“The Boundaries of Free Speech Online” Response

Without fail, the introduction of new technology into society is met by a full range of human emotion: curiosity, excitement, and hope, as well as pessimism, anxiety and fear. On no large scale, however, has any technology resulted in the disaster that its respective fear-mongers predicted. When it first began production on a mass scale, even the telephone—a device that has since connected the world in immeasurably positive ways by drastically improving communicative efficiency in work, social, and police environments—was feared by those suspicious that others could listen in on their conversations, or even that the phone could make you deaf or crazy. Due to the information explosion it has sparked, one of the most hotly debated new revolutions in technology, the Internet, has come under the same frightened scrutiny. The terror, however, greatly exaggerates the danger of the Internet relative to the potential safety it could provide. Due to this imbalanced scale, as well as the logistical impossibility, the Internet and all the platforms, apps, and utilities it encompasses should be governed as minimally as possible.

False accusations gaining worldwide momentum through the web is a real concern, but one vastly overshadowed by the real evidence accumulation that the Internet allows. Furthermore, just like wiretapping on phones, the issue is only a symptom of a new technology and will resolve itself in time without attempting to implement clunky massive handicaps. Over and over, the Internet has allowed criminals to be caught for increasingly ambitious crimes. A personal example is the case of Mark Tracy, a ticket scammer from Arizona, who sold fraudulent tickets to unsuspecting buyers, including a friend of mine, from at least six states before the Internet allowed his victims to find each other, combine evidence, contact local police and put him behind bars. While the Boston marathon case involving false suspects provides for an attention-grabbing scare piece, it is a relatively miniscule issue compared to how much good
the Internet does. Additionally, the problem only arose because information was not known in completion. As long as the Internet is allowed to grow freely, products such as, or similar to Snapchat and Google Glass will make information more and more readily available in time, until false suspicions simply cannot arise. In other words, the solution will not be regulation of information spreading: it will be encouragement of such networking.

Making private information public may also create danger, but at the same time, also has the potential to create worldwide safety. By keeping everyone’s identity and location shrouded in secrecy, we will be safe through ignorance. But if everyone’s information was public—in the example given, Sasha’s, and the threateners—everyone’s actions could be properly evaluated in fair light. In the dichotomy of privacy and publicity, we can choose to try reversing the direction of the current momentum back towards complete privacy, and accept the huge logistical, moral and economical problems that doing so will create. Alternatively, we could ignore the fear-mongers, embrace with the inevitable spread of information, and focus on magnifying the many positives that come with the Internet.

Works Cited