Disconnecting the Dots: Anonymity in the Digital Age

Sydney Hanover

Governmental and corporate spying are no longer a surprising facet of everyday life in the digital age. In this paper, I expand upon the implications at stake in debates on autonomy, privacy, and anonymity, and I arrive at a definition of anonymity involving the flow between traits and the inability to connect them based on deliberate non-publication on a structurally social level. I argue that cultivating the space to remain anonymous is useful for distanced association with oneself in the purely private internal sphere, furthering a more fully examined inner association not based on a future already predicted or prematurely acted upon. The privilege of anonymity is a precondition for genuine self-relation. Later, I argue doubly against the "nothing to hide" argument, i.e., if one has nothing to hide, one has nothing to fear. Firstly, the actionability and fabrication of data make it such that it is always at risk of being interpreted as unsafe. Secondly, this argument is predicated on hiddenness as negative, which I answer with an analysis of the functionality of anonymity concerning personal growth.

I. Introduction

What we search and put on personal devices, who owns that data, and what they do with that information, is at the center of an important debate on privacy containing various opinions on what is being protected and why. This debate is not merely about words and concepts, rather, as exemplified by the extent of corporate and governmental spying in this country, all of us are affected, despite how technologically involved one may be. As I will show in this paper, at stake are the philosophical realms of autonomous deliberation, agency and personhood that underlie our actions in the digital age. These are topics that are often neglected, as we can see by the general public's blind acceptance of information banks, and even their willing participation in handing out data in forms such as social media and personalized biological information like 23andMe. Once our data is publicized, unbeknownst to us, it is not only wrung out for its future use but also may be manipulated in such a way that can affect how we relate to others—and, importantly, even to ourselves—when being anonymous is no longer a choice. As I will explain below, voyeurism in the form of unsolicited viewership can come in many forms, and often governmental and corporate spying rip away autonomy, deciding the future of personal control of information and its implications.

In this paper, I argue that the concept of anonymity, which I will define in detail below,

ought to be a central focal point of the debate on privacy and autonomy, especially in the context of data-driven, algorithmic, and predictive technologies. If autonomy, the ability of an agent to act on the basis of her own authority over herself, is to be self-authored and reflective of personal deliberation in terms of growth, then anonymity ought to be protected and its centrality brought into focus. As I will show, defending anonymity as central to autonomy can elucidate key aspects of important debates about privacy.

To illustrate the centrality of anonymity in relation to privacy, I will also argue against the "nothing to hide" argument. Daniel J. Solove explains the argument as follows: government surveillance poses no threat to privacy unless unlawful activity is uncovered, in which case it should not be private—legal activity and the surveillance thereof is nothing to worry about.[1] I will refute this argument in two ways. My first strategy will be to challenge the first premise of the argument: that quotidian and legal activity can be transparent and safe. As I will explain below, movability of data, how it is disseminated and by whom allows algorithms and data banks—particularly those sustained by corporations and government—to take raw personal data and create new repossessed data sets. A repossessed data set is a data set that is taken from one data collecting entity and placed, differently categorized, into another database. The information itself is not necessarily changed, but its movement dissociates it further from where it came and its separation may shift the way that it will be used in the future. Once repossessed by the recording technology, and the industry behind it, these data sets are used for further algorithmic purposes.[2] Eventually, that individual's data does not truly belong to the agent from whom it was taken any longer. It belongs to banks of data that are stored and continuously revisited. This means that even quotidian and legal activity is not safe from how its actionability will be utilized. This is, of course, exacerbated by the fact that even if such an agent had access to such data, it would be incomprehensible to them without the algorithmic technology required to decipher its actionability.

Secondly, the nothing to hide argument does not consider how the exposition and utilization of data in the form of institutionalized surveillance policy and simpler listening devices in cell phones, for example, reflects back on personhood and growth, which will depict the implications of

---

1. Daniel J. Solove, "'I've Got Nothing to Hide' and Other Misunderstandings of Privacy. Informational Privacy: Philosophical Foundations and Legal Implications)," *San Diego Law Review*, vol. 44, no. 4, 2007, pp. 745–772

