Case Study #1: Ethics of Whistleblowing

Read the ethics section in our text and the attached pieces from the ACLU, The Guardian, The New York Times, NBC News, NPR and The New Yorker, then answer the following questions. **The completed assignment should be three pages long, using 12 pt. fonts and single spacing with one inch margins.** Each answer should be proportionate to the number of points possible and each supporting quote should be no longer than one or two short sentences. All quotes must be from primary literature (the philosopher in question) and not from Solomon’s secondary commentary or any other non-primary source. Quotes must be cited and if pulled from our text all you need do is indicate the page – if not from our text, a full citation is required. Please separate and number each response as shown in the example attached. This exercise is worth a total of 105 points. **Your completed assignment is due on the 5th (M/W) / 6th (T/Th) of March.**

Keep Scrolling Down – Detailed instructions, rubrics and a sample completed assignment are on the pages following the Background!

Questions:

1. **Paraphrase** the argument made by the ACLU in the first attached article concluding that Snowden should be granted immunity. (15 points)

2. **Fact-finding & Background Research:** Prior to determining whether granting Edward Snowden immunity is morally justifiable, what facts do you need to know about his case? Note that these should include questions regarding whistleblowing in general, granting political immunity and Snowden’s disclosures but not questions about Mill or Kant. **Provide as a bulleted list and pose in question form.** For this assignment, you do not have to do the research but you need to raise the kind of questions that would drive such a project. These should be research questions and as such should be concrete and answerable. No bias or prejudice should be evident and the questions should be non-normative. Think about facts that, if known might help determine how one should or could respond to the case. (20 points)

3. **Would Kant be likely to urge the US to grant immunity to Snowden?** Defend your answer including specific details from Kant’s deontology. (30 points)

   3b. Provide and cite a quote from Kant supporting your answer. (5 points)

4. **Would Mill be likely to urge the US to grant immunity to Snowden?** Defend your answer using specific details from Mill’s utilitarian approach to ethics. (30 points)

   4b. Provide and cite a quote from Mill supporting your answer. (5 points)
Tuesday, 21 January 2014

UPDATE: This week The New York Times stood with the ACLU, calling Edward Snowden a whistle-blower and crediting him with the patriotic acts that helped expose the NSA’s unconstitutional surveillance program: “Considering the enormous value of the information he has revealed, and the abuses he has exposed, Mr. Snowden deserves better than a life of permanent exile, fear and flight.” We couldn’t agree more.

Edward Snowden is a great American who deserves full immunity for his patriotic acts. And we’re proud to serve as his legal advisors.

When Snowden blew the whistle on the NSA, he single-handedly reignited a global debate about government surveillance and our most fundamental rights as individuals.

And a federal judge just vindicated Snowden’s actions by declaring unconstitutional the NSA’s spying program, labeling it “Orwellian”— adding that James Madison would be “aghast.”

For more than 12 years, the ACLU has been fighting to end government surveillance that invades the rights and lives of millions of Americans with virtually no oversight. But when our years-long case against mass surveillance finally reached the Supreme Court, it was dismissed for lack of evidence of the secret programs. Snowden provided that evidence, at great personal risk.

Right now, Snowden still lives under threat—exiled in Russia far from his home and his family, and the victim of ongoing public attacks by the NSA and their surveillance allies.

And recently, former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations John Bolton said that Snowden “ought to swing from a tall oak tree” for exposing the NSA’s illegal programs.

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1 Please note that you are not limited to the background offered – you may feel free to use any credible/reliable source as evidence for your arguments. Please provide full citation for all research.

2 https://www.aclu.org/secure/grant_snowden_immunity
Despite all this, in a recent CBS News interview, a top NSA official opened the door to offering Snowden immunity under certain conditions (though we firmly believe it should be unconditional).

Obama acknowledges Edward Snowden disclosures in NSA reform speech

• President criticises 'unauthorised disclosures' from Snowden
• Admits debate on national security 'will make us stronger'

Adam Gabbatt in New York
theguardian.com, Friday 17 January 2014 13.54 EST

Edward Snowden was mentioned twice in Obama's 5,000-word NSA speech. Photograph: Uncredited/AP

President Barack Obama mentioned NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden by name on Friday as he criticised his “unauthorised disclosures” but acknowledged that they had sparked the public debate over US surveillance capabilities.

The president had largely avoided name checking Snowden his previous speeches on the NSA revelations which began on 5 June last year when the Guardian published details of the agency’s collection of all US phone records.

On Friday, Obama limited Snowden to two mentions in a more than 5,000 word speech.

“Given the fact of an open investigation, I’m not going to dwell on Mr Snowden’s actions or motivations,” Obama said as he announced reforms to the NSA including the end of government storage of phone data.

“I will say that our nation’s defence depends in part on the fidelity of those entrusted with our nation’s secrets.

“If any individual who objects to government policy can take it in their own hands to publicly disclose classified information, then we will never be able to keep our people safe, or conduct foreign policy.”

Despite his criticism for Snowden’s publication of the documents, Obama acknowledged the importance of the debate over government surveillance.

“One thing I’m certain of: this debate will make us stronger,” Obama said.

“It may seem sometimes that America is being held to a different standard, and the readiness of some to assume the worst motives by our government can be frustrating. No one expects China to have an open debate about their surveillance programs, or Russia to take the privacy concerns of citizens into account.

“But let us remember that we are held to a different standard precisely because we have been at the forefront in defending personal privacy and human dignity.”

Later Obama referred to the “Snowden disclosures” as he argued that the US “has special responsibilities as the world’s only superpower”.

Snowden is currently in Russia, where he was granted temporary asylum last August. He has been charged with theft of government property, unauthorised communication of national defence information and willful communication of classified communications intelligence information to an unauthorised person.

Obama criticised the “sensational way” the NSA revelations had come out, lamenting that it had “often shed more heat than light, while revealing methods to our adversaries that could impact our operations in ways that we may not fully understand for years to come”.

POLITICS

Congressional Leaders Suggest Earlier Snowden Link to Russia

By ERIC SCHMITT and DAVID E. SANGER
JAN. 19, 2014

WASHINGTON — The heads of the House and Senate Intelligence Committees suggested on Sunday that Edward J. Snowden, the former National Security Agency contractor, might have been working for Russian spy services while he was employed at an agency facility in Hawaii last year and before he disclosed hundreds of thousands of classified government documents.

The lawmakers, Representative Mike Rogers, Republican of Michigan, and Senator Dianne Feinstein, Democrat of California, offered no specific evidence that Mr. Snowden had cooperated with Moscow. Since Mr. Snowden’s disclosure first became public last spring, there has been much speculation that he was collaborating with a foreign spy service.

