

## PHI 335: Oct 11 | Internet Business Discussion

Today I want to wrap up the section pertaining to internet based business issues that affect and impact your ability to live a good life, morally speaking. As a reminder, we covered the moral issues posed by apps, specifically pertaining to data collection; drop shipping, which is morally troublesome both in terms of being the customer or proprietor; and finally in regard to content creation and the way in which it poses moral dilemmas. Today, I want to discuss with you the relevance of these issues, and come to some kind of consensus as to what ought to be done about these things concretely.

### Relevance

So these issues are relevant to you whether you think they are or not. I am not merely suggesting that this is my opinion or theoretical abstract point I aim to make—this is not the same as when I claim that times are better or worse, or other opinions I share. No, it is a fact that these issues affect you every day and that they substantially make life harder for you to live.

Now, speaking frankly, most of you seemed nonchalant and unmoved when we were discussing these issues. Perhaps you are more reserved, which is fine. But I suspect that perhaps it just does not seem like an issue that bothers you. I want to dive deeper into that. The only analogy I have to relate to you by is climate change. I know very well that climate change is real, and I know very well that the data says that things are going to get worse and are already. However, because it is such an ‘out there’ thing, a thing about which I cannot do anything about, a thing that any individual action will not resolve, I simply am nonplussed by it.

So, in a non-judgmental way, I should like to ask you: the moral issues we covered in relation to internet commerce, namely:

1. That your data is constantly being used to exploit you on an everyday basis
2. That a lot of the items you buy are sourced via shady means and moreover are usually of subpar quality
3. That anytime you consume content, what you consume is optimized to exploit you for attention and advertisement

All of these things taken together, making it significantly hard for you to live life well, to live a good life given your privacy, consumer rights, and autonomy are actively being violated, does it simply not cause a reaction in you because you cannot do anything about it?

In other words, I am asking this: do you seem non-fazed by all that I have presented to you over the last several class meeting periods simply because it feels entirely out of your control and not something you can do about it? Similar to climate change in a sense?

My suspicion is that this is so. However, all of the above being said, there are concrete things, steps, you could do and take, as a means of alleviating some of the above. Climate change, for comparison, is indeed an issue that is outside and beyond you. However, there are steps you can take, practically speaking,

to ensure that you can live a good life despite the challenges posed by internet commerce.

### **Concrete Steps toward a Virtuous Life**

Let us start with apps. If you have an iphone, it is common for apps to now ask for permission for various data collection techniques. Here, you can reject them, ask them not to track, and so on. Moreover, in regard to the software that you use, you could switch to using open-source software the source code of which is publicly visible, and hence there is better transparency as to what data is being gathered. Yes, it requires more work, and frequent work around, but if you value privacy, as a virtue requisite for a good life, then this is a tradeoff that is obviously worth it—this makes sense on both virtue, utilitarian, and deontological grounds as well. Privacy is worth it utility wise, it is a matter of rights and dignity hence deontologically significant, and finally, you cannot live a good life if you are not conscious of how your personal data is being used and collected. If you simply do not care about privacy, despite what I have said, then you do not care about living a good life, and I have nothing to say to you beyond that. But overall, if you do care about privacy, which you should if you wish to live a good life, then you should always read terms and conditions, use open source software when you can, use encryption, and minimize your online footprint. You do not need to use most of the apps that you use, and I guarantee you that your life would improve dramatically if you avoided them. As for making apps, none of you indicated interest in so doing, which is fine, but if you do, avoid being like me and gathering data that is unnecessary—I do not live a good life, and this is a significant part of it.

Let us address drop shipping now. I know that amazon is convenient, and that using it to obtain various goods is hard to resist. However, you also do not need all of the stuff that you order. You can have less, and order from proper sellers. Remember that walmart took over small towns and led to the closing of mom and pop shops not because it is this nebulous evil entity that is all powerful—no, the people of the towns shopped at walmart, instead of the mom and pop shops, because of *convenience* and *low prices*. The same people that complain about walmart are the same people who keep it in business, because they are too lazy to go to 3 stores instead of one, and too greedy to be content with less stuff at the same price than with more stuff at lower prices. Food price differences between walmart and local stores are minimal. As for non-necessities, they are non-necessities for a reason—you do not need them. So the same applies to drop shipping. You can pay a couple dollars extra for a good that you know the quality of which is checked and that is well made. And if you contemplate engaging in drop shipping, consider the fact that obviously you are participating in a questionable enterprise and how that might affect you down the line. If the good is minor, like a phone case, then whatever. If you are drop shipping goods the use of which can result in injury, and you do not verify the quality of the product, it is only a matter of time until someone injures themselves because of the product, and even if you escape legal liability, consider if you could live with yourself if something like that happens. I know it is easy to say “whatever, I do not care, money is money” – but, you only tell this to yourself because you have never been in a situation like this. It is easy to talk about how hard you are,

until you are in the position, and you crumble like a building being demolished.

Finally, regarding content creation practices and the issues with that. The simple solution is to install ad-block, except ad block no longer works and even if it did, the problem remains. If you know you are being targeted by the algorithms, that the videos you see that are viral are viral not because there is something about them worthy of making them viral, sometimes there is, but a lot of the time, it is because it benefits the platform-advertiser relationship, if you know this, which you do because I taught you this, then the rational thing is to not consume the content anymore. Do you need to see the reels? Do you need to watch those endless youtube videos that are ultimately mediocre and contribute nothing to your life? Of course not. In fact, your life will improve the less you are online, I can promise you that. But, that being said, you might respond that it is harmless and you just want to unwind and turn off brain and watch cat play piano or yet another video essay by some person you like about an obscure topic. Fine, but ultimately, in so doing, you are surrendering yourself to this. Finally, I mentioned parasocial relationships—for this, grow up and realize that the creator you think you know is a different person altogether beyond the videos you see. I do not think the parasocial thing applies to you all, you seem grown, and this is a thing that mostly affects younger people. But again, be less drawn and involved to all of this online content stuff—it is ultimately a cave shadow, when life is the real deal. Go live.