2. Following Louise Amoore, I will use the term "actionability" to refer to the way in which data becomes usable. By this I mean that traceable data like credit card purchases, flights, and numerical identifiers like social security for instance are used to glean more information about a person or her future actions. Amoore's work refers to more than the ways in which already established data points are used but how the absence of data is also acted upon. Louise Amoore, "Data Derivatives: On the Emergence of a Security Risk Calculus for Our Times," *Theory, Culture & Society*, vol. 28, no. 6, 2011, 24–43.

a misled approach to privacy that neglects the value of anonymity. As we will see, there are some things worth keeping for oneself independently of whether or not they are things that would be considered "something to hide." In one sense, this means that this argument misses the main point of both privacy and anonymity: that we all have something to hide.[3]

The potential for invasion of personal life is ripe, as is the exposing feeling it engenders even, and perhaps especially, when it is implicit.[4] For example, unless I share information willingly, I do not want others to have access to certain traits about me, facts about how those traits are related to each other, facts about how they are related back to me, and/or, importantly, what I do with them.[5] It is this sharing transaction that, as I will show in this paper, is at the center of the flow of information I referred to above. For example, the National Security Agency, a component of the Defense Department is legally able to survey international and domestic communications under the FISA Amendment Act signed under President George W. Bush. Under this act, "foreign intelligence information," which is the primary excuse for data collection, retention, and dissemination, is defined incredibly broadly.[6] This vagueness means that Americans, their domestic and international calls, locations, and search histories are subject to government acquisition. This publicity suggests that the data of every American and foreigner, not simply those they consider "a threat" (which also has an extraordinarily broad definition), is available for legal procurement by the government.[7] What is ours, in fact, is at the disposal of the government (and corporations, which I speak less of, that are also guilty of procuring data in a manner once thought to be barred).[8] While problematic methods of collection are built into the law, practices— in terms of what they are able to collect and why—

---

3. As it will become clear throughout this paper, that something should be kept from others, is independent of its moral status or social stigma. Having something to hide is not based on criminality or embarrassment but out of self-preservation, the possibility of a continued notion of self that is simultaneously changing and handling that change.

4. Judith Jarvis Thomson inquires into the violation of rights and what that means for privacy in general by presenting several imaginary, yet very real, cases in which privacy might be being violated. See Judith Jarvis Thomson, "The Right to Privacy," *Philosophical Dimensions of Privacy*, ed. Ferdinand David Schoeman, (Cambridge University Press, 1984): 272–289, doi:10.1017/cbo9780511625138.012. I am here thinking of her example of a passerby listening to a fight she is having at home heard through open windows versus a neighbor training an amplifier to listen in (273). For most of the paper, she attempts to determine whether these two scenarios, or one or the other, violates the right to privacy and to what degree. I point this example out to note that she uses it because in both cases, intuitive discomfort is palpable and a springboard for her argument.

5. As I will show in detail below, I do not use the term "anonymity" to refer to simple namelessness, nor do I put identity solely in that basket. Rather, as I argue, it is related to a flow of traits, behavioral propensities and embodied habits or hobbies, used to distinguish someone (not externally appropriate an identity for them).

6. Alex Abdo and Jameel Jaffer, "How the NSA's Surveillance Procedures Threaten Americans' Privacy," *American Civil Liberties Union*, April 26, 2015, www.aclu.org/blog/national-security/secrecy/how-nsas-surveillance-procedures-threaten-americans-privacy.

7. Abdo and Jaffer, "How the NSA's Surveillance Procedures Threaten Americans' Privacy."

8. Adam Uzialko, "How and Why Businesses Collect Consumer Data," *Business News Daily*, August 3 2018, www.businessnewsdaily.com/10625-businesses-collecting-data.html.

also exceed lawful categories.[9]

So, why does having nothing to hide from the government still produce discomfort from the acquisition of information in the personal, and in this case technological, field? There is an underlying aspect of personhood that is extremely important to uphold and protect — anonymity. I would like to suggest that anonymity articulates the boundary for personal rights violation, in the form of exhibition of traits, as well as potential for human flourishing. This internal space, which anonymity seeks to protect, is perhaps to remain space—*as such*, not to be filled in—where I can connect with my most undisguised self.[10] This part of the self is to be the aspect of personhood most free from any third party intrusion, existing only for oneself.