4 http://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/20/us/politics/congressional-leaders-suggest-snowden-was-working-for-russia.html?_r=0
Nearly a year later, however, there has been no public indication that the F.B.I.’s investigation of Mr. Snowden’s actions, bolstered by separate “damage assessment” investigations at the N.S.A. and the Pentagon, has uncovered evidence that Mr. Snowden received help from a foreign intelligence service. A senior F.B.I. official said on Sunday that it was still the bureau’s conclusion that Mr. Snowden acted alone.

The questions raised by Mr. Rogers and Ms. Feinstein came as the F.B.I. continues its investigation of Mr. Snowden, and as the debate rages about whether he was a traitor, a whistle-blower or a violator of his oaths who nonetheless started what President Obama again last week called an important debate. To some, he is all three.

The initial portrayals of Mr. Snowden depicted a young man shocked by the scope of government surveillance and determined to expose it. In his insistence that he would release only documents showing what he viewed as government wrongdoing or overreach by intelligence agencies, he appeared to be cultivating an image as a whistle-blower.

The main recipients of his materials, including The Washington Post and The Guardian, have said that Mr. Snowden insisted that material revealing operations, but no wrongdoing, should not appear in public.

But Mr. Rogers described a very different view of Mr. Snowden, as a man who, from the beginning, might have knowingly or unknowingly been directed by a foreign intelligence service. He said the mass of military data in the Snowden trove clearly had nothing to do with privacy or the reach of intelligence services, and he suggested that Mr. Snowden’s possession of a “go bag” to get out of Hawaii, and his smooth entry into Hong Kong, indicated preplanning beyond his individual capacity.

Intelligence officials say they have no doubt that Chinese and Russian intelligence have obtained whatever information Mr. Snowden was carrying with him digitally. They also say it is possible that much of the data Mr. Snowden took is stored in an Internet cloud service.

Mr. Snowden has said he did not turn over any documents to any foreign governments; American officials say that given the cyber skills of the Russian and Chinese intelligence agencies, they assume that those countries could have gotten them without Mr. Snowden’s knowledge.

Mr. Obama weighed in on the subject in a newly released interview with David Remnick of The New Yorker. He insisted Mr. Snowden had not revealed any illegalities, and though he might have raised “legitimate policy questions” the question was, “Is the only way to do that by giving some 29-year-old free rein to basically dump a mountain of information, much of which is definitely legal, definitely necessary for national security, and should properly be classified?”

Mr. Obama insisted that “the benefit of the debate he generated was not worth the damage done, because there was another way of doing it.” But he did not say what that way was, and even his own aides acknowledge that if Mr. Snowden had not made so much information public, it was doubtful that the president would have announced the reforms and further studies of N.S.A. actions that he spoke about on Friday.

On Sunday, Mr. Rogers appeared to hinge many of his suspicions about Mr. Snowden on a recent Defense Intelligence Agency report that he has described in other interviews as concluding that Mr. Snowden stole about 1.7 million intelligence files that concern vital operations of the United States Army, Navy, Marine Corps and Air Force. He said that it would cost billions of dollars to change operations because of the security breaches.
The defense intelligence report remains classified, though some members of Congress have been briefed on it in recent weeks.

“I don’t think it was a gee-whiz luck event that he ended up in Moscow under the handling of the F.S.B.,” Mr. Rogers said on the NBC program “Meet the Press,” referring to the Federal Security Service, the Russian state security organization that succeeded the K.G.B.

Ben Wizner, an American Civil Liberties Union lawyer who advises Mr. Snowden, said in a telephone interview on Sunday that Mr. Rogers’s statement was “not only false, it is silly.”

Mr. Wizner said that Mr. Snowden’s actions before seeking asylum in Russia were not consistent with someone who was working for a foreign government, pointing out that Mr. Snowden flew to Hong Kong, where he gave classified documents to American journalists. He then sought to travel to Ecuador, and was marooned for five weeks in the transit zone of Moscow’s international airport while he sought asylum in some 20 countries.

Mr. Wizner also criticized Mr. Rogers’ description of the defense agency report as “exaggerated national security claims.”

American suspicions had been raised in part, according to one official familiar with the intelligence, because intelligence agencies believe that some of the information apparently stored with an Internet cloud service has been changed or moved in recent months. It is not clear how much American intelligence agencies know about where all the trove of data is now stored.

The United States is concerned that Russian agents may have access to the data while Mr. Snowden is in the country under temporary asylum, or in exchange for his asylum.

Ms. Feinstein, when asked by David Gregory, the host of “Meet the Press,” whether she agreed with Mr. Rogers that Mr. Snowden might have had help from the Russians, was more tentative: “He may well have. We don’t know at this stage.”

Both lawmakers said their committees would continue their investigations.

Mr. Snowden has been living in Russia since June; in August the authorities there granted him temporary asylum. The Russian government has refused to extradite Mr. Snowden, who has been charged with espionage and stealing government property, to the United States.

A version of this article appears in print on January 20, 2014, on page A5 of the New York edition with the headline: Lawmakers Suggest Snowden Link to Russia Before He Leaked Data.
The 29-year-old source behind the biggest intelligence leak in the NSA's history explains his motives, his uncertain future and why he never intended on hiding in the shadows

The individual responsible for one of the most significant leaks in US political history is Edward Snowden, a 29-year-old former technical assistant for the CIA and current employee of the defence contractor Booz Allen Hamilton. Snowden has been working at the National Security Agency for the last four years as an employee of various outside contractors, including Booz Allen and Dell.

The Guardian, after several days of interviews, is revealing his identity at his request. From the moment he decided to disclose numerous top-secret documents to the public, he was determined not to opt for the protection of anonymity. "I have no intention of hiding who I am because I know I have done nothing wrong," he said.

Snowden will go down in history as one of America's most consequential whistleblowers, alongside Daniel Ellsberg and Bradley Manning. He is responsible for handing over material from one of the world's most secretive organisations – the NSA.

In a note accompanying the first set of documents he provided, he wrote: "I understand that I will be made to suffer for my actions," but "I will be satisfied if the federation of secret law, unequal pardon and irresistible executive powers that rule the world that I love are revealed even for an instant."

http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2013/jun/09/edward-snowden-nsa-whistleblower-surveillance
Despite his determination to be publicly unveiled, he repeatedly insisted that he wants to avoid the media spotlight. "I don't want public attention because I don't want the story to be about me. I want it to be about what the US government is doing."

He does not fear the consequences of going public, he said, only that doing so will distract attention from the issues raised by his disclosures. "I know the media likes to personalise political debates, and I know the government will demonise me."

