Defining Wrong

Purpose

To help students understand the definition of right versus wrong by identifying behaviors that demonstrate wrong.

Preparation & Materials

Prepare an overhead of Right versus Wrong. For each student, copy the Right versus Wrong worksheet.

Process

- On a flip chart or blackboard, list the values on the group's code on the left side of the space. As a whole class, for each word on the code, try to identify a word that means the opposite and write that across from the original word on the right side of the flip-chart page. Have students copy these lists onto their Right versus Wrong worksheets. (Note: If there are only six words on your list, only use six spaces, and so on.)
- In small groups, ask members to come up with at least one good example of wrong behavior for each word on the list. Share these examples in the larger group. Post the list of operationalized "wrong" as you did for operationalized "right" in the previous lesson. (Also see examples on the "Taking Responsibility" list in the previous lesson.)
- Discuss the idea of *moral temptation*—a situation in which we know what is right, but might be tempted to do wrong. Why might we be tempted to do wrong?

RIGHT VERSUS WRONG

For each *right* value on your list, try to find a word that describes its opposite, as well as several examples of doing wrong (we've left space for up to twelve values, though you may have only five or six on your list):

Example: honesty Its opposite: dishonesty

Examples of doing wrong (that is, *dishonest behavior* means . . .): cheating, lying, covering up for yourself or someone else, being a fake

Value #1: _____ Its opposite: _____

Examples of doing wrong: _____

_____

_____

_____

Value #2: _____ Its opposite: _____

Examples of doing wrong: _____

_____

_____

_____

Value #3: _____ Its opposite: _____

Examples of doing wrong: _____

_____

_____

_____

Value #4: _____ Its opposite: _____

Examples of doing wrong: _____

_____

_____

_____

Value #5: _____ Its opposite: _____

Examples of doing wrong: _____

_____

_____

_____

Value #6: _____ Its opposite: _____

Examples of doing wrong: _____

_____

_____

_____

Value #7: _____ Its opposite: _____

Examples of doing wrong: _____

_____

_____

_____

Value #8: _____ Its opposite: _____

Examples of doing wrong: _____

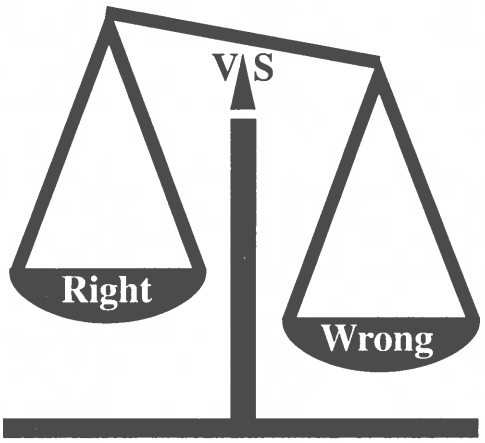
_____

_____

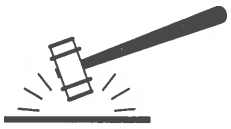
_____

A Moral Temptation

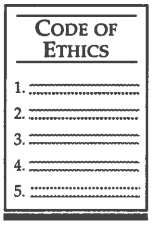
When you know
what is right,
but are tempted
to do wrong



FIVE WAYS TO TELL RIGHT FROM WRONG



The Legal Test



The Professional-Standards Test

The Gut-Feeling Test

The Front-Page Test

The Role-Model Test

Testing for Right versus Wrong

Purpose

To discuss the meaning of *wrong* and to practice four ways to discern right from wrong.

Preparation & Materials

Copy, for each student, the worksheets "For the Taking," "Cheap Snacks," and "Final Exam." Alternatively, create your own right-versus-wrong scenario as a basis for class discussion.

Process

- Divide the class into small groups of four to six students to work through one of the right-versus-wrong examples.
- Ask the students to look closely at each of the tests for wrong in relation to the story. (Note that the Professional Standards Test is not always applicable.)
- Debrief the exercise as an entire class. In "For the Taking," for example, how many of the tests indicate that keeping the money is wrong? Is it easy to see what is the right thing to do? What if some of the tests say it's wrong, but others don't say that it is wrong?
- Next, discuss the key questions from the lesson plan with the class.
- If you have time, consider doing one of the activities described briefly on the Supplemental Activities page.
- Assign the other right-versus-wrong worksheets as homework.

