**Course:** Media Ethics and Laws

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**INTRODUCTION TO LAWS AND ETHICS**

**What is Law?**

A law is basically a body of principles or rules which are the basis of a society and are abide by the society. No system in a society can exist without a law. Human life needs a proper rule of conduct or principle at every step. It is also important for a successful society. If it will not happen then there will be anarchy and disturbance in a society and it will not exist for long.

There are various definitions of law. Some of them are as follows:

1. A rule of conduct or procedure established by custom, agreement, or authority.

2. A code of principles based on morality, conscience, or nature.

3. A law is rules of conduct of any organized society, however simple or small, that are enforced by threat of punishment if they are violated. Modern law has a wide sweep and regulates many branches of conduct. A body of rules of conduct of binding legal force and effect, prescribed, recognized, and enforced by controlling authority.

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In simple terms, the **law** may be understood as the systematic set of universally accepted rules and regulation created by an appropriate authority such as government, which may be regional, national, international, etc. It is used to govern the action and behavior of the members and can be enforced, by imposing penalties.

**Need and importance of law**

There are a number incidents taking place all the time which could be harmful to people. This leads to the need of making law. People need a proper code of life. They need to know these as well as others right to lead a peaceful life. Laws were made by the kings to empower themselves

Why laws are too important for a society or for a community?

In ancient periods, laws were made due to fear, like prohibited areas in this case animals or the nature were the main force to construct laws or restrictions.

Actually, restrictions were the first source of laws that were adopted by human beings. Today, we believe that it was our ancestors who made life very miserable in some context. On the other hand, we are highly blessed that we do not need to go in details of such things proved by our forefathers’ experiences. However, it is quite clear that we need some rules and regulation to live. So, that’s why we make laws to be known as knowledgeable creature. We are ruling over other creatures because of the law that is “Survival of the fittest”.

**Types of Laws**

1. **Natural Laws**

Even nature has certain laws which are strictly obeyed by nature as well as its creatures. Such as laws of sunrise and sun set, changing of day and nights, revolving of earth around sun, law of birth and death. Such laws are above human control and cannot be altered. We have to obey them. Thus they also affect our customs, culture, traditions and on the whole our whole life.

1. **Common Laws**

Common laws are dependent on natural laws but natural laws are not dependent on common laws. For example let’s talk about our traffic laws. They were made to control the traffic, to bring a discipline and organization in traffic system. If there would be no laws there would be no discipline n thus it will cause disturbance not for an individual but for a whole society so if has given a sense to society that if they will obey them there would be a discipline and peace. A gentle and sensible man always obey the laws not because of fear but because he has been trained like that since his childhood. But some people obey them because of the fear of being punished. Because if you will break any law whether it’s manmade or natural law, you will have to pay for them. In other words you will be punished.

**What are ethics?**

Ethics is a branch of philosophy. It is related to human nature. It reflects our behavior. It plays an important role in building up our nature and behavior. As a society is made by people and their behavior and ethics plays an important role in organizing our behaviors so it is an important part of a society.

**Ethics** are the principles that guide a person or society, created to decide what is good or bad, right or wrong, in a given situation. It regulates a person’s behavior or conduct and helps an individual in living a good life, by applying the moral rules and guidelines.

**DEFINITIONS**

Following are some of the definitions of ethics as is defined by some philosophers.

1. Ethics is a branch of philosophy that deals with moral component of human life.

Ethics are involved in a society to a great extent. Even they are much involved in human life therefore the more a person is having or following ethics in his life, the more his life become decent, disciplined and organized. Hence it is an important component of human life.

1. It reflects a society’s notions about the rightness or wrongness of an act and the distinctions between virtue and vice.

Ethics is taken as a collection of principles or a code of rules. It consists of such rules which a society adopts in its daily routine. Sometimes some of the rules or principles are set by the society and you have to obey them. For example drinking is prohibited in an Islamic society but there are no restrictions in western societies on it. Therefore being a Muslim and a part of Muslim society it is compulsory for us to stay away from it. Even for an Islamic state it is unlawful. But if we are in a western society as there is no restriction hence now is the place where our ethics comes into action.

1. Ethics is often thought of as a set of principles or a code of moral conduct.

As we have discussed in the above example, that there are some places where we are no bounded for certain things. There are no restrictions on us. It is that time where we have to utilize our personal ethics to differentiate between right and wrong. Hence ethics regulate our moral conduct.

1. Ethics involves the evolution and application of those moral values that a society or culture has accepted as its norms

It means that there are certain things which are purposed and applied by the society. They are then accepts as the cultural norms of that society. It also differentiates it from other societies. Hence it has been shown by the above definitions that ethics is a branch of social sciences that deals with the moral conduct of individuals and also it is a collection of certain norms that are formulated and followed by a society.

**Sources of Ethics**

There are certain sources of ethics. These sources include those persons, places or people which affect our lives at different stages and thus help us in developing and adopting our ethics.

These sources are as follows.

• Parents

• Peer groups

• Educational institutions

• Observations & Experiences

• Society

**Parents**

Parents are the primary and most important source of ethics. They are the first source whish introduce us to the worlds. They teach us how to behave, how to talk how to walk, how to eat and above all how to develop our ethics i.e. the way to deal with others.

**Peer Group**

Our second source of ethics is our peer group. This includes our age fellows and our friends. So it is the first time when you interact with the people other than your family. You gain many things from here also. The most important thing you get from your peer group is the development of your attitude. For example some of the children developed tolerance. Others may gain to react harshly to certain situations .Hence it also play an important role in developing ones self.

**Educational Institutions**

It includes development at two levels.

* School level when we are at a stage of learning and adopting thing. At this period of age children try to copy others. They try to gain the qualities of those personalities which they like the most. So people around him specially teachers try to develop good qualities in them. They try to make them differentiate between right and wrong.
* At Higher Educational level when children have both the pictures in front of them. Now they are socially bound to show their ethics. It is the time when others expect the practical side of their ethics they have learned so far. Hence they have to prove themselves what kind of nature he has developed so far.

**Observations & Experiences**

After passing through your higher education, the next source is our own observations and experiences. Because at this level we are mature enough to observe our society.

Secondly when we talk about experiences then there are two possibilities.

1. We can learn from others’ experiences

2. We can experience our self.

**Society**

This is the biggest source of learning as it is effective at all stages of life but becomes even more effective when it comes in our practical life. It is the time or stage which requires more responsibilities and ethical behaviors from us.

**Comparison Chart**

| **BASIS FOR COMPARISON** | **LAW** | **ETHICS** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Meaning | The law refers to a systematic body of rules that governs the whole society and the actions of its individual members. | Ethics is a branch of moral philosophy that guides people about the basic human conduct. |
| What is it? | Set of rules and regulations | Set of guidelines |
| Governed By | Government | Individual, Legal and Professional norms |
| Expression | Expressed and published in writing. | They are abstract. |
| Violation | Violation of law is not permissible which may result in punishment like imprisonment or fine or both. | There is no punishment for violation of ethics. |
| Objective | Law is created with an intent to maintain social order and peace in the society and provide protection to all the citizens. | Ethics are made to help people to decide what is right or wrong and how to act. |
| Binding | Law has a legal binding. | Ethics do not have a binding nature. |