II. Anonymity

In order to begin my analysis of anonymity it is useful to start with a working definition of the term. I define anonymity in the following way:

> The inability of any second or third party, beyond oneself, to connect the flow between traits that act as an underlying structural association of social identification that is deliberately unpublicized.[11]

As I will show later, this definition is closely related to the work of Kathleen A. Wallace, which emphasizes the sociality of anonymity, namely that everyone acts and interacts within a social context in which they can be identified, which contributes to the exhibition of their traits.[12] But first, let us take a look at each of the key terms in the definition above. By traits, I mean physical characteristics, such as hair color and height, but also habits or actions, as well as the relationships between them and their intimate, exclusive relationship to myself.

Expanding on the definition of anonymity above, consider the following example: For me to remain anonymous in one respect would mean that a second or third party observer is incapable of connecting the fact that I am graduating from the University of Oregon, my address on my license is not in Oregon, and that I am communicating with landlords in Portland. If one of these traits were taken individually, it would place me in a different geographical location along the West coast.

---

9. Eric Lichtblau and James Risen, "Officials Say U.S. Wiretaps Exceeded Law," *The New York Times*, April 16, 2009, www.nytimes.com/2009/04/16/us/16nsa.html?pagewanted=1&_r=1&ref=us.

10. I do not mean to pinpoint free will or selfhood, but to contribute a conversation on becoming attuned to being anonymous to others as well as oneself, which may be productive and weighty. Free will and the self are concepts extremely tied up in philosophy on the whole, and these topics themselves are not covered sufficiently in this thesis. Instead, my view comments on the importance of the control of one's own information, and what that might contribute to these larger concepts.

11. The traits we display and how they integrate to form a consistency that is identifiable to one person.

12. See Kathleen A. Wallace, "Anonymity," *Ethics and Information Technology*, vol. 1, no. 1, (1999): 21–31, doi:10.1023/a:1010066509278.

Taken together one can ascribe to a story of where I am from, where I am, and where I am going. In other words, the aggregation of spatial (location) and temporal (near graduation) traits allow a third party observer to correctly, or incorrectly, infer possible scenarios as to who I am and what I am about to be and do. It is this inference space that anonymity protects.[13] It is important to note that it is not the traits or throughlines, the connections between the connections of traits, themselves at issue in anonymity. Facts and data point to a story of someone's life. Their traits may identify them simply in some contexts, but their ability to remain anonymous refers to what is done with the information rather than what it contains. Helen Fay Nissenbaum devotes an analysis to the ways in which technology has changed in order to facilitate data aggregation and fabrication. This example is truly a euphemism for the data that is used in what she calls the "vast enterprise of meaning-making [that motivates] a great deal of collection, storage, and dissemination of information."[14] My view of anonymity is more closely related to that of Wallace, whose view addresses the "noncoordinatability of traits in a given respect."[15] Maintaining anonymity seeks to preserve a lack of comprehensive correspondence between traits. By using the term "correspondence" my framework ties anonymity to social contexts, upon which I will expand later. For now, traits identified to one person or a group must stand on the same contextual ground as the one identifying them. By "contextual ground" I mean to suggest an outline of the way in which different social networks in which people exist and act connect to one another, providing a "context" where detailed and different arenas of social life become intelligible to others. This ground does not mean to suggest a cultural or linguistic similarity, but the exhibition of traits must be able to be understood by other people. I am not considering animal behavior or extremely fringe human behavior as exhibiting the same degree of sociality, though there may be intentional interaction within these networks. To comprehend the flow of traits, they must be recognizable in comparison to others' on a social human level.

Now, let me clarify what I mean by the flow between traits. The flow between traits can be conceived of as the abstracted overarching coherence of one person's identity that allows for traits as well as throughlines to be tied together in order to denote a singular person or group. This

---

13. In training predictive algorithms, the accuracy of capturing each individual instance is not really prioritized, whether it is a correct categorization of an individual or an incorrect one, the system will use it as raw data from which to learn and adapt. See Amoore, "Data Derivatives," 32-33.

14. Helen Fay Nissenbaum, *Privacy in Context: Technology, Policy, and the Integrity of Social Life,* (Stanford University Press, 2010), 45. I dedicate much of what follows to the actionability of data, but Nissenbaum also highlights an important aspect of that narrative: that inventories of information can be "effectively moved into massive aggregations and disaggregated into usable chunks … Furthermore, information begets information: as data is structured and analyzed it yields implications, consequences, and predictions" (37).