FOR THE TAKING

Lisa, president of the Volunteer Service Club on campus, is planning a party for the club members. She collects money from each of them for the refreshments. After purchasing the food and beverages, she finds that she has about $10 remaining. In the past, extra money was either returned to the members or deposited in the club treasury for future events. However, Lisa realizes that tomorrow she has to drive to her internship site and has no gas in her car or money to pay for it. She is the only one who knows that the funds for the party have exceeded the costs.

TRY THESE TESTS:

1. Is it legal for Lisa to use the money to buy her gas? Why or why not? _____

2. If you were Lisa, what would your instincts tell you to do in this case? _____

3. If the local newspaper learned that Lisa had used the money for gas, how would the front page read? If you were Lisa, how would that make you feel? _____

4. Name a person you respect and describe what she or he would do in this case. _____

CHEAP SNACKS

Tom and Kevin are good friends at your school. They frequently miss meals at the cafeteria and use their meal cards at the snack bar in the student center. On Thursday nights, Tom and many other students like to cash in their remaining meal-card credit for food before that credit period runs out. Tom likes the crowds because they make it easier for him to slip extra food into his pocket without getting caught. Tom often offers Kevin some of the food he's stolen from the pub. Although Kevin dislikes the high prices at the snack bar and is on a tight budget, he has never taken something without paying for it. Kevin wonders if taking small items from the snack bar is any big deal and if he should slip something into his pocket next Thursday night.

TRY THESE TESTS:

1. Is it legal for Kevin to take a small item without paying for it? Why or why not? _____

2. If you were Kevin, what would your instincts tell you to do in this case? _____

3. If the local newspaper learned that Kevin had taken a candy bar from the pub, how would the front page read? If you were Kevin, how would that make you feel? _____

4. Name a person you respect and describe what she or he would do in this case. _____

FINAL EXAM

Ashley and Jody are good friends at your college or university. They frequently study together and are taking most of the same classes in their major. Just before a final exam in one of their most difficult classes, Ashley discovers that she needs to get an "A" on the exam to pass the class and keep her scholarship aid. She knows that Jody is maintaining an "A" average in this class and has done very well on the previous exams. Ashley asks Jody to sit next to her during the exam so she can glance at Jody's answer sheet when the proctor leaves the room. Jody isn't sure what to say. Is it wrong to let her friend look at her exam?

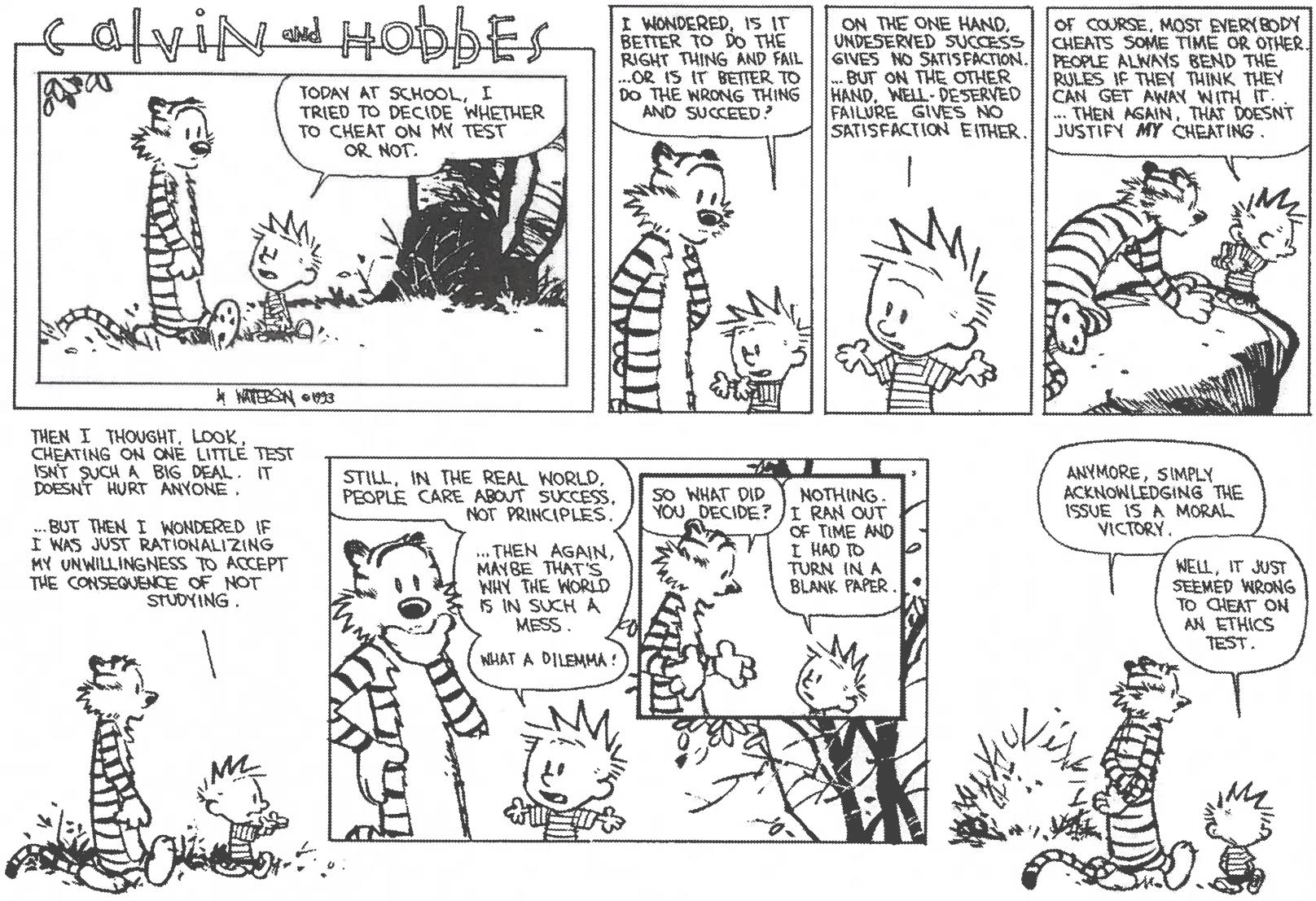
TRY THESE TESTS:

