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Ethics: Ethics & Laws

Define ethics?

The basic concepts and fundamental principles of decent human conduct. It includes study of universal values such as the essential equality of all men and women, human or natural rights, obedience to the law of land, concern for health and safety and, increasingly, also for the natural environment.

Ethics is defined as, the philosophical study of the moral value of human conduct and of the rules and principles that ought to govern it; moral philosophy.

A social, religious, or civil code of behavior considered correct, esp. that of a particular group, profession, or individual

The moral fitness of a decision, course of action, etc.

Are laws based on ethics?

No the laws are not based on ethics.

Law is based on thousands of years of pragmatic experience telling us what's practical to administer and desirable for fairness. There are exceptions caused by legislators and jurists who mistakenly believe law should be based on ethics. Ethics-based laws have caused a lot of problems before they were overturned or modified to make them practical to administer and consistent with other laws.

Ethics are moral philosophy where a person makes a specific moral choice and sticks to it, whereas law is a system that comprises of rules and principles to govern a society. Though, ethics are based on the goodwill of law, ethics completely differ in their foundation, basis and purpose.

Do laws affect ethical values?

Ethical behavior is not always best defined within the confines of the law. Ethics and the law are not identical. It is said that the law sets minimum standards of behavior while ethics sets maximum standards.

Many people make the mistake of thinking following the law equates with being an ethical person. This what is known as ethical legalism. This is not so. The laws set minimum standards of ethical behavior. Ethical people go beyond the laws. Although ethical people always try to be law-abiding, there may be instances where their sense of ethics tells them it is best not to follow the law. These situations are rare and should be based on sound ethical reasons. For example, workplace treatment of others may not violate employer-employee laws but still be unethical, such as forms of cyber-bullying.

In philosophy, ethics defines what is good for the individual and for society and establishes the nature of duties that people owe themselves and one another. The following items are characteristics of ethics:

* Ethics involves learning what is right and wrong, and then doing the right thing.
* Most ethical decisions have extended consequences.
* Most ethical decisions have multiple alternatives.
* Most ethical decisions have mixed outcomes.
* Most ethical decisions have uncertain consequences.
* Most ethical decisions have personal implications.

Though law often embodies ethical principles, law and ethics are far from co-extensive. The law does not prohibit many acts that would be widely condemned as unethical.