Despite these fears, he remained hopeful his outing will not divert attention from the substance of his disclosures. "I really want the focus to be on these documents and the debate which I hope this will trigger among citizens around the globe about what kind of world we want to live in." He added: "My sole motive is to inform the public as to that which is done in their name and that which is done against them."

He has had "a very comfortable life" that included a salary of roughly $200,000, a girlfriend with whom he shared a home in Hawaii, a stable career, and a family he loves. "I'm willing to sacrifice all of that because I can't in good conscience allow the US government to destroy privacy, internet freedom and basic liberties for people around the world with this massive surveillance machine they're secretly building."

'I am not afraid, because this is the choice I've made'

Three weeks ago, Snowden made final preparations that resulted in last week's series of blockbuster news stories. At the NSA office in Hawaii where he was working, he copied the last set of documents he intended to disclose.

He then advised his NSA supervisor that he needed to be away from work for "a couple of weeks" in order to receive treatment for epilepsy, a condition he learned he suffers from after a series of seizures last year.

As he packed his bags, he told his girlfriend that he had to be away for a few weeks, though he said he was vague about the reason. "That is not an uncommon occurrence for someone who has spent the last decade working in the intelligence world."

On May 20, he boarded a flight to Hong Kong, where he has remained ever since. He chose the city because "they have a spirited commitment to free speech and the right of political dissent", and because he believed that it was one of the few places in the world that both could and would resist the dictates of the US government.

In the three weeks since he arrived, he has been ensconced in a hotel room. "I've left the room maybe a total of three times during my entire stay," he said. It is a plush hotel and, what with eating meals in his room too, he has run up big bills.

He is deeply worried about being spied on. He lines the door of his hotel room with pillows to prevent eavesdropping. He puts a large red hood over his head and laptop when entering his passwords to prevent any hidden cameras from detecting them.
Though that may sound like paranoia to some, Snowden has good reason for such fears. He worked in the US intelligence world for almost a decade. He knows that the biggest and most secretive surveillance organisation in America, the NSA, along with the most powerful government on the planet, is looking for him.

Since the disclosures began to emerge, he has watched television and monitored the internet, hearing all the threats and vows of prosecution emanating from Washington.

And he knows only too well the sophisticated technology available to them and how easy it will be for them to find him. The NSA police and other law enforcement officers have twice visited his home in Hawaii and already contacted his girlfriend, though he believes that may have been prompted by his absence from work, and not because of suspicions of any connection to the leaks.

"All my options are bad," he said. The US could begin extradition proceedings against him, a potentially problematic, lengthy and unpredictable course for Washington. Or the Chinese government might whisk him away for questioning, viewing him as a useful source of information. Or he might end up being grabbed and bundled into a plane bound for US territory.

"Yes, I could be rendered by the CIA. I could have people come after me. Or any of the third-party partners. They work closely with a number of other nations. Or they could pay off the Triads. Any of their agents or assets," he said.

"We have got a CIA station just up the road – the consulate here in Hong Kong – and I am sure they are going to be busy for the next week. And that is a concern I will live with for the rest of my life, however long that happens to be."

Having watched the Obama administration prosecute whistleblowers at a historically unprecedented rate, he fully expects the US government to attempt to use all its weight to punish him. "I am not afraid," he said calmly, "because this is the choice I've made."

He predicts the government will launch an investigation and "say I have broken the Espionage Act and helped our enemies, but that can be used against anyone who points out how massive and invasive the system has become".

The only time he became emotional during the many hours of interviews was when he pondered the impact his choices would have on his family, many of whom work for the US government. "The only thing I fear is the harmful effects on my family, who I won't be able to help any more. That's what keeps me up at night," he said, his eyes welling up with tears.

'You can't wait around for someone else to act'

Snowden did not always believe the US government posed a threat to his political values. He was brought up originally in Elizabeth City, North Carolina. His family moved later to Maryland, near the NSA headquarters in Fort Meade.
By his own admission, he was not a stellar student. In order to get the credits necessary to obtain a high school diploma, he attended a community college in Maryland, studying computing, but never completed the coursework. (He later obtained his GED.)

In 2003, he enlisted in the US army and began a training program to join the Special Forces. Invoking the same principles that he now cites to justify his leaks, he said: "I wanted to fight in the Iraq war because I felt like I had an obligation as a human being to help free people from oppression".

He recounted how his beliefs about the war's purpose were quickly dispelled. "Most of the people training us seemed pumped up about killing Arabs, not helping anyone," he said. After he broke both his legs in a training accident, he was discharged.

After that, he got his first job in an NSA facility, working as a security guard for one of the agency's covert facilities at the University of Maryland. From there, he went to the CIA, where he worked on IT security. His understanding of the internet and his talent for computer programming enabled him to rise fairly quickly for someone who lacked even a high school diploma.

By 2007, the CIA stationed him with diplomatic cover in Geneva, Switzerland. His responsibility for maintaining computer network security meant he had clearance to access a wide array of classified documents.

That access, along with the almost three years he spent around CIA officers, led him to begin seriously questioning the rightness of what he saw.

He described as formative an incident in which he claimed CIA operatives were attempting to recruit a Swiss banker to obtain secret banking information. Snowden said they achieved this by purposely getting the banker drunk and encouraging him to drive home in his car. When the banker was arrested for drunk driving, the undercover agent seeking to befriend him offered to help, and a bond was formed that led to successful recruitment.

"Much of what I saw in Geneva really disillusioned me about how my government functions and what its impact is in the world," he says. "I realised that I was part of something that was doing far more harm than good."

He said it was during his CIA stint in Geneva that he thought for the first time about exposing government secrets. But, at the time, he chose not to for two reasons.

First, he said: "Most of the secrets the CIA has are about people, not machines and systems, so I didn't feel comfortable with disclosures that I thought could endanger anyone". Secondly, the election of Barack Obama in 2008 gave him hope that there would be real reforms, rendering disclosures unnecessary.

He left the CIA in 2009 in order to take his first job working for a private contractor that assigned him to a functioning NSA facility, stationed on a military base in Japan. It was then, he
said, that he "watched as Obama advanced the very policies that I thought would be reined in", and as a result, "I got hardened."

The primary lesson from this experience was that "you can't wait around for someone else to act. I had been looking for leaders, but I realised that leadership is about being the first to act."

Over the next three years, he learned just how all-consuming the NSA's surveillance activities were, claiming "they are intent on making every conversation and every form of behaviour in the world known to them".

He described how he once viewed the internet as "the most important invention in all of human history". As an adolescent, he spent days at a time "speaking to people with all sorts of views that I would never have encountered on my own".