1. Is it legal for Jody to let Ashley look at her answers on the exam? Why or why not?

2. If you were Jody, what would your instincts tell you to do in this case?

3. If the local newspaper learned that Jody had let Ashley look at her final exam answers, how would the front page read? If you were Jody, how would that make you feel?

4. Name a person you respect and describe what she or he would do in this case.



Assessing Moral Temptations

Purpose

To study and understand the nature of moral temptations and the factors that either weaken or strengthen one's resistance to such temptations

Preparation & Materials

Prepare copies of the Moral Temptations handout and the Moral Temptation Assessment worksheet for each student. Make an overhead of the Moral Temptation Assessment worksheet to use when explaining the activity.

Process

- Divide students into small groups and provide each student with a copy of the Moral Temptations handout and the Moral Temptation Assessment worksheet.
- For each of the three story examples, ask students to consider which factors might operate to help the actor resist or yield to the moral temptation described.
- Have students share their findings in the large group.
- Introduce the concept of moral courage, asking participants what role moral courage might have in helping a person to resist moral temptations. Point out that more time will be devoted to the topic of moral courage in subsequent lessons.
- Finally, assign the Courageous Moral Stand Paper due on the last day of the course.

MORAL TEMPTATIONS

We are all faced with moral temptations in our daily life. Sometimes we are able to resist these temptations and do what we know is right. At other times we yield to these temptations and do what we know is not right.

For each of the three temptations described below, use the Moral Temptation Assessment sheet to list all of the factors that influence you to yield to the temptation and all of the factors that help you resist yielding to the temptation. Next list all of the resources—internal and external—that can weaken the yielding factors and strengthen the resistance factors so that you would be more able to resist a moral temptation.

What have you discovered about the power of specific factors to sway your judgment and behavior? How can you draw upon your resources to resist moral temptations?

Moral Temptation #1—Parking Lot Mishap

In the parking lot of the local grocery store, you nick the paint of the car parked next to you when opening your car door. No one sees the incident and you are in a hurry to buy a few items and get back to campus for your next class. What is the moral temptation you face?

Moral Temptation #2—Breaking a Promise

A friend asks you to work an extra shift for her on a Friday night at a local restaurant where you also work. You agree to work her shift, but then on Thursday night, a popular group of students whom you like asks you to join them on Friday for a special birthday celebration of one of the group's members. What is the moral temptation you face?

Moral Temptation #3—Friendship at Stake

At a private party in a friend's apartment off campus, a few students start to smoke marijuana and ask if you want a joint. Even though you have had a stressful week and need to relax and enjoy this evening with your friends, you know that some students were recently busted in this apartment complex for drug use. You are also hoping to get into law school after graduation next month and do not want to jeopardize your chances in any way. Most of the people at the party are lighting up and you are one of the few who is not smoking. What is the moral temptation you face?

