# Autonomy

Another one of those "heady" presentations

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*"The most unpardonable sin in society is independence of thought."*

Emma Goldman, *Anarchism and Other Essays*

*"For each person there is a sentence — a series of words — which has the power to destroy him ... another sentence exists, another series of words, which will heal the person. If you're lucky you will get the second; but you can be certain of getting the first: that is the way it works. On their own, without training, individuals know how to deal out the lethal sentence, but training is required to deal out the second."*

Philip K. Dick, *VALIS*

# What is Autonomy?

The **capacity** of a rational individual to make an **informed**, **un-coerced** decision.

**Capacity** can be measured.
Individuals must be **informed**.
**Coercion**, however, is deceptively tricky to understand.

# Privacy enables Autonomy

The reason for privacy rights is that they are structurally crucial for individuals to function with autonomy.

Without privacy, an individual can neither be fully **informed** nor free from **coercion**.

# You are Your Data

It's "stuck" to you.  Your data is composed of the following types of information:

- Confidential (state of mind)
- Private (bank balance)
- Social (job)
- Public (driver's license)

# Technology Trends

- Digital Storage ("Big Data")
- Networking and Bandwidth
- Search and Catalog

# So now there's also Derived Data

Since companies and governments are now capable of practically collecting, storing, sharing, and analyzing large data sets of individuals' data, you are not only the set of "sticky" information, but you are also a set of **derived data**.

# Icebergs, anyone?

More troubling, the data you have direct control and agency over is shrinking.

Your "file" is mostly composed of derived data, and you have no means to modify or correct it.

# This gloom goes to 11

Worse, you are losing control over your "sticky" data as well.

Businesses deal with data brokers to buy and sell individual profiles in an unregulated market, for everything from marketing, insurance, and private investigation.

Legal systems push for cryptography key disclosure, and are starting to allow private, social, and even derived data as admissible evidence.

Police push for greater access to private and social data to investigate crimes, testing the boundaries of search and seizure (GPS trackers, cell phone signal tracing).

Governments repeat history by demanding lists and full profiles of dissenters or anyone that threatens their will to power.

# Group Autonomy

We can slightly alter the definition of individual autonomy and apply it to groups:

The capacity of a group to make informed, un-coerced decisions.

Rationality is not applicable to groups, but decisions can be made by groups through a number of means, including consensus by democracy.

# Putting it all together

So, if mass surveillance takes away the privacy of an entire group, and privacy is structurally critical to autonomy - **it follows that the purpose of mass surveillance is to remove group autonomy.**

In other words, your vote definitely doesn't count, and there are governments and businesses actively working together to make sure of that.

# Countermeasures

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