

**Conversation: Do we need laws?**

[Instructions: read the conversation and recognize the habits of excellent and non-excellent thinking. Highlight which excellent or non-excellent habit you recognize next to the sentence in which this habit was displayed. You can apply habits from the table below:

Habits of excellent thinking	Habits of non-excellent thinking
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Listening to different points of view.</li> <li>» Making a judgment based on good reasons.</li> <li>» Gathering enough evidence.</li> <li>» Considering if I might be wrong.</li> <li>» Being open-minded.</li> <li>» Being curious.</li> <li>» Being interested in truth more than in being right.</li> <li>» Asking advice from wise people.</li> <li>» Thinking about the consequences of your ideas and actions.</li> <li>» Being consistent in your positions.</li> <li>» Accepting valid criticism.</li> <li>» Providing arguments for your positions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Using stereotypes.</li> <li>» Judging based on prejudice.</li> <li>» Rushing to conclusion.</li> <li>» Discarding valid criticism because it makes you feel bad.</li> <li>» Disregarding some opinion because I don't like a person who is saying it.</li> <li>» Taking things for granted.</li> <li>» Letting anger blur your judgment.</li> <li>» Arguing that something is true simply because you say so.</li> <li>» Distorting someone's argument.</li> <li>» Attacking the person's character to discredit their argument.</li> <li>» Being intentionally ambiguous.</li> <li>» Avoid answering a legitimate question.</li> </ul>

Note: some habits may occur more than once. Not all habits from the table are necessarily present in the conversation.]

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### CONVERSATION:

Mike, John and Lucy were on their way to school when Lucy started talking about the documentary she saw last night.

**Lucy:** Last night I saw what horrible things Nazi Germany did to people they didn't like. All people are equal in their worth, I don't see how they could think anything different.

**John:** I agree. Something like that should have never happened.

**Lucy:** Yes, it all happened because one man enforced a law and made other people act that way. People were punished if they refused to cooperate. Laws don't do us any good. I wish there weren't any laws.

**Mike:** I don't think this conclusion is right.

**Lucy:** What? So, you don't mind that laws tortured people?

**Mike:** That's not what I am saying. Let me explain. I just think the situation is more complex than that. Although those were really bad laws, laws, in general, are not useless. For example, given that we are vulnerable and the altruism of others is limited, we cannot survive without rules prohibiting the free use of violence; so such rules are necessary.

**John:** Why do you always have to stand out and be special? Can't you agree with everyone just once?

**Lucy:** I see what you mean by that, Mike, but how do you explain that precisely the laws didn't protect people, but they incited violence?

**Mike:** Yes, you are right. As I said, laws are not without flaws, but I don't think the idea that all laws should not exist is something we should agree with. The laws should be made in a way that persons are put before the laws. Laws exist for the persons and not the other way around. It's not that people exist to follow the laws.

**John:** Ok, so you are saying that each person should act according to his or her private standards. In that way, no one can impose their standards through laws.

**Mike:** I think there should be a consensus which standards we should implement as laws. That's why we have different declarations which say that the human dignity of every person is to be respected in every way. Therefore, laws should be made in a way that recognizes human dignity and protects each person's rights.

**John:** You are just trying to be smart in front of us. We are not in school yet. You can't get an A from us.

**Lucy:** Ok, I know what I said and what I saw yesterday, but how can we guarantee that leaders of countries will follow some objective standards and not their private ones?

**John:** I think that everyone should follow their own standards. There is no one truth that everyone should follow. Everyone who doesn't think this way obviously needs to educate himself more and stop being so rigid and try to impose their opinion. Great philosophers would all agree.

**Mike:** Aren't the subjective moral standards the most problematic thing here? Isn't relativizing objective standards such as human dignity, the reason why these laws passed in the first place?

**John:** I know what I believe and this is that laws only limit people, they prevent us from being truly free.

**Mike:** Lucy, to be honest, I don't have all the answers. I think we should ask our history or ethics professor to help us with this problem.

**John:** I don't see a need for that, I believe I am right and nothing can change it.

**Lucy:** I thought of another problem with your opinion on this, Mike. What should the people do once this or any other immoral or unjust standard is enforced as law? For example, laws allowing slavery or racial segregation.

**Mike:** I know this is a problem. I guess what we should do is practice habits of excellent thinking in order to determine which laws are just before bringing them. But, if our leaders enforce unjust laws which don't respect human dignity, then I believe we shouldn't follow them, but we should work to change them.

**Lucy:** OK, maybe this makes sense. Maybe a complete absence of laws could lead to chaotic behavior. So maybe my views are wrong, but still, I can't say I completely agree with you. I definitely need to do more research. I think there is a potential of misuse in all of this.

**Mike:** Definitely, but it can't be any better if there are no laws. I think that just laws can help us to know what is right and wrong. They also hold us responsible for our actions. And they protect the most vulnerable among us, those who cannot protect themselves. These are all good things we shouldn't easily discard.

**Lucy:** I guess you are right, I will think about it more thoroughly to consider everything that you were saying.

**John:** Ok, our class starts in one minute. We can finish the discussion later.