

Christopher Bero

Due 2014 July 1

EH 102 - Argument of Fact

### To Kill a Mocking Ideology

Humans, an interesting lot. Our ability to process and interpret abstract relationships has lead to modern society housing fundamentally strange concepts. People project personas and human-like characteristics to inanimate objects on a daily basis; creating relateable characters from cartoons which would otherwise be lines on a screen. When such a character is "killed" those invested in the series may feel a very real sense of loss, regardless that the missing cartoon face never actually lived or died at all. This construct is found to be near ubiquitous in aspects of our life from television to academia. A student may be well aware that a grade assigned by the institution can hold a binary value to advance further in education or to stop and reevaluate. Nevertheless, a positive but not perfect grade can be the root of great personal stress. Said student may be under outside pressure from family and peers or genuinely motivated by such a grading system to reflect on the gathered knowledge from a class. Occasionally though, the situation involves a similar yet stronger sense of loss as previously discussed; the student is concerned with the principle of the situation and has defined an internal and separate grading measure which has not been met. Just like the cartoon character, the self has felt a death of something intangible which is not nearly as grave as suggested, yet is also quite profound. These 'principles' that people have, some of which are very dear, can be under attack from internal and outside forces

which work to remove them. When compromised, do our principles and ideals reflect our feelings of them? Is the associated feeling of loss and helplessness that of death, or that of simple disappointment?

Our topic quickly spirals out of control. There are too many aspects to consider, too many cases to review. To move forward we shall focus on a particular ideal, that of personal and societal privacy. A principle, which will also represent ideals in this paper, is defined by Merriam Webster online dictionary as "a basic truth or theory; an idea that forms the basis of something" ("Principle"). Privacy allocates such a description well, as it is something ephemeral which can be described as a basic theory about how people view their lives.

To begin our investigation, we should seek some small historical perspective. In Judith A. Swanson's book *The Public and Private in Aristotle's Political Philosophy* the writings of Aristotle, a Greek philosopher, are given interpretation in regards to common misconceptions. Through the book, Swanson argues that Aristotle's concept of privacy is prerequisite to society, and that it is also the provision for virtue and self improvement in a person's life (Swanson 12). Aristotle has just detailed that a person must be able to work internally to achieve self betterment. This contradicts many commercials for team building services, and even a public education system in which students are gathered and "instilled" with knowledge rather than being given just the tools to generate and gather for one's own. But upon closer look it may be apparent that team building exercises and public schools do serve the individual who is privately motivated to learn and accentuate lessons with a more

fulfilled experience than another student who, not wrongly, simply participates in society. The private aspect and events of life are critical to development as a person, and in turn critical to the social environment in which he or she operates. This concept is further expounded in dizzying detail by our next writer, Joseph Tussman. In his book *Government and the Mind*, Tussman argues that contrary to a large faction of public belief, the government deserves complete involvement in the spirit and mind of its citizenry. The argument directly addresses our inherent belief that a government must be limited and bound in order to prevent it from developing tyrannical tendencies. Indeed, Tussman states, the government's best course of action to remain as righteous as possible is to ensure that each citizen is educated to a level capable of carrying the home country forward (Tussman 54). In a way, this is nothing new as government has been long established as the procurement of a standard education with the expressed goal of bettering its people. But the article drives to a deeper level of comprehension in attempting to show that common views of the 'big bad state' need to be combated by better involvement in the government, not by neutering the capabilities which allow society to remain cohesive and functional.

In light of recent events, however, Tussman's philosophy can seem like a pipe dream. The government of the United States, along with cooperating countries overseas, has been found conducting ultra scale surveillance on the entire planet by means of a secret court ("The NSA"). The knowledge that every time a person has used a phone, sent an email, or visited an HTTPS webpage in the past several years has had that data recorded and

analyzed may rightfully drudge forth that characteristic feeling of loss and helplessness. Our case in point, that such an endeared and determinedly valuable aspect to life can be wrest from an entire population's grasp without their knowledge. Surely our ideal of privacy is gravely wounded and confronting its own mortality at this stage. Let us look to the past once more and gather the full scope and contrast of this situation.

"In the United States no committee in government is even trying to exercise oversight; no ping; and finally, without exception, private professional wiretappers are no longer arrested for political wiretapping." (Bromfield 18).

The previous excerpt is from a book discussing phone wiretapping and recording. Eerily similar to the current newscasts, except published in 1983. It turns out that this isn't a new concern at all. Before computers, people worried about being spied on through phones, before phones the mail. Once a system is established and entirely integrated into daily life, those who would reject it for the capability to eliminate privacy are ignored and their writings gradually cease. In a way, our concern with privacy is very much a concern with the 'newness' and novelty of a technology or system. And despite generations of erosion, we still feel that we stand on the hill striving to reverse a tide; that the fight has just begun and is in short enough involvement to be won. If the contents of a computer define the security of our person, then privacy is entirely dead, a corpse of the not recently deceased but of that lost to a sickness of attrition.

Perhaps our privacy is dying. Maybe it was even killed long ago, lost to the comforts that its departure gifted. More likely though is that

privacy is a balance between living within a person as well as a society, and it can be only influenced and discussed. So how do the two aspects find parity? Are we allowed to acknowledge that a person can be denied privacy on the will of a larger organization through incarceration, while the organization as a community retains an intrinsic value of privacy? I propose that privacy is a dichotomy which exists within an individual and a group of people, and holds separate properties for each which defines its own mortality.

Works Cited

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