But he believed that the value of the internet, along with basic privacy, is being rapidly destroyed by ubiquitous surveillance. "I don't see myself as a hero," he said, "because what I'm doing is self-interested: I don't want to live in a world where there's no privacy and therefore no room for intellectual exploration and creativity."

Once he reached the conclusion that the NSA's surveillance net would soon be irrevocable, he said it was just a matter of time before he chose to act. "What they're doing" poses "an existential threat to democracy", he said.

A matter of principle

As strong as those beliefs are, there still remains the question: why did he do it? Giving up his freedom and a privileged lifestyle? "There are more important things than money. If I were motivated by money, I could have sold these documents to any number of countries and gotten very rich."

For him, it is a matter of principle. "The government has granted itself power it is not entitled to. There is no public oversight. The result is people like myself have the latitude to go further than they are allowed to," he said.

His allegiance to internet freedom is reflected in the stickers on his laptop: "I support Online Rights: Electronic Frontier Foundation," reads one. Another hails the online organisation offering anonymity, the Tor Project.

Asked by reporters to establish his authenticity to ensure he is not some fantasist, he laid bare, without hesitation, his personal details, from his social security number to his CIA ID and his expired diplomatic passport. There is no shiftiness. Ask him about anything in his personal life and he will answer.

He is quiet, smart, easy-going and self-effacing. A master on computers, he seemed happiest when talking about the technical side of surveillance, at a level of detail comprehensible probably only to fellow communication specialists. But he showed intense passion when talking
about the value of privacy and how he felt it was being steadily eroded by the behaviour of the intelligence services.

His manner was calm and relaxed but he has been understandably twitchy since he went into hiding, waiting for the knock on the hotel door. A fire alarm goes off. "That has not happened before," he said, betraying anxiety wondering if was real, a test or a CIA ploy to get him out onto the street.

Strewn about the side of his bed are his suitcase, a plate with the remains of room-service breakfast, and a copy of Angler, the biography of former vice-president Dick Cheney.

Ever since last week's news stories began to appear in the Guardian, Snowden has vigilantly watched TV and read the internet to see the effects of his choices. He seemed satisfied that the debate he longed to provoke was finally taking place.

He lay, propped up against pillows, watching CNN's Wolf Blitzer ask a discussion panel about government intrusion if they had any idea who the leaker was. From 8,000 miles away, the leaker looked on impassively, not even indulging in a wry smile.

Snowden said that he admires both Ellsberg and Manning, but argues that there is one important distinction between himself and the army private, whose trial coincidentally began the week Snowden's leaks began to make news.

"I carefully evaluated every single document I disclosed to ensure that each was legitimately in the public interest," he said. "There are all sorts of documents that would have made a big impact that I didn't turn over, because harming people isn't my goal. Transparency is."

He purposely chose, he said, to give the documents to journalists whose judgment he trusted about what should be public and what should remain concealed.

As for his future, he is vague. He hoped the publicity the leaks have generated will offer him some protection, making it "harder for them to get dirty".

He views his best hope as the possibility of asylum, with Iceland – with its reputation of a champion of internet freedom – at the top of his list. He knows that may prove a wish unfulfilled.

But after the intense political controversy he has already created with just the first week's haul of stories, "I feel satisfied that this was all worth it. I have no regrets."
Republican Sen. Saxby Chambliss tells NBC's Meet The Press on Sunday that information leaked to the media by former NSA contractor Edward Snowden has caused terrorists to change their tactics to thwart detection.

Asked if Snowden, believed to be in hiding in Hong Kong, qualified as a "traitor" who should face U.S. justice, Chambliss, R-Ga., replied, "If he's not a traitor, then he's pretty darn close to it.

"And as far as getting him back here, he needs to look an American jury in the eye and explain why he has disclosed sources and methods that are going to put American lives in danger," said Chambliss, the ranking member on the Select Committee on Intelligence.

Snowden worked as a contractor for the National Security Agency in Hawaii before giving The Guardian newspaper a series of exclusives on the agency's surveillance programs.

Chambliss, who has been an outspoken in his support of the NSA's secret collection of phone record metadata and Internet surveillance efforts since they were made public earlier this month, says "there's no question" that Snowden's revelations damaged American security.

"We know now that because of his disclosure that the terrorists, the bad guys around the world, are taking some different tactics, and they know a little bit more about how we're gathering information on them," Chambliss told NBC.

The remarks come after top U.S. intelligence officials told The Associated Press late Saturday that information gathered from the controversial data-collection programs was used to thwart terrorist plots in the U.S. and 20 other countries.

The AP reported that the unnamed officials did not elaborate on the plots, but said that in 2012 "fewer than 300 phone numbers were checked against the database of millions of U.S. phone records gathered daily by the NSA in one of the programs."

Analysis: What does Putin get from giving temporary asylum to Edward Snowden?7

By Jim Maceda, Correspondent, NBC News

President Barack Obama cancelled his one-on-one meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin, after Russia provided asylum to NSA leaker Edward Snowden. A political panel joins MSNBC’s Chris Jansing to discuss.

MOSCOW, Russia – The decision to grant temporary asylum to Edward Snowden was a key reason behind Wednesday’s cancelation by the White House of planned talks between President Barack Obama and Russia’s Vladimir Putin.

So what does Russia’s president get out of his help for the self-declared leaker of classified NSA documents? Especially when – at least for now – there’s no indication that Russian intelligence has debriefed the young defector.

Veteran Kremlin-watcher Fyodor Lukyanov last month commented that letting Snowden into Russia would be like “turning a small headache into a major migraine.”

So why did Putin take on this massive headache?

First, because he can. Putin could simply not resist an act that would not only embarrass Washington, but remind it that Russia, not America, is now in the driver’s seat of their east-west relationship.

Second, because most reliable opinion polls here suggest a majority of Russians think Snowden should be given permanent asylum in Russia. That means Snowden’s presence could be a vote-winner for Putin, who already has eyes on a fourth term in office, after elections in 2018.

Third, because doing so would be popular among America’s adversaries. As Lukyanov puts it: “If Putin cares about nothing else, he cares about how the Third World thinks about Russia. And the Third World sees Snowden as a hero who spilled the beans on imperialist America. Putin is sensitive to that. There’s too much at stake not to be.”

Finally, Putin saw a chance to strike at the heart of the US-Russia rivalry – the fight over each other’s human rights record.

In this context, Snowden is Putin’s early Christmas present. He can hold Snowden up as a beacon for those who speak the truth about government abuse of individual freedoms- even as he cracks down on gays, NGOs, and all forms of opposition.

