players, the press, managers, the public, etc.) determine is fair or unfair will the practice become taboo. Therefore, the best way to achieve bright-line compliance is understanding what is necessary to achieving fuzzy-line ethical norms.

## Situation Ethics & Stealing

By Bettina Drew, eHow Contributor

\* Print this article

It's not OK to steal workplace resources because you feel underpaid.

Situation ethics, or situational ethics, proposes that the line between ethical and unethical behavior isn't necessarily unwavering. The religiously rooted concept states that behaviors should be considered within the context of their surroundings. This might help you make decisions in your personal life, but it should probably be avoided in the workplace. Chances are your boss won't condone you stealing from him because you felt it compensated for your low pay. Other People Are Reading

\* Employer-Employee Ethical Issues

\* Situation-Based Vs. Rules-Based Ethics

### 1. Joseph Fletcher

\* Situational ethics was advocated by Joseph Fletcher, a religious leader who lived from 1905 to 1991. An Episcopal priest and advocate of euthanasia and Planned Parenthood, Fletcher's publication " Situation Ethics" has become the foundational reference for successive writings on the subject. Fletcher draws on the Bible's New Testament to argue that behaviors commonly considered unethical can be justified in some circumstances. For example, if an armed robber enters your home, it might be acceptable to respond violently to protect your family. Or you may be justified telling a loved one she looks pretty even when she's in bed with the flu because the lie might make her feel better. Workplace

\* Situation ethics can sometimes be applied to the workplace, although employees should be cautious about this. In many cases their situational-ethics approach may be directly at odds with their employers' perspective. An employee might feel comfortable telling callers his employer is out of the office, when in fact his employer is present but in a bad mood. The employee might justify the lie by assuming his employer wouldn't have handled the call to the customer's satisfaction because of the boss' sour mood. \* Sponsored Links

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Stealing

\* Stealing in the workplace can take many forms. This can be the outright theft of physical objects, such as pens, paper clips, stationery or glue sticks taken home for personal use. Employees might also steal resources, such as using office computer access to hunt for other jobs or create personal client lists from the company's master file. Workplace stealing can also include the deliberate misuse of time: compiling a recipe book, chatting with friends or booking airline travel during time allotted for work. Stealing Ethics

\* Situational ethics are applied to workplace stealing when workers (or employers) justify theft as an attempt to correct unfair practices. For example, a worker who feels unfairly compensated might steal office supplies or slack off during the workday to counterbalance her low pay. An employee who has observed his employer stealing from clients or the

government might decide to steal from his boss, with the justification that he's punishing the dishonest employer. Employers observing unproductive workers might "adjust" the time clock to shave off increments of time worked, believing this to be fair. The problem with this approach is that some of these practices are considered illegal. If apprehended, culprits might lose their jobs or be demoted.

Ethics: a branch of philosophy which seeks to address questions about morality; that is, about concepts such as good and bad, right and wrong, justice, and virtue.

Morale: a state of individual psychological well-being based upon a sense of confidence and usefulness and purpose.

Stealing: to take (the property of another or others) without permission or right, especially secretly by force

In criminal law, theft is the illegal taking of another person's property without that person's freely-given consent. The word is also used as an informal shorthand term for some crimes against property, such as burglary, embezzlement, larceny, looting, shoplifting, fraud, and sometimes criminal conversion. In some jurisdictions, theft is considered to be synonymous with larceny; in others theft is replaced with larceny.

The common ideas for the reason why people steal is that it is for the money. On the black market you can sell an item for 50% of its value- possibly even more if the item is popular in the community at the time. For



example, in the winter season a thief will go into a store and steal something like Tylenol Cold medicine. This is because Tylenol Cold costs about \$6 dollars retail. On the street it would sell for about \$3 dollars. These items are small and very easily concealed. So, a person could take anywhere from 50 to 100 at a time. The street value would be around \$300 which is equivalent to a full time job paying 7.50 an hour. This type of thief is known as a professional. The second most common reason people steal is obsession. They can't help themselves and they steal just to get the rush. This type of thief will take anything they can get their hands on because they just do it to see if they can get away. Last but not least the third most common reason that people steal is for survival. This type of thief steals things that he/she needs to survive. Most of the time they take things like

