

A right to privacy? Not at the expense of free speech!

Our user imos.org.uk argues with one of our draft principles challenging the idea that privacy is a condition for free speech.



Privacy sounds like a nice thing. If I could have a right to privacy without this interfering with free speech, then I'd be tempted. But what are we supposed to do? If I do tell someone an intimate secret, can I really be given a right to force them never to reveal this information? That sounds an awful lot like limiting free speech.

Attempts to enforce a right to privacy can easily interfere with free speech – and free speech is more important than privacy. It shouldn't be a question of trying to 'balance' a 'right to privacy' against 'the public interest.' It is not in the public interest to compromise on free speech without an extraordinarily good reason – and preventing people being embarrassed is not an extraordinarily good reason for limiting free speech. Are we really going to argue – without any trace of irony – that, in order to protect free speech, we have to force people to keep quiet about things that might embarrass other people? Very often, this embarrassment results from people being two-faced and deceitful. They want to present one image of themselves to certain people whilst the truth lies elsewhere. Should we compromise free speech in order to protect liars from being discovered?

I am also concerned to challenge the central argument that privacy is a condition of free speech – as expressed in the top paragraph. Providing we don't have a police state – which obviously wouldn't have free speech anyway – the argument about a lack of privacy preventing free speech doesn't hold water. It is true that, even without a police state, most people will still limit what they say if they think their words will not remain private. That, however, is their choice. They are not being forced to keep quiet. Their right to free speech has not been taken away. They are choosing not to share their views – usually because it doesn't suit them for certain other people to know the truth about what they think.

There are legitimate ways in which we can seek to protect our rights to privacy. Mainly, however,

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these should focus on restricting some of the more intrusive methods that people might use to gain information about us rather than on restricting how they can disseminate information they have obtained legitimately. Limiting free speech in order to protect people's privacy, however, is another matter.

We shouldn't be compromising our free speech principles. When people have concerns about such things as privacy, instead of pandering to any demands they might have that free speech should be limited, we should stand by our principles and argue our case that, however much we might enjoy our privacy, free speech is far, far more important.

Read the original article and comments [here](#).

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