

Legislation, Laws, Not the Same Thing

How much do you respect and obey laws? How much should you? I suppose that depends on what you mean by “laws.”

Most people confuse legislation for laws. Laws were discovered — usually thousands of years ago — while legislation is made up by politicians and imposed under threat of violence as if it were law. Occasionally, legislation is written to copy or reflect law, but not often.

Law concerns respecting the rights of others, while legislation is almost entirely written to give excuses for government to violate individual rights. Thus “don’t murder” is a law, while “pay this tax” is legislation.

Laws don’t need to be written down for you to have the right to defend your life, liberty, or property from violators. Nor do laws have to be enforced. People must only be allowed to defend themselves and others from anyone who violates law.

Since most people use the word “law” for legislation, I’ll make things simple and switch to following the common usage below. Just keep the difference in mind.

I have lived in many places. Each time I moved to a new place I was subjected to a new set of laws. I never felt glad about the laws that were being enforced in my new location. Not even once. I have, however, often been glad about the laws that either hadn’t been written or weren’t being enforced.

I’m much more likely to comply with a harmless policy, even if it’s arbitrary, if I’m asked nicely than I am if someone puts it into legislative language and turns it into a threat. I see all laws as a negative; a drain on society. The fewer laws, the better.

In the Tao Te Ching, written in the 6th century BCE, Lao Tzu wrote: “The more laws and restrictions there are, the poorer people become ... The more laws and commands there are, the more thieves and robbers there will be.”

So, thousands of years ago, smart people had already realized that laws aren’t good for society. Politicians and their hired guns still pretend otherwise.

I once asked a retired deputy sheriff — a former legislation enforcement officer — whether something was “legal.” He replied, “By the time a person sits down to breakfast they’ve already broken a bunch of laws, so don’t worry about it. Just live the best you can without harming anyone else and you’ll be better than most people.”

Great advice for everyone, unless you suffer from a law fetish.