In early modern Europe "moral philosophy" often referred to the systematic study of the human world, as distinguished from "natural philosophy," the systematic study of the natural world. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries moral philosophy in this broad sense was gradually split up into separate disciplines: politics, economics, historical sociology, and moral philosophy more narrowly understood as the study of the ideas and the psychology involved in individual morality. It should be noted that moral philosophy was a part not only of Aristotelian philosophy but also, along with grammar, rhetoric, poetry, and history, of the humanities (*studia humanitatis*), and in this connection, the ethics of the Platonists, Stoics, and Epicureans also came under consideration. New Issues

The philosophers who created modern moral philosophy were familiar with the thinkers of classical antiquity; some had also studied the medieval scholastics. But neither the ancient nor the medieval philosophers faced the conditions that increasingly confronted the whole of Europe from the Reformation onward. Early in this period political and religious authorities struggled for control over all significant human activity. After the Reformation, religion no longer spoke with the single voice it claimed in the Middle Ages, but ministers of every denomination demanded obedience to the God they preached. For Lutheran and Reformed thinkers as well as for Catholics, all philosophy had to be subservient to theology. Philosophers had to reach conclusions that theologians could certify as agreeing with Christian doctrine. Monarchs claimed to rule by divine right and worked with their national churches to enforce social hierarchies that shaped daily life even in its details, but established institutions, practices, and beliefs were increasingly being challenged and were eventually severely weakened or destroyed. Political and religious authority and the hold of custom and tradition were eroding.

New kinds of groups were developing in which individuals interacted without attending to rank or class. In these new forms of sociability people treated one another as equals, able to get along together pleasantly and profitably without control by external authority. All these changes called for the rethinking of both individual and political norms. Advances in scientific and geographical knowledge contributed greatly to the widespread feeling that everything from the past was open to question. But even without the

advances in knowledge, the turmoil of religious controversy and social change made evident the need for a new understanding of morality. Ancient moral philosophers thought that their task was to determine what was required for human flourishing—the highest good—and to show what virtues were needed in order to attain it. Christian theologians made ultimate human flourishing dependent on a proper relation to God, who alone was man's highest good. Laws of morality, which God teaches everyone through conscience, would guide us to the good of sociable living in this world. Conformity to them, however, could not guarantee salvation, for which God's grace was needed. Montaigne's Challenge

Modern moral philosophy began as the effort to answer questions like those raised most effectively by Michel de Montaigne (1533–1592). In his widely read *Essays* (1588) he presented himself as earnestly trying all the available theories about how we should live, asking if any of them could be followed. Although Montaigne was a devout Catholic, he used neither dogma nor theology to test claims about the good life. His attempts led him to think that neither he nor anyone else—aside from a few exceptional figures—could steadily follow Christian or classical models. Montaigne concluded that we must each determine for ourselves what the good life is. We each have a distinctive natural form that tells us what we need and what we cannot tolerate.

For each person that must be the supreme guide. Montaigne could find no grounds, outside religion, for believing in moral laws known to all. We should obey the laws of our country, he held, not because they are just but simply

because they are the established local law. Our individual form gives guidance to each but not guidance for all. In an age already deeply unsettled by interminable debates about religion, Montaigne was taken to be a skeptic about morality. His conservative acceptance of local law and his claim to a private inner voice did not offer enough to a world in which confessional and international conflict was pervasive. His denial that there is a common highest good seemed to make it impossible to find a basis for working toward principles that could cross all the lines dividing Europe. Modern moral philosophy had to create new resources to underpin a common morality.