Putin had to know that releasing Snowden would get America’s goat – a judgment confirmed by Wednesday’s announcement by the White House.

Russian observers say that, like all headaches, this one will pass for Putin. And even a migraine is a small price for Putin to pay for taking the spotlight away from the United States.

Wednesday’s stumble in Moscow-Washington relations underlines the difficulty in trying to second-guess Putin, and has echoes in recent history.

George W. Bush claimed in 2001 that he had looked into the Russian leader’s eyes and “was able to get a sense of his soul.”

The NSA leaker was stranded for six weeks in Moscow’s Sheremetyevo airport, but with a one-year refugee passport, he spent his first night of freedom in Russia at the home of an American expat family. NBC’s Jim Maceda reports.

Could he have seen that, six years later, Putin would stun the annual Munich Security Conference with a fiery speech that railed against the U.S. and came just short of declaring a new Cold War? He slammed U.S. military action in the Middle East as “unilateral” and “illegitimate,” saying Washington had created global instability. “They bring us to the abyss of one conflict after another,” Putin said.

A year later, Putin invaded the former Soviet republic of Georgia - one of Bush’s key allies. Russian soldiers are still there.

After Snowden fled to Moscow from Hong Kong in June, Putin quickly signaled that he had no time for the former intelligence contractor, and expressed hope he would soon continue onward to Havana.
Misreading Putin’s position, Washington chose to treat Snowden like a chess piece, blocking all his possible next moves by issuing arrest warrants and closing off airspace.

It was an understandable gambit. But Putin did exactly what the White House hoped he would not do.

Indeed, Russia’s Federal Migration Service not only approved Snowden’s request for temporary one-year asylum, but also processed the paperwork in record time – barely two weeks, compared to the usual wait of between three and six months.

Snowden is now living in undisclosed quarters somewhere in Moscow, the guest of American ex-pat supporters, catching up on sleep as he embarks on a new life of exile in Russia.

Jim Maceda, a London-based correspondent for NBC News, has covered Russia and the former Soviet Union for three decades.

The assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr., and Robert F. Kennedy led directly to the passage of a historic law, the Gun Control Act of 1968. Does that change your view of the assassinations? Should we be grateful for the deaths of these two men?

Of course not. That’s lunatic logic. But the same reasoning is now being applied to the actions of Edward Snowden.

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Of course not. That’s lunatic logic. But the same reasoning is now being applied to the actions of Edward Snowden.
Snowden. Yes, the thinking goes, Snowden may have violated the law, but the outcome has been so worthwhile. According to Glenn Greenwald, the journalist who was one of the primary vehicles for Snowden’s disclosures, Snowden “is very pleased with the debate that is arising in many countries around the world on Internet privacy and U.S. spying. It is exactly the debate he wanted to inform.”

In this debate, Snowden himself says, those who followed the law were nothing better than Nazis: “I believe in the principle declared at Nuremberg, in 1945: ‘Individuals have international duties which transcend the national obligations of obedience. Therefore individual citizens have the duty to violate domestic laws to prevent crimes against peace and humanity from occurring.’ ”

To be sure, Snowden has prompted an international discussion about surveillance, but it’s worthwhile to note that this debate is no academic exercise. It has real costs. Consider just a few.

**What if Snowden’s wrong? What if there is no pervasive illegality in the National Security Agency’s surveillance programs?**

Indeed, for all the excitement generated by Snowden’s disclosures, there is no proof of any systemic, deliberate violations of law. Based on the ruling in a 1979 Supreme Court case, *Smith v. Maryland*, it is well established that individuals do not have an expectation of privacy in the phone numbers they call. This is not entirely surprising; we all know that we’re already sharing that information with the phone company. In the same way, it’s long established that the government has great latitude in intercepting communications between the United States and other countries. It’s true, too, that while the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act court is largely toothless, it has, on occasion, rejected some N.S.A. procedures, and the agency has made adjustments in response. That is not the act of an entirely lawless agency.

It is true that, as the Washington Post’s Barton Gellman recently reported, the N.S.A. sometimes went beyond its authority. According to Gellman, the agency privately admits to two thousand seven hundred and seventy-six incidents of unauthorized collection of data within a twelve-month period. This is bad—but it’s not clear how bad. If it’s that many incidents out of a total of, say, three thousand initiatives, then it’s very bad. But if—as is far more likely—it’s two thousand seven hundred and seventy-six incidents out of many millions, then the errors are less serious. There should be no mistakes, of course. But government surveillance, like any human activity, is going to have errors, and it’s far from clear, at this point, that the N.S.A.’s errors amounted to a major violation of law or an invasion of privacy.

**What are the actual dollar costs of Snowden’s disclosures?**

The United States, like any great power, is always going to have an intelligence operation, and some electronic surveillance is obligatory in the modern world. But, because of Snowden’s disclosures, the government will almost certainly have to spend billions of dollars, and thousands of people will have to spend thousands of hours, reworking our procedures. This is all because a thirty-year-old self-appointed arbiter of propriety decided to break the law and disclose what he
had sworn to protect. That judgment—in my view—was not Snowden’s to make. And it is simply grotesque that Snowden compares these thousands of government workers—all doing their jobs to protect the United States—to the Nazi war criminals at Nuremberg.

What did China and Russia learn about American surveillance operations from Snowden—and what will they do with this information?

As part of Snowden’s flight from American justice, he went to two of the most repressive and technologically sophisticated countries on earth. (Hong Kong is, of course, part of China.) In an interview with Greenwald, Snowden said that the authorities in those countries behaved like perfect gentlemen.

“I never gave any information to either government, and they never took anything from my laptops,” Snowden said.

Oh, really? Is he serious? Should anyone believe a word of this? China and Russia spend billions of dollars conducting counterintelligence against the United States. An American citizen walks into their countries bearing the keys to our most secret programs, and both—both!—China and Russia decline to take even a peek. That is a preposterous proposition. Even assuming that Snowden believes he had control of his computers 24/7 (he never slept?), there is simply no way that China and Russia would pass up that kind of bounty.

There is obviously some legitimate debate to be had about the extent and the legality of American surveillance operations. But there is no doubt about the nature of China and Russia. Snowden’s pious invocation of the Nuremberg trials will probably be small comfort to the dissidents and the political prisoners whose cell doors may be locked a little tighter today because of what these authoritarian governments may have learned from his hard drive.