15. Wallace, "Anonymity," 24.

perspective of materialized traits that are mapped onto an actual person does not imply a solely superimposed identity, although to remain anonymous is considered to be necessarily in relation to others. A flow is by definition not rooted or stagnant, its movement is its constancy, but the flow connects the dots between traits, and traits are always socially contextualized if they are to be recognized by others. It is important to note that anonymity, by these characterizations, is a broader term rooted in much more than safeguarding a name. The underlying structural association within these contexts is a throughline of traits that exists for the identification of a singular person. When this flow between traits is shielded, so that links cannot be made and, thus, one cannot be identified by a second or third party, one achieves anonymity.

As I briefly discussed above, in this definition I have departed from the widely accepted definition that ties anonymity to namelessness, the kind of definition that one may even find in a Merriam Webster dictionary. Being anonymous commonly refers to forms of pseudonyms or being unrecognizable. Because this paper focuses on the implications of contemporary data technologies, it is important to note, as Nissenbaum writes, that when it comes to contemporary technology "the electronic medium now offers many points of entry, some of which may be even more effective than a name."[16] Here, Nissenbaum refers to the way in which data can be inferred about a person through technology without ever knowing his or her name. Consider the following example, someone who shops at Home Depot and donates to charities that construct homes pro bono. The unnamed person can be located geographically and can be typified by her interests. This unnamed individual points out to Nissenbaum that there are other ways to gather information that are even more satisfactory than through a name. What "effectiveness" is getting at in the Nissenbaum quote above is included in the definition: relations of traits become accessible and may pinpoint a person or group. In a later section, I will explore in detail the related notion of "actionability" in this data, a concept used by Louise Amoore. These two facts about this person may be traced to her email, from which she is updated on Home Depot and her favorite charities, then targeted for advertisements on landscaping designs and manipulated into buying expensive tools, thereby making the data actionable. Capturing the electronic medium that Nissenbaum highlights requires a more thorough definition of anonymity, which will clarify my discussion on autonomy and privacy. Nissenbaum is concerned for this external identification (that of locating by another), but on which she does not elaborate. The effectiveness of the entry is what is at stake in risking anonymity and what it seeks to preserve. At stake is a zone of personhood, deliberately nonspecific and undefinable, wherein traits

16. Helen Fay Nissenbaum, "The Meaning of Anonymity in an Information Age," *The Information Society*, vol. 15, no. 2 (1999): 141–144, doi:10.1080/019722499128592, 142.

and throughlines are melded into one another and one may grow.

Anonymity can include namelessness, but namelessness is only a portion of the larger concept of anonymity. In this paper, I will be using a version of anonymity connected to recognizable traits of identity and the flow of their linkages. At first sight, the concept of namelessness seems in fact a viable way to think of anonymity because the term denotes a certain removal of a part of identity. As mentioned above, Nissenbaum exemplifies nameless anonymity as "people strolling through a foreign city" in which "no one knows who they are."[17] There is power in this type of anonymity because being able to roam without recognition puts less anticipatory pressure, such as expecting how one will act in a foreign city setting based on already knowing their habits, on any one person. There is a lighter version of responsibility to be held. Being unrecognizable can sometimes mean having the freedom to be anyone at that given moment unbeholden to previous duties. However, even in these examples one can see that anonymity is much more complex than a name, especially in an information age sustained by electronic data gathering systems, as previously mentioned. In the first two examples about location on the West coast and shopping/donating both in relation to home repair, external agents can see what I am doing while I nevertheless remain nameless and a stranger to them. In an information age knowing people's habits and activities allows a system to at least typify me, at most use what I do for predictive purposes. Thus namelessness is only the surface of the traceability of someone, where the availability of traits and their manifestation also act as key identifiers.[18] As Nissenbaum notes, these systems can link bits and pieces of online information to a person or group without ever knowing a name, and the information they can accumulate goes much deeper than a name.[19] In the data gathering systems to which I refer, search history, online purchases, tax returns, and many more items of information are bound to one person and can reveal more about that person without ever knowing her name (this information can all be gathered from what is stored on any one computer). These items are relevant to anonymity because they are not simply pieces of information. Pieced

17. Nissenbaum, "The Meaning of Anonymity in an Information Age," 141.

18. Here, a proper name does indeed act as a "rigid designator," which "designates the same object in all possible worlds in which that object exists and never designates anything else." Joseph LaPorte, "Rigid Designators," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Spring 2018, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2018/entries/rigid-designators. The object being identified when called out by name can remain that very object throughout different contexts. But, I am suggesting here, that the patterns of the flow of our traits also point to, by way of identification, to a singular person or group as well. Though the flow of traits is more malleable and subject to change than a proper name, it still acts as a rigid designator because the object remains the same, and the object remains the same within different social contexts. If that object, the anonymous person, is the same person in various social spheres, then the flow of their traits provides a more calculated rigid designator than simply her name, which likely is not needed to place traits on to a person.

