

ILLEGAL OR OPINION?

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In my rearview mirror I could not see his grill or bumper and in my side mirrors I could not see him at all, he was that close! He had been there since we pulled away from the traffic signal. He had on shades and I could see his hand gripping, not resting, on the steering wheel. I glanced down at my speedometer; we were moving at exactly 45 mph. I did some quick (though probably not altogether accurate) calculations. At 45 mph, it would take about 100 feet for him to stop. There was no way he was 100 feet behind me!

We were traveling down a narrow two-lane back-country road in Virginia. This well-traveled 15-mile stretch alternated between straight and curved, with solid yellow or broken yellow lines on either side of the centerline. Finally, in a long winding curve (marked with double yellow lines) he swerved out and angrily sped by, cutting in and immediately causing me to brake. A woman in a mini-van almost instantaneously replaced him. While not quite as close, she was nonetheless tailgating. As soon as we hit a straight stretch, she sped around, giving me a dirty look as she and her kids zoomed by. Within 15 miles this happened seven times at various intervals, legally and illegally; two minivans with kids, a Mustang with racing stripes, three pickups, and one delivery van, all obviously upset with me.

As I drove on, the new gray haired guy behind me was now keeping a respectable distance. I considered for the past few miles why those people were so upset with me? I signaled, then made the turn into my neighborhood. As I pulled into my driveway, it hit me; they were angry with me for *obeying the law!!!* Except for one 55-mph stretch, the speed limit had been 45 mph all the way and I had been carefully observing it. My strict obedience to the law obviously did not sit well with the majority of other drivers, all of whom, I am sure, would consider themselves law-abiding citizens.

As I sat there in my driveway, I had this chain of thought... Is 45 mph the law, or merely an inconvenience? Is speeding only wrong if you get caught? Is crossing the double yellow lines only illegal if a cop sees you? Or is it all just a matter of opinion? Obviously, those other drivers thought so, which brought this question to mind... Are all laws simply a matter of opinion?

If I disagree with a ban, am I bound to follow it if there is no danger of being caught? Is stealing only wrong if you get caught? Shoplifters, burglars, robbers apparently think so. Since rapists apparently disagree with the laws against rape, they must believe it is only wrong if they get caught. What about cheating, lying, perjury? And how about murder? Which is more wrong... 1st, 2nd, or 3rd degree murder? Is a dead person less dead if it is homicide (intentional) or manslaughter (lacking proof of malicious intent)?

Our prisons are full of people who disagree with society's rules. From a recent CNN commentary... *the United States accounts for less than five percent of the world's population, but almost a quarter of the world's prisoners... in the United States there are about 16,000 homicides per year, or roughly six per 100,000 people, based on Department of Justice statistics.*

We have police forces, law enforcement agencies, and courts all charged with apprehending and dispensing justice to folks who break the law, laws they obviously

disagree with. Is that fair to them? Or are we imposing our views of right and wrong on them? When all is said and done, are laws just someone's *opinion* on the matter? After all, don't courts just offer "opinions"?

It's like the case where a British judge freed six adult soccer players who confessed to gang raping two 12-year-old girls, after they had agreed, via texting, to meet one of the men. C'mon, what's the problem? They were free to go afterward. So we should arrest them just because we disagree with them?

Someone decides 25 mph in a school zone is "too slow for me" so they speed up. You don't like it because I am driving some arbitrarily imposed speed limit (after all, it's not *your* law, right?) Just speed on around me... so what if you kill some kids crossing the street. You crash head on and kill a family in a minivan? Hey, you didn't mean to; there was no malicious intent. Besides, it's a *first offense*... the only kid(s) you've ever killed. Anyway, breaking the law is not *really* breaking the law (unless you get caught), "...and in *my* opinion, 25 mph is just too slow."

Should lawbreakers be prosecuted just because they don't agree with society's standards of behavior? Is *anything* truly right or wrong, *really* legal or illegal, or does it all just depend on whether one agrees or disagrees?

Hey, I have a solution; let's just let everybody do whatever *feels good*. Let's dispense with all those arbitrary societal rules established by somebody else, like speed limits. Anyway, *nobody* has the right to tell me what to do or impose his views on *me*, right? As Chuck Berry says in a song... "Don't bother us, leave us alone, anyway we almost grown..."

So, back to my drive time tomorrow. What do I do? Obey the law or go with the flow? (By the way, I pass thru one elementary school zone.) Do I draw the line? Step on the brakes? After all, speeding *safely* is not really breaking a *serious* law, is it?

Naah...step on it... after all, everybody else does.