Photograph: Maxim Shemetov/Reuters

Keep Scrolling Down – Detailed instructions, rubrics and a sample are on the following pages!
General Suggestions for Writing Case Studies

How not to write your paper:

| I USED TO HATE WRITING ASSIGNMENTS, BUT NOW I ENJOY THEM. |
| I REALIZED THAT THE PURPOSE OF WRITING IS TO INFLATE WEAK IDEAS, OBSCURE POOR REASONING, AND INHIBIT CLARITY. |
| WITH A LITTLE PRACTICE, WRITING CAN BE AN INTIMIDATING AND IMPENETRABLE FOG. WANT TO SEE MY BOOK REPORT? |
| “THE DYNAMICS OF INTERBEING AND MONOLOGICAL IMPERATIVES IN ‘DICK AND JANE’ A STUDY IN PSYCHIC TRANSRELATIONAL GENDER MODES.” |

I. The Paragraphs
Authors often complain that the most difficult sentence to write is the first one. In sections three and four, your opening sentence should tell your reader your thesis. Then you just need to answer the question as thoroughly and succinctly as possible given the length allowed. Look at the sample case study questions and responses following the rubrics.

II. Format
You should not re-type the question (The sample includes the questions only so that you can follow the assignment). However, each response should be numbered corresponding to the assigned questions. Place the corresponding quote below each response and label appropriately – see example below. All papers should be three pages single spaced, using 12 pt. fonts and 1 inch margins all around.

III. Tone/Voice & Writing Style
Ever since George Carlin pointed out that “using your own words” would result in a private and hence meaningless expression, I’ve had to give up on the phrase, however a certain degree of originality is still important. Your task is to explain a concept as if you were the Teaching Assistant for this class. If you simply repeat the text or my lecture, you haven’t helped your imaginary student. You need to clarify the argument/concept in a way that demonstrates that you really understand it and can express the same ideas in a way that is different than has already been explained by the text or by me.

I value simple declarative sentences. Avoid overly ornate sentence structure and redundant phrasing. This assignment is designed to force you to focus and to parse your explanation down to the essence of the arguments. As a special note, only you know what you believe, think, feel, etc. and you have no direct evidence to make such claims.

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9 Please note that these guidelines are for my class assignments. Individual instructors may have other format preferences and you should consult with your teacher for the details before completing your assignment.
for anyone else. Accordingly, please use verbs like wrote, claimed, stated, argued, held, maintained, etc. when describing the arguments of others.

IV. Quotes
Quoting is a way of supporting your interpretation of an argument or theory. Relevance to your response and to the question asked is critical. Quotes can be edited but be careful not to take the quote out of context, thus altering the intent of the author. The length of the quote must be appropriate to the length of the assignment: short papers require shorter quotes. All quotes must come from the original author’s works, neither from the secondary commentary of the author of our text nor from my lectures or power points. Quotes, if they are drawn from our assigned text, need only be cited with the page where it was found (see example below). However any quotes from other sources must have full citation. A failure to cite will result in zero points for that section of this assignment. You may not use quotes I’ve used in my PowerPoint slides.

V. Length
Part of the criteria for success is efficient use of the space allowed. If you write a single sentence for a one/third page assignment, you have not satisfied this criterion. However, this is not an invitation to use the additional space for stream-of-consciousness or irrelevant information not pertinent to the assigned issue. If you are having difficulties with the length, it is usually because you have not recognized or developed sufficiently the various issues involved. Conversely, if your draft is too long, you need to whittle it down to just the relevant essentials, perhaps editing out the anecdotes or redundancies; more is not always better! I am very willing to help if you submit drafts sufficiently before the due date.

VI. Rough Drafts
I have invited all of you to bring rough drafts of your completed assignment in for a preview reading. I do not offer re-writes after I have graded your papers. Rough drafts are brought in during my office hours or by appointment and I only read them in person - with the student present. Please do not submit rough drafts electronically nor should you drop them off in my box.

I support pro-active measures that encourage preparation and thought and with rough draft readings, both the student and I should benefit with the end result being a better final draft. If your work satisfies my criteria (see rubrics following) for “A” level work, and if the draft is formatted and printed in final draft format, I will sign off on the draft, guaranteeing those students somewhere between 100% and 90% of the points possible for this assignment. Your cut-off for rough draft submissions is 24 hours prior to the due date; I will read no rough drafts the day of or the day prior to the due date.

Keep scrolling down for specific rubrics and a sample completed assignment!
Standards (Rubrics) for Grading Case Studies

The excellent paper (100-90% of points) will exhibit the following qualities:

**Question 1:**
- Conclusion is clearly identified
- Major supporting premises are identified
- Relevant and critical minor supporting premises are identified.
- Argument has been presented with good logical flow.
- Paraphrase has eliminated all irrelevant or unnecessary information.
- Paraphrase is original and not merely a verbatim repetition of original argument
- Argument is clearly understood and consistent with the author’s intent.
- No critique, analysis or irrelevant commentary is provided.

**Question 2:**
- All items are listed as normatively neutral questions. No immediate bias is evidenced.
- All critical questions have been raised given the space allowed.
- Questions are relevant to the case and would be likely to be relevant to the philosophers/theories being applied to the case in the third and fourth sections.
- Questions are likely to drive effective and informative research. The questions should be factual and answerable (at least in terms of probabilities or projections backed up with historical data).
- Questions are not phrased in terms of what will happen or should happen but what has happened; remember one cannot gather data from events that have yet to occur.
- Questions are grammatically correct and are presented in a bulleted list.

**Question 3 and 4:**
- A clear and definitive thesis statement is made at the beginning of the response. You may characterize the philosopher as unqualified in their support or rejection of the thesis, supportive with some concerns/qualifications or rejecting the issue with some concerns/qualifications, but you may not leave the philosopher sitting on the fence.
- Responses are sufficiently detailed and focused on the questions raised.
- Responses are consistent with the philosopher referenced.
- Sufficient detail from the philosopher’s theory is provided.
- Responses reflect careful and detailed consideration of background material provided.
- Responses are well supported with relevant reasons.
- Counter-considerations are included and responses to those considerations are reasonably developed given the space allowed.
- No immediate personal bias is evidenced.
Quotes in 3b and 4b:
- Quote is from philosopher’s primary work & is cited properly & quote is not one I've used in my PowerPoint slides. Proper citation for this assignment is the page number from our text in parenthesis after the quote. If the quote is drawn from another source, full citation (MLA or APA) must be provided. (Sites such as Wikiquotes and Intelliquotes are not acceptable sources.)
- Quote is specifically relevant to the issue and is not too general.
- Length of quote is appropriate to the assignment.
- Quote supports the position maintained by the author in the previous section.

Overall Impressions:
- Study presents evidence of a thoughtful and deliberative approach.
- Language is clear and explanations/arguments are original
- Effective use has been made of space allowed
- Study reflects careful consideration of background material provided.
- There is good logic flow from one response to another – issues raised in earlier questions must link logically with responses to later questions.
- The study is scholarly, with effective use of the essays and relevant philosophical theory. All quotes and references are properly cited.
- Assignment format has been followed.

