

Dossier Report: Sophia Wushanley

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2025-08-21

Recommendation

I recommend Sophia Wushanley's dossier be approved.

Summary of Thesis Plan

Sophia plans to write a thesis on privacy in three or four chapters.

The first chapter takes up the argument in Thomson (1975) that privacy is too unclear and disjunctive a notion to do serious philosophical work. Sophia argues, in effect, that there was something right about Thomson's critique. In particular, she argues that what she calls "content-based accounts" of privacy have systematically failed to respond successfully to Thomson. These are accounts that identify privacy with a particular interest that individuals have, such as control over presentation, or freedom from intrusion. She argues that any one of these interests doesn't capture all we care about in privacy, and a disjunction of them is ad hoc. So far, this looks like Thomson's critique. Her positive suggestion is that privacy norms play a particular function. Privacy isn't a particular interest people have, rather, privacy norms are norms that constrain information flows to protect individuals.

The second chapter spells out this positive account of privacy. She calls this a functional account. A norm is a privacy norm if it stops the flow of information about individuals. Importantly, aboutness here is not defined in semantic or syntactic terms, but in terms of what kind of individualised treatment would be possible were the information spread around. Privacy norms include both the

actual norms a society has that fit this description (i.e., preventing the flow of information about individuals) and the norms that a society should have.