19. Nissenbaum, "The Meaning of Anonymity in an Information Age," 142.

together, they create a story (whether or not it is accurate), that are springboards from which governments, institutions, companies, and private interests target people and tell them who they are. Hence, because of the intricacy of human participation in social life, in this paper I will be using an account of anonymity tied to networks of relation that go much deeper than a name. As I will show later in detail, the insufficiency of the name is what lies in the incalculable forms of knowledge in the form of the elusive self and why the actionability of data and the gaps between data are far more important than pinning down the points of entry that negate anonymity.

Consider now that whether or not my data depicts something worth investigating or prosecuting is not up to me to decide—governments and corporations can manipulate data in general and to their advantage. Amoore cites the ontology of association as implying a relational quality between data points that becomes actionable, able to act upon.[20] The intangible link between data points is not concrete in itself, rather becomes actionable because the association and correlation between data is legitimized, even though it is an absence instead of something positive used. There is a level of abstraction based "precisely on absence, on what is not known, on the very basis of uncertainty."[21] The potential consequence is an "amalgam of disaggregated data, inferring across the gaps to derive a lively and alert new form of data derivative."[22] This associative method of interpretation can be dangerous, even if the data does not necessarily say so. For example, becoming a security risk at the airport is based on data such as checked luggage, method of payment, location leaving from and going to, and ethnicity. The associative method ties these pieces of information together to create a picture of a threatening person who is then subjected to interrogation and often racism.

Let us now return to the definition of anonymity I provided above. Social context is taken as a prerequisite to the coordinability of traits, as traits cannot stand alone within an intricate patchwork of community, notably in the technological context where platforms are interconnected by people and databases. People's traits can be thought of as their active expression—what people do characterizes parts of who they are, and when traits overlap and correlate with each other, their aggregation forms a fuller picture of who one is on the whole. Traits are not solely different patterns of behavior but how they are manifested in various and overlapping ways. For example, one person may have a hat collection, a consumer pattern, and use each style of hat for a different outdoor activity she enjoys—running, cycling, hiking, etc. These are traits in themselves and also may, for

20. Amoore, "Data Derivatives," 27.
21. Amoore, "Data Derivatives," 27.
22. Amoore, "Data Derivatives," 27.

instance, suggest she is a pale person that likes spending time outside. Wallace's work highlights that people and their traits are always socially contextualized, which allows them to be placeable within a social realm at the outset.[23] Someone who is completely off the grid is not anonymous because her traits and the flow between them are not in the same sphere as others, and so they are not placeable in the language of traits agreed upon that are socially accessible. Thus, I agree with Wallace in that anonymity is not simply unknownness, in the case of being unaware of someone's existence, but rather being cognizant of someone's existence without identifying a person or group from the information available about them. Instead, anonymity shields one's identity located within a social context that would naturally allow a window into the flow of their traits that makes them not only visible but identifiable. For example, one can be visible without being identifiable. In the case of anonymous support groups like Alcoholics Anonymous, a name is stated along with the literal visibility of one's physical presence in the room, but that person is not identifiable beyond that circle. Wallace deems "network," "order," and "location" within these structures broadly as social contexts, where the examples she gives are economic, geographical, linguistic, etc. and one's position within these orders.[24] An order contains several networks of relations that overlap with other orders —for example the market and consumer networks belong to both the economic and political orders.[25] These orders make sociality more precise in examining the contemporaneousness of traits in other sectors, opening up the way in which traits, behaviors, and habits overlap in one person's life and with others'. The possibility of disclosure of identity in different sectors is extremely important to anonymity for potentially divulging choice information.[26] Divulging one's own information, or pointing out the flow of traits in order to be identified, introduces the agent as a gatekeeper for his or her own identification. This permeability folds a layer of autonomy into the function of anonymity.