The Good Paper (89-80% points)
The good paper will demonstrate all the above qualities but perhaps to a lesser degree or, will demonstrate some of the above qualities excellently, but not all of the qualities will be presented at a consistently high level.

The Satisfactory Paper (79-70% points)
The satisfactory paper will present all of the above qualities but not as strongly as the good paper or, some qualities may be stronger with some not as strong. Insight is not usually present.

The Paper that Needs Work (69-60% points)
This paper is weak on many of the desired qualities.

The Paper that Really Needs Work – Pretty Much Unacceptable (59-0% points)
This paper presents few if any of the desired qualities.

Keep scrolling down for a sample completed assignment!
Sample Case Study: Ethics & New York Cycling

1. **Paraphrase the argument put forth by Randy Cohen in the attached article.** *Note that Cohen specifically mentions Kant in his essay which follows thus it is appropriate in the paraphrase. Since the ACLU made no such references in your assignment, references to Kant or Mill would not be appropriate.*

Cohen argues that Kant would agree that while it is illegal it is still morally justifiable to treat red lights and stop signs as yield signs while riding a bicycle in NYC. He claims that it passes the categorical imperative test in that he is prepared for every cyclist to treat red lights & stop signs as yield signs in NYC. Cohen rejects the relevance of laws written to apply to both cars and bikes; just because a law reasonably applies to cars, it doesn’t follow that the justification would hold for bicycles since a) bicycles are not relevantly similar in weight, speed and capacity for damage and, b) allowing exceptions for bikes works in Idaho, Amsterdam and Copenhagen. Cohen offers the promise of beneficial consequences in allowing cyclists to run red lights, people could get to their destinations faster which would encourage more cycling which then would promote health for more people and it would be better for the environment. Finally, by allowing cyclists to run red lights, Mr. Cohen’s enjoyment of cycling is improved – it makes him happier to go faster.

2. **Research information**
   - How many cyclists are there in NYC and what is the proportion of cyclists, to motorists and to pedestrians?
   - How many accidents occur at intersections involving cyclists running the red light or stop sign?
   - Of these accidents, how many people have been injured or killed?
   - In cities such as Amsterdam or states such as Idaho, where such practices are legal, what is the safety record of cyclists, motorists and pedestrians?
   - Are Idaho, Amsterdam & Copenhagen population densities and traffic patterns relevantly similar to NYC?
   - Proportionately, how much time on average is actually saved on a bicycle by running red lights?
   - Have studies been done examining the motivations for people to shift from automobiles to bicycles in large urban areas & is it reasonable to expect statistically significant shifts given the weather and other hazards encountered in NYC with the readily available option of public transit?
   - Is riding a bicycle hazardous in NYC - how many people have been injured while riding a bicycle in NYC over the past decade?

3. **Do you agree with Mr. Cohen that Kant would approve of his actions?**
Kant would not agree with Mr. Cohen’s thesis for the following four reasons. First, Cohen’s plan to break the law fails the test of acting solely upon the good will – the will to act upon
one’s duty without contradicting one’s reason. One cannot articulate a duty to break traffic laws whenever it is convenient to do so without contradicting one’s aims to use public roads to arrive safely – the concept of orderly traffic depends upon the concept and general agreement to all traffic laws. Were Cohen to advocate breaking laws whenever one assessed it safe to do so, he would have to then be prepared to have everyone – not just cyclists – to act accordingly. This would make maneuvering the roadways ridiculously perilous and thus contradict his intention to use them safely. One might charitably articulate the duty more narrowly, for example, “when riding a bicycle in NYC and when one encounters a red light or stop sign at an intersection, pause & verify that it is clear and safe to cross before entering.” However, Cohen would still fail the categorical imperative by selectively writing exceptions to rules for himself and other cyclists. When one uses the public roadways, one is tacitly agreeing to the rules and conventions that apply to all. Admittedly, Cohen’s thesis would be a better Kantian argument if he were simply arguing to change the law rather than break the law. In this way, at least this behavior would then be one that is reasonably expected by those who share the roads with him. However, it still smacks of writing exceptions based on one’s desires and preferences and not from a will to act in a rationally consistent fashion.

Secondly, Cohen’s argument also fails the practical imperative to always have respect for persons. In not abiding by the generally agreed upon laws Cohen’s actions present an avoidable risk to the well-being of others and constitute a kind of lying promise to abide by those laws commonly agreed upon by those who share the roads; If one uses public roads, one indicates one’s acceptance of the terms associated with that use and to break those rules is to break a contract with the public and with one’s government.

Thirdly, Cohen’s justification that pedestrians often jaywalk and cross against the light so that makes it ok for cyclists to run red lights and stop signs would not pass the Kant test – just because others don’t do their duty, it doesn’t follow that one should be excused from doing one’s own duty. Kant asks us to act as if everyone always did their duty – this is what he meant in his discussion of a Kingdom of Ends.

Finally, Cohen’s argument is largely consequentialist. His expectations that it will be good for more people’s health and the environment and for his own satisfaction are used as justifications to run red lights. Kant is not a consequentialist – one must act solely from one’s duty regardless of outcome. If one makes a decision based on consequences, then one must be prepared to take responsibility for things one cannot foresee with any certainty or control with any regularity. Further, Cohen’s consequential justification that it makes him happy to go fast is insufficient for Kant – happiness as an end to one’s actions is inadequate for humans who are capable of acting rationally and having the will to counter one’s appetites. Though Kant is not opposed to happiness in itself, it is not, or at least should not be, a determinate for one’s moral duty.

3b. Cite a quote from Kant supporting your answer.

“For the universality of a law which says that anyone ...could promise whatever he pleases with the intention of not keeping it would make promising itself and the end to be attained thereby quite impossible.....” (page 287)
4. For Mill does it make sense to institute exceptions to rules and if so, under what circumstances?

Mill would not agree with Mr. Cohen’s decision to treat red lights and stop signs as yield signs. For Mill as a consequentialist, the decision would hinge on a kind of cost/benefit analysis. Mill would need to assess the risk associated with Cohen’s plan and weigh that risk against the reasonably expected beneficial outcomes.