#### Natural Law and Intuitionism

The two earliest lines of thought were started simultaneously. Hugo Grotius (1583–1645), a Dutch Calvinist lawyer, initiated a new understanding of natural law theory with his *Law of War and Peace* in 1625. As part of it he outlined the view that natural law should be understood as empirically based directions for enabling sociable but quarrelsome people to get along with one another, no matter how much they differed about God or the good. In his *On Truth* (1624) Edward, Lord Herbert of Cherbury (1582–1648) claimed that all humans have an intuitive grasp of certain basic moral truths that show us how to live. Though both thinkers believed in God, both wanted to minimize the extent to which God or his ministers had to be consulted about morality. Herbert also rejected the subordination of philosophy to theology, holding that religious claims in conflict with intuitively known moral principles must be false. Grotius's themes were developed by the English philosophers

Thomas Hobbes (1599–1679) and John Locke (1632–1704) and by the German lawyer Samuel Pufendorf (1632–1694).

All saw humans as needing to live together but as so prone to selfishness that they found this difficult. Moral laws of nature were basic directions for solving the problem posed by our unsociably sociable nature. With Luther and Calvin these thinkers held that morality requires law, that law requires a lawgiver, and that God is the ultimate lawgiver. Morality is obedience to divine commands. Since no one can command God, he alone is self-governing. God has left it up to us to discover the contents of morality. Ordinary experience provides us with all the facts we need to infer the divine commands. We need not appeal to revelation. Critics of modern natural law theory all objected that an ethics of divine command made God an arbitrary and unlovable tyrant.

One group followed Lord Herbert's lead in working out how to defeat this kind of theory. Two Anglican clergymen, Ralph Cudworth (1617–1688) and Samuel Clarke (1675–1729), held that eternally valid moral principles guide God. They are known by us because he has given us a power of intuition enabling us to grasp them. Moral knowledge thus makes us self-governing. Developed further by an Anglican bishop, Joseph Butler (1692–1752), and a dissenting minister, Richard Price (1723–1791), intuitionism received its classic form in the *Essays on the Active Powers of Man* (1788) by the Scottish professor Thomas Reid (1710–1796), who was a major influence on nineteenth-century British and French moral thought. Perfectionists and Moral Sense Theorists

Another group, the rationalist perfectionists, including Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677), Nicholas Malebranche (1638–1715), Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716), and the Leibnizian Christian Wolff (1679–1754), held that ignorance, not quarrelsomeness, was the source of immorality. They argued that only increase of knowledge could improve our behavior and our happiness. The more we think as God does, the more perfect we become. God is guided not by an arbitrary will but by his knowledge of all facts and all values. We and our societies will become more perfect the more knowledge we have and the more we live according to it. People who know more than others are closer to governing themselves and are responsible for directing the lives of the rest. Many eighteenth-century British thinkers shared the common reaction against divine command theory and its assumption that only punishments and rewards, here or in an afterlife, could make most of us act morally.

We are not, they held, as selfish as Hobbes and Pufendorf said we are. We are benevolent as well as self-interested, and we feel moral sentiments of approval and disapproval, coming from a moral sense that approves of what we do from benevolence. To be self-governing, we need no further guidance. Moral sense theorists like the Earl of Shaftesbury (1671–1713) and the Presbyterian minister Francis Hutcheson (1694–1746) were not atheists, but their views began to make God marginal for morality. The Scottish philosopher David Hume (1711–1776) developed moral sense theory to its fullest and excluded God from morality altogether. Morality for Hume is just

the feelings with which we respond to certain facts about people and their characters.

We feel approval of people whose character leads them to be good company or useful to others and to themselves. People tend to feel benevolent toward those close to them. For dealing with strangers we invent rules, called laws of nature, governing property, contracts, and obedience to government; and we are moved to obey them because we can feel sympathy with those who benefit from them. Hume held that there can be no rules of obligation unless we naturally have or create sufficient motives to follow them. We need no divine threats or promises about an afterlife to make us virtuous. Even political authority springs from our sense of our own needs and how to meet them. We are wholly self-governing parts of nature, and nothing more.