Because traits in themselves, like data points, provide only so much information on a subject, topic or person, the flow between them is a more apt conception of understanding the operation of the flow between traits as opposed to description of the traits themselves. More literally I use the term flow to indicate connection. Also, I use the term "flow" to indicate changeability, in terms of growth, development, and shifting interests (for better or worse). In developing new hobbies, habits, or traits themselves, there remains a flow qua throughline that may solidify identity even through its obligatory changes (whether it shifts a little or changes completely over time). There are necessary

23. Wallace, "Anonymity," 21-31.
24. Wallace, "Anonymity," 25-26.
25. Wallace, "Anonymity," 26.
26. By "choice information" I mean to introduce the controllability of data that is at least seemingly one's own.

linkages and associations between traits but the practice of their lived embodiment for a person is constantly shifting. In this sense, I am referring to the developing to which most everyone is subject yet of which one is not necessarily aware. I am pointing to the sense of changing traits and thus how their manifestations change as a natural part of personhood. I doubt none of us are who we were, even if our hobbies and activities have remained the same. Development here is intentionally somewhat shallow and ought not to be taken positively or pejoratively; this is simply a recognition and allowance for variation in traits over time.

All this is not meant to delve into the intricate philosophical debates surrounding the nature of the soul or of personal identity, however the throughline can be said to be that which renders the same person identifiable while her traits and their manifestation change. For example, a student from Iowa that grew up on a farm may be graduating from the University of Oregon with a degree in Environmental Studies. That student previously showed her enjoyment for the outdoors by farming and producing vegetables for the farmer's market. Now, her enjoyment for the outdoors has shifted into protecting farmers through policy and she spends time talking to people in their communities, outside, but also advises local politicians on the wants of this population. She has developed, her interests have changed, but she remains herself. In the more literal (former) sense, flow signifies a more fluid interrelation between traits that may connect or disconnect with other traits of one person—a caveat that Wallace points to but does not expand upon when she says that people are a plurality of traits that are not each related to every other.[27] Thus, the flow between traits is perhaps the least material or observable aspect of anonymity, yet it is nonetheless the most definite. Traits change but a flow will remain. The space between traits is seemingly the most empty. But, I emphasize, here as well and throughout this thesis, that negativity can be productive. Traits are established and classified by their positive manifestations, how they come to be in the world, but even though the flow between traits is not positive in the sense that it impresses activities and data on the world, it is generative in the sense of creating a foundation and conditions on which occurrences happen conventionally in the world. The flow between traits is similar to how I will conceive of privacy later on as a network that is somewhat groundless but still substantially rooted and active in sensible connections between more concrete variables.

III. Privacy, Autonomy, and Anonymity

In this section I will introduce the way in which the concepts of privacy, autonomy, and anonymity fundamentally operate in concert with one another. As I will show, anonymity is a central focus in both privacy and autonomy, privacy directly pointing directly inward, and autonomy

27. Wallace, "Anonymity," 26-27.

controlling the publication of that internal and personal space. The space created for oneself to grow through those boundaries is made possible by the ability to protect it, anonymity.

Privacy

Before considering the right to privacy, I will outline some of the conceptions of privacy itself in the literature. There is considerable debate on the term and how we use it in philosophy, law, and colloquial speech. Firstly, some authors believe privacy is a stand-alone concept while others believe it is derivative.[28] The latter I will discuss in relation to the right to privacy, but I would like to consider the former in order to later see if the right can be breached or forfeited. Herman T. Tavani delineates four distinct kinds of privacy: physical/accessibility, decisional, psychological/mental, and informational.[29] Each is also distinct in type of harm that may be accounted for when the respective type of privacy is violated. Physical privacy is fairly obvious in its spatial manner, focusing on the capacity for harm "through physical access to a person" or her possessions.[30] Foul play in this category of privacy may harm the victim in a direct sense. This conception is clearly not the only one and not sufficient, notably in a technological environment where there is no materiality.[31] Examples may be found in stalking or reading someone's diary. Stalking infringes on someone's personal physical space from afar yet significantly impedes in a personal way, whereas reading someone's diary also invades physical space, the significant harm done is not physical but rather mental. Much like the technological context, privacy is violated without a name, not really physically, and in a way that is inhibiting from within. These examples highlight the inadequacy of considering only this type of privacy. Secondly, decisional privacy is that of freedom from interference affecting one's choices and the ability to make them, such as states' rights to deny access to counseling on birth control.[32] This non-intrusive type of privacy is exclusionary in the processes leading up to and the moment of decision making—what is questionable here is who or what plays a part in shifting the way one carries out one's actions. The harm done is more subtle and can be, consequently, more