Firstly, there is clearly a reasonable risk associated with Cohen’s plan. While it is true that for Mill, liberty is a critical aspect of happiness but one’s rights can justifiably be limited if the exercise of those rights constitute harm to others. Oncoming pedestrians or vehicles may not always be seen - blocked intersections and congested traffic are common in NYC. Further, while it may be true that automobiles present a greater risk to pedestrians, nevertheless if a pedestrian is hit by a bicycle it can still do significant damage. Even if a cyclist hits a car there can be significant damage to oneself, to the driver (if not physical harm then one could reasonably argue for psychological, legal, financial impacts), to the vehicle and such an event would most likely produce subsequent delays due to accident investigations with the associated drain on city revenues afterwards by costs from first responders and the police.

Secondly, Cohen’s predicted beneficial consequences are somewhat questionable. If Cohen’s anticipated consequences proved true, Mill might approve of his plan. However, it is unclear that advocating this practice, even if the law were changed, would be sufficient to significantly increase the number of cyclists in NYC – the weather for many months of the year is inclement and would make showing up for jobs having gotten there on a bike in well-groomed business attire very challenging to say the least. A city needs both an infrastructural and a cultural shift to produce such a change in numbers of cyclists. There is also the additional concern that if one is involved in an accident, the bike offers no protection from impact. Cohen’s comparison to Idaho, Amsterdam or Copenhagen is not relevantly similar – Though there may have been positive outcomes in these places, it does not follow that the same would occur in NYC. None of them have the same traffic patterns and city planning; Idaho does not have the high density population and traffic of NYC and Amsterdam and Copenhagen very likely have proportionately more cyclists and fewer motorists; It is very likely that what generates good consequences in those areas will not be a good predictor for NYC nor will it be likely to produce similar results.

Finally, the perceived direct beneficial consequence is trivial; Cohen’s good of going fast and being happy is not the same as Mill’s good which he called Happiness which is associated with a higher rational dignity. Mill argued that one must make clear distinctions not just about the quantity of a good but also the quality of such goods. I doubt that Mill’s ideas of higher rational goods such as freedom of speech, religion, etc. are really commensurate with running red lights with impunity. Dogs have great pleasure hanging their heads out car windows with the wind in their fur; humans can do better!

4b. Cite a quote from Mill supporting your answer.

“That the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others.” (page 255)
THE rule-breaking cyclist that people decry: that’s me. I routinely run red lights, and so do you. I flout the law when I’m on my bike; you do it when you are on foot, at least if you are like most New Yorkers. My behavior vexes pedestrians, drivers and even some of my fellow cyclists. Similar conduct has stuck cyclists with tickets and court-ordered biking education classes.

Please note that you are not limited to the background offered – you may feel free to use any credible/reliable source as evidence for your arguments. Please provide full citation for all research.

http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/05/opinion/sunday/if-kant-were-a-new-york-cyclist.html?ref=ethics&_r=0
But although it is illegal, I believe it is ethical. I’m not so sure about your blithely ambling into the intersection against the light while texting and listening to your iPod and sipping a martini. More or less.

I roll through a red light if and only if no pedestrian is in the crosswalk and no car is in the intersection — that is, if it will not endanger myself or anybody else. To put it another way, I treat red lights and stop signs as if they were yield signs. A fundamental concern of ethics is the effect of our actions on others. My actions harm no one. This moral reasoning may not sway the police officer writing me a ticket, but it would pass the test of Kant’s categorical imperative: I think all cyclists could — and should — ride like me.

I am not anarchic; I heed most traffic laws. I do not ride on the sidewalk (O.K., except for the final 25 feet between the curb cut and my front door, and then with caution). I do not salmon, i.e. ride against traffic. In fact, even my “rolling stops” are legal in some places.

Paul Steely White, the executive director of Transportation Alternatives, an advocacy group of which I am a member, points out that many jurisdictions, Idaho for example, allow cyclists to slow down and roll through stop signs after yielding to pedestrians. Mr. White e-mailed me: “I often say that it is much more important to tune into the pedestrians rather than tune into the lights, largely because peds jaywalk so much!”

If my rule-breaking is ethical and safe (and Idaho-legal), why does it annoy anyone? Perhaps it is because we humans are not good at weighing the dangers we face. If we were, we’d realize that bicycles are a tiny threat; it is cars and trucks that menace us. In the last quarter of 2011, bicyclists in New York City killed no pedestrians and injured 26. During the same period, drivers killed 43 pedestrians and injured 3,607.

Cars also harm us insidiously, in slow motion. Auto emissions exacerbate respiratory problems, erode the facades of buildings, abet global warming. To keep the oil flowing, we make dubious foreign policy decisions. Cars promote sprawl and discourage walking, contributing to obesity and other health problems. And then there’s the noise.

Much of this creeping devastation is legal; little of it is ethical, at least where, as in Manhattan, there are real alternatives to the private car. But because we’ve so long let cars dominate city life, we take them, and their baleful effects, for granted. The surge in cycling is a recent phenomenon: we’re alert to its vagaries.

But most of the resentment of rule-breaking riders like me, I suspect, derives from a false analogy: conceiving of bicycles as akin to cars. In this view, bikes must be regulated like
cars, and vilified when riders flout those regulations, as if we were cunningly getting away with something. But bikes are not cars. Cars drive three or four times as fast and weigh 200 times as much. Drive dangerously, you’re apt to injure others; ride dangerously, I’m apt to injure myself. I have skin in the game. And blood. And bones.

Nor are cyclists pedestrians, of course (at least not while we’re pedaling). We are a third thing, a distinct mode of transportation, requiring different practices and different rules. This is understood in Amsterdam and Copenhagen, where nearly everyone of every age cycles. These cities treat bikes like bikes. Extensive networks of protected bike lanes provide the infrastructure for safe cycling. Some traffic lights are timed to the speed of bikes rather than cars. Some laws presume that in a bike-car collision, the heavier and more deadly vehicle is at fault. Perhaps as New York City’s bike share program is rolled out, these will become the case here.

Laws work best when they are voluntarily heeded by people who regard them as reasonable. There aren’t enough cops to coerce everyone into obeying every law all the time. If cycling laws were a wise response to actual cycling rather than a clumsy misapplication of motor vehicle laws, I suspect that compliance, even by me, would rise.

I choose my riding style mindful of my own safety and that of my neighbors, but also in pursuit of happiness. Uninterrupted motion, gliding silently and swiftly, is a joy. It’s why I ride. And it’s why Stephen G. Breyer says he rides, sometimes to work at the Supreme Court: “The advantages? Exercise, no parking problems, gas prices, it’s fun. An automobile is expensive. You have to find a place to park and it’s not fun. So why not ride a bicycle? I recommend it.” I don’t know if he runs red lights. I hope so.

*Randy Cohen was the original writer of The New York Times Magazine’s “Ethicist” column and the author of the forthcoming book “Be Good: How to Navigate the Ethics of Everything.”*