#### Egoists and Utilitarians

Philosophers who rejected the sanguine portrayal of human nature given by the moral sense theorists followed Hobbes in arguing that rational self-interest alone could give rise to morality and decent government. Some saw God's providential hand in this happy outcome of selfishness. Atheistic thinkers in France, like the government official Claude Adrien Helvetius (1715-1771) and the wealthy Baron D'Holbach (1723-1789), saw it as showing that morality was nothing but instruction about how individuals could attain for themselves the highest good, a life filled with pleasure. Many religious thinkers believed that God wills the happiness of all rather than purely private happiness and that we should therefore try to bring about as much happiness as we can. For many years *The Principles of Moral and*

Political Philosophy (1786) by the Anglican cleric William Paley (1743–1805) was the most widely read version of this doctrine, but a secular counterpart had a much longer life.

In his Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation (1789) the legal reformer Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832) set out the view later known as utilitarianism. The good, for Bentham, was pleasure and the absence of pain. Pleasures and pains can be balanced against one another, like credits and debits. The basic principle of morality instructs us to bring about the greatest happiness we can for the greatest number of people. To the extent that individuals are not naturally inclined to act this way, society and government should set up inducements that would lead them to do so. Bentham was sure that England's laws were not aimed at maximizing happiness. He set out to change them and gathered an active group of disciples to help him. Partly as a result, secular utilitarianism eventually became the main systematic alternative to Reid's brand of intuitionism in nineteenth century Britain. Kant

Secular theories basing morality on experience seemed always to rely on emotions and to take the highest good to be earthly happiness, no matter what its source, and whether for all or only for oneself. The British intuitionists fought against such views, as did the German Lutheran philosopher Christian August Crusius (1715–1775). But the most systematic opposition came from the philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724–1804). He rejected divine command ethics but thought that perfectionist and intuitionist theories led inevitably to a morally objectionable reliance on an educated elite to control everyone else. He had learned from the Genevan



writer Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) to honor the common man. But Rousseau's views rested finally on sentiment, and Kant held that sentiment could not ground the kind of absolutely universal and necessary principles that morality needed. Kant based morality not on pure thought or on emotion but on the will, which is the ability to make decisions for reasons.

Our desires propose reasons for action, but the will can accept or reject any such proposal. Only proposals that match the will's own demands can become reasons for action. Kant identifies the basic demand that the rational will imposes on desires as the moral law—the voice of reason in practice. It comes to us as the form of a directive or imperative that cannot reasonably be avoided. Kant calls it the categorical imperative. We can moreover be moved to act as the categorical imperative requires simply out of respect for our will's dictates. Because we govern ourselves not by knowing external laws but by following a self-legislated law, Kant called our form of self-governance “autonomy.” The categorical imperative says that I ought to act in such a way that the plan of action proposed by my desire could be a universal law. If a desire gives me a reason for action, it must give the same reason to anyone who has the same desire.

We can use this principle to test our plans. We ask whether it would still be rational to follow our plan if everyone were to act on it. If not, we must reject it. The categorical imperative requires us to treat all autonomous agents including ourselves with respect. We may pursue happiness in any way that the categorical imperative allows, and we ought to help others carry out their own plans for happiness if the categorical imperative allows those plans.

Happiness, or the satisfaction of desires, is thus a goal to be pursued, on condition that we act fairly toward everyone in pursuing it. Among other goals that the categorical imperative requires us to pursue is the highest good: the distribution of happiness in proportion to virtue. We know we need assistance to bring this end about. Hence morality requires us to believe that there is a superhuman being who can help us. Kant thus tried to avoid the naturalism that earlier thinkers such as Hume had championed. For Kant morality does not come from God. Instead it leads us to him. Conclusion

Natural law theories and perfectionism lost their hold by the end of the eighteenth century. Kantianism, utilitarianism, and intuitionism set the initial terms for future discussion. All three types of view grew from efforts to show how morality could be supported without reliance on tradition, authority, or revelation. To different degrees contemporary defenders of these still-living positions have argued that everyone can think through moral issues and be moved by themselves to do what they conclude is right. We can thus all be self-governing. Modern moral philosophy developed while Europeans were increasingly treating people as equals who were capable of living sociably without external authority. Philosophy aided this movement by providing alternative ways to talk about how morality could structure an aspect of life that was not dependent on its religious and political aspects. In doing so modern moral philosophy created much of the vocabulary through which Europeans were enabled to envisage the kind of self-governing person needed to sustain modern liberal democratic societies.

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