

The Price of Being Watched: Carissa Veliz's Take on the Ethics of Mass Surveillance

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Carissa Veliz argues that mass surveillance holds ethical costs that far outweigh any potential benefits. She claims that when governments/corporations collect large amounts of personal data, they turn individuals into commodities, turning their private information into something to be bought, sold, or exploited. This method exposes people to risks like discrimination and manipulation, undermining their autonomy according to Veliz. She goes on to warn of a "chilling effect," where the awareness of being watched leads people to self-censor, suppressing free expression and limiting open discourse, which is necessary for a healthy democracy. Ultimately, Veliz believes these harms are not ethically justified.

A surveillance proponent might argue that Veliz overstates the ethical risks of mass surveillance, especially since legal reforms like the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) exist. Veliz worries about exploitation and coercion, however GDPR ensures that individuals have the power to give explicit, informed consent and can withdraw it whenever they wish. This shift from passive data collection to active user consent addresses her concerns about autonomy. Moreover, surveillance proponents would express that the benefits of increased security and personalized services tower over these risks. By empowering users with more control, they claim, the ethical concerns Veliz raises have been effectively mitigated.

Veliz would counter argue that while GDPR improves transparency, it fails to address the deeper ethical issues of coercion and power imbalance. Even with consent mechanisms, users often don't fully understand the long-term implications of sharing their data, especially when it can be aggregated and sold to third parties for purposes they didn't agree to. More critically, essential services often force users to consent to data collection in order to participate, leaving

them with little genuine choice. This coerced consent undermines its ethical validity, as true autonomy requires the ability to meaningfully opt out without sacrificing access to necessary services.

The objection is defeated by Veliz's response. While GDPR enhances transparency, it does not resolve the underlying ethical issue of coerced consent. In today's digital world, people often have no choice but to accept surveillance if they wish to utilize vital services like banking, communication, or social media, which compromises the voluntary nature of consent. Moreover, users often don't fully grasp or control the long-term effects of their data being collected and sold, which deepens the power imbalance between them and large companies. As Veliz argues, this coercion and unpredictability make GDPR insufficient to fully address the ethical concerns of mass surveillance.

This exchange highlights the need for stricter policy measures to regulate mass surveillance. While transparency and consent frameworks like GDPR are improvements, they fall short in addressing the ethical issues of coercion and power imbalances. If individuals must consent to surveillance to access essential services, their autonomy is compromised. To protect personal freedoms, laws should impose stricter limits on data collection, ensuring it occurs only when necessary and providing clear, proportionate benefits. Such reforms would better safeguard individual autonomy and democratic discourse, addressing Veliz's concerns about the deeper ethical costs of mass surveillance beyond mere transparency.

In conclusion, while GDPR has improved transparency, Veliz's concerns about the ethical costs of mass surveillance remain compelling. The coercive nature of consent, power imbalances, and unpredictable data use show that transparency alone is not enough. To truly protect individual autonomy and democratic values, further reforms are necessary. These should

prioritize minimizing coercion and ensuring data is collected only when absolutely needed, with clear, proportionate benefits to individuals and society.

Outline for Veliz's Argument on Mass Surveillance

- **Presenting Carissa Veliz's Argument**
 - General Issue: Veliz argues that mass surveillance has significant ethical costs, undermining privacy and autonomy.
 - Thesis: The ethical costs of surveillance, such as privacy violations, far outweigh the benefits, even if aimed at security.
 - Main Points:
 - Personal data is collected, sold, and used for profiling, often without individuals' full understanding.
 - Costs: This leads to loss of privacy, risks of discrimination, and manipulation.
 - Impact on Society: Surveillance causes self-censorship, conformity, and threatens democracy.
 - Surveillance should only be used when absolutely necessary and proportional to its benefits.
- **Objection to Veliz's Argument**
 - Veliz's Claim: Consent in data collection is meaningless because:
 - Terms and conditions are too complex and vague.
 - People don't fully understand the implications of agreeing.
 - Objection:
 - Regulations like GDPR provide clearer, enforceable consent and give users more control over their data.
 - GDPR ensures transparency, allowing users to withdraw consent and make informed decisions.
- **Veliz's Reply to the Objection**
 - Informed Consent is Still Limited
 - Even with GDPR, users don't understand long-term implications of data sharing.
 - Opaque Data Practices
 - The complexity of data usage makes it difficult for users to foresee how their data will be aggregated and used.
 - Lack of Real Choice
 - Many essential services require consent to terms, leaving users with little practical autonomy.
- **Evaluate**
 - Veliz's Reply Defeats the Objection:
 - GDPR improves transparency but doesn't address deeper ethical concerns like coerced consent.
 - Complex Practices and Coercion: Users still lack understanding, and many services force consent, limiting real choice.

- Expand
 - Government Surveillance
 - The debate suggests that surveillance should be legally restricted, as the ethical issues remain unresolved.
 - Legal Reform
 - Stronger privacy protections and reduced data collection are needed to protect individual autonomy.
 - Long-term Societal Impact
 - Surveillance laws must consider the long-term effects on democracy and personal freedom.