---

28. For his extended discussion of these differing conceptions, see Herman T. Tavani, "Informational Privacy: Concepts, Theories, and Controversies" in *The Handbook of Information and Computer Ethics,* eds. Kenneth Einar Himma and Herman T. Tavani, 131–164, 1st ed., (Hoboken, NJ, USA: Wiley, 2009), doi:10.1002/9780470281819.ch6.

29. Tavani, "Informational Privacy: Concepts, Theories, and Controversies," 132.

30. Herman T. Tavani, "Informational Privacy: Concepts, Theories, and Controversies," 135.

31. The first type of privacy (physical) and the last type (informational) implicate different conceptions of property. I am referring to three classifications Ali M. Al-Khouri uses to describe personal information. Ali M. Al-Khouri, "Data Ownership: Who Owns 'My Data'?," *International Journal Of Management & Information Technology*, vol. 2, no. 1 (2012): 1–8, doi:10.24297/ijmit.v2i1.1406. They are observed, or "captured" data that can simply be recorded, volunteered, which is shared or given, and inferred from the first two kinds of raw data. For example, I can go to the park and observe the amount of times an adult helps a child on the play set (observed). I can also take a survey which will give me similar information (volunteered). Al-Khouri gives the example of a credit score, which is a numerical value and interpretation of spending habits and financial habits (3).

32. Tavani, "Informational Privacy: Concepts, Theories, and Controversies," 136.

manipulative. Third, Tavani describes privacy in terms of psychological and mental states including protecting one's thoughts and capacity for thinking free from intrusion.[33] Similar to decisional privacy, psychological/mental privacy attempts to reserve the internal sphere for oneself. In contrast, this latter category focuses more on personality and identity (ripe for harm in this case) than decision making. The last conception that Tavani discusses is informational privacy, simply the restriction of collecting and using personal data—quite relevant to the technological context[34]—the speed at which information is exchanged, and duration in the form of storage, writ large this last type of privacy in the current conversation on privacy in general.[35]

Before I move on, I would like to discuss why the psychological/mental in congruence with the decisional conception of privacy are most relevant to my thesis. Psychological/mental privacy is more subtle than physical privacy, as it is not so much what knowledge has been gained or possessions have been taken, but what Mark Alfino contends is that "the very act of the intrusion that prevents [us] from thinking or concentrating on [our] life or actions."[36] Decisional privacy operates similarly, in that the intrusion comes not in the form of epistemic advantage or potential harm, but in that the act of infiltration that can disturb one's modus operandi.[37] Therein lies the way in which jeopardized privacy phenomenologically feels uncomfortable and logistically inhibits the way people are, though what may be included or under the larger concept of privacy is still at issue. And, I would suggest, that the way that they are, or what is obligatory for their sensing a compulsion for privacy in general, is the recognition that there is something personal to keep to oneself, and it

---

33. Tavani, "Informational Privacy: Concepts, Theories, and Controversies," 137-138.

34. Tavani, "Informational Privacy: Concepts, Theories, and Controversies," 139. There is an already-established use of privacy in the debate on collecting personal data. Colin Koopman's book *How We Became Our Data* details the genealogy of datafied information, in which he comments on these topics. See Colin Koopman, *How We Became Our Data: A Genealogy of the Informational Person*, (University of Chicago Press, 2019). I am not, nor is Tavani, the first to comment on privacy and technology. I recognize that there is a longstanding history and deliberation on the subject.

35. While I agree with and respect aspects of Tavani's endeavors in tackling the vague and unsatisfactory definitions of privacy, I believe he outlines the categories too stringently, not allowing for enough overlap. Delving into his delineations only pointed out how imbricated they are. But in contrast to Tavani, my view is not opposed to the overlapping of the conceptions of privacy. The overlapping is necessary for a more accurate picture of what we mean when we say or use privacy in debate. He does not necessarily advocate for a strict separation out of context, but their entanglement is integral to the way in which