

# Moral equilibrium

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Have you ever felt really good about donating money to charity? Or done something wrong and told yourself it was ok because you had been doing the right thing for such a long time? If you have, be practicing something called moral equilibrium; Moral equilibrium or moral license if you prefer, is us keeping a mental scoreboard to ourselves to constantly tell ourselves we are good people. Even the most ethical people are morally bound via the self serving bias, and it is pretty hard to resist keeping up a moral license.

Some people will say that the only people practicing moral licence are amped up tax-pocketing politicians, snotty charity pocketing ministers and cheating olympic level athletes. But your everyday girl or guy could just as well be moral licensing, even a waitress pocketing tips is just as guilty that politician pocketing tax money. As a Nothing boosts moral equilibrium like doing a good deed, and since people are always encouraged to do good deeds; Avoiding starting up a moral license is almost impossible. Say a politician raised millions for charity, after being praised for his good work; he pockets one million for himself. Maybe you say that in this politicians place you never would have taken money for yourself, but often you may just say to yourself “nobody would care about this one thing compared to all of my other good deeds!” And even praise is being given a lot more these days over having people develop “self-confidence”. But almost all people allow this to go to there head; get cocky and need to pay the

price. You really have quite the paradox here, people need to feel good about themselves, but we also must not get to cocky; If you feel like you are going to do something bad, think about the consequences of your actions, and accept the praise graciously.

Another issue is measuring the right incentives to get involved involved , take this instance for example, in a social experiment initiated by economists, they had no fine at daycares for four weeks, in that month about 10 children were picked up late each week, but after they initiated a three dollar fine for each pick-up roughly 25 children were picked up late each week; then when they repealed the fine after another month, the number of children picked up late stayed the same. The logic behind this, the school replaced a moral incentive (the guilt of causing trouble for the teacher that had to deal with their child) there was a small tangible incentive, and the parents literally got to buy off their guilt. (after all, in terms of babysitting 60 dollars a month is pretty cheap.) and when the fine was repealed, the parents had the excuse of: why bother rushing to school? I'm obviously not causing too much trouble. Then the parents got free babysitting and a clean conscience, but what about the stressed-out teachers and anxious children? Or when people started getting paid to donate blood, people started donating less blood because instead of a noble act, it became a painful way to make a quick buck. But if you make the incentive high enough, that's a game changer; For example, if blood was worth 5000 dollars a pint, people would be scrambling to meet the standards; and if the fine for late pickups was 100 dollars that would likely be the end of parents being late. But there are still many issues with raising the incentives if blood was suddenly worth 5000 dollars a pint; don't even

bother to deny that people wouldn't create fake ids to donate over the limits or even rob people of their blood at knifepoint, or try and pass off animal blood as their own. One of the ways to stop yourself from doing this is to think about the person who is at loss because of what you're doing if you feel the need to steal from a tip jar, for example, think about the store employees who are the ones who worked for these tips.

The last reason people commit moral licensing is by somehow convincing themselves that the person they are ripping off somehow deserves it or the telltale “if I didn't do it, someone else would have” the biggest issue with both of these is the fact that they involve not only hurting and deceiving others, but deceiving yourself and hurting yourself by causing future consequences.

For example: say you are a school track star, and winning your race determines who is going to the championships, but you see that you are going to lose if you do not push the other racer behind, and you tell yourself, she deserved it she is such a bad sport. Or as a teacher, taking student government funds and pocketing them yourself. The best way to avoid this is to be completely honest with yourself, and if you hear that little alarm bell going off, to stop what you're doing and ask yourself if what you're doing is really ethical or not

These three reasons and excuses for moral reasoning are everywhere, and even ethical people like Mahatma Gandhi, Mother Teresa and Malala Yousafzai are ethically and morally bound to a small self serving bias. The best way to defend yourself against moral licensing is to always admit to your mistakes and when you do a good deed not to let it go to

your head; if you are having trouble with this you can always talk about it with a trusted family member or teacher.

There is nothing wrong with getting a second opinion and it's often better to get the information of your chest.