Moral Temptation Assessment

YIELDING FACTORS (-)	RESISTANCE FACTORS (+)
10 - - - - - - - - - - 5 - - - - - - - - - - - - 0	0 - - - - - - - - - - - 5 - - - - - - - - - - 10
(strength of factor)	*(strength of factor)*

RESOURCES TO REDUCE YIELDING FACTORS	RESOURCES TO ENHANCE RESISTANCE FACTORS
(What will weaken the above?)	*(What will strengthen the above?)*

MORALLY COURAGEOUS ACTION

YIELDING FACTORS

Internal or external factors that *weaken* one's resolve or ability to resist temptation

RESISTANCE FACTORS

Internal or external factors that *strengthen* one's resolve or ability to resist temptation

COURAGE

State or quality of mind or spirit that enables one to face danger with self-possession, confidence, and resolution

MORAL COURAGE

The quality of mind and spirit that enables one to face up to ethical dilemmas and moral wrongdoing firmly and confidently, without flinching or retreating

Courageous Moral Stand Paper

Write a four- to five-page typed paper describing your plan to take a courageous moral stand for an ethical issue or a situation in your own life right now that is of importance to you. This situation or issue should be one that involves the betterment/improvement of the physical environment, life of animals or pets, or quality of human relationships and the human condition (e.g., your family, dormmates, classmates, friendship group, team members, college community as a whole, outside community, etc.). In addition, this situation should be one that requires you to stick to your own ethical values in the face of opposition and the risk of sacrifice—perhaps requiring an unpopular stand or a difficult decision that tests your individual courage.

The paper will address the following points:

1. **Description of the ethical dilemma you are facing.** Provide enough detail of the history and current status of the issue, but change names and identities of people as necessary for privacy.
2. **Analysis of the dilemma.** Dissect the dilemma using the nine-step checkpoint process explained in upcoming lessons.
3. **Description of what is at stake for you.** What are the risks? What makes acting ethically in this situation an act of moral courage?
4. **Written plan for taking a moral stand.** Evaluate the actions you could take to address this situation. What could you do, say, confront, write, or create to help resolve this situation? Schedule a time line for when you would take these steps.
5. **Risk analysis.** What barriers make this moral stand difficult for you? What stops you? What resources or strengths can you draw upon to help you? What helps you do it?
6. **Probability.** Predict the likelihood that you will take this moral stand and act.

Supplemental Activities

Changes in the Moral Perimeter

Some philosophers refer to the concept of a *moral perimeter*—a boundary that society agrees upon for separating right behavior from wrongdoing. Yet our concept of right and wrong—this moral perimeter—can change over time. For instance, while slavery in the modern United States is neither legal nor tolerated, it was accepted in the early nineteenth century as a legitimate societal institution.

Lead a discussion or give a homework assignment addressing changes in the moral perimeter in regard to premarital sex, cigarette smoking, domestic violence, or divorce. Ask students to identify other ways in which our concept of what is right or wrong has changed over time.

Civil Disobedience

Lead a discussion by asking, "Should unjust laws ever be disobeyed?" Have students give historical examples of disobedience, e.g., Thoreau, Ghandi, and Martin Luther King, Jr. What are the moral stipulations—e.g., openness, willingness to suffer whatever consequences the disobedience brings, conscious and voluntary action—that accompany breaking the law in civil disobedience? Ask students to imagine instances in which they might choose between obeying the law and civil disobedience. Use, or require students to consult, additional resources on this topic, such as *Letter from a Birmingham Jail* by Martin Luther King, Jr., or *Civil Disobedience,* an essay by Henry David Thoreau.

Unethical Choices in the News

Ask students to read the newspaper or watch the news on TV and to find an example of a person making an unethical choice. Share examples. What ethical values did the individual violate? Why do you think he or she violated them? What would you have done and why?

Role Play Moral Temptations

Divide students into groups. Based on ideas from the students' Self-Observation papers, ask them to script a brief role play, present it to the class, and then lead a discussion about factors in the role play that support either resisting or yielding to the moral temptation. What common moral temptations do students face and how do they resolve them?

Discipline/Major Adaptation—Forecasting Challenges in the Professions

Based on pre-assigned interviews and readings in professional newsletters and journals, ask students to identify moral temptations unique to people in different professions. What are these temptations? How well are current professionals resisting these temptations?

Is It Ever Right to Lie?

Assign the online essay by Robert C. Solomon, "Is It Ever Right to Lie? The Philosophy of Deception," which can be found at *http://web.utk.edu/~gwynne/lying.html*. Ask students to either write a short essay in response to this reading or debate the merits of absolute truth telling versus judicious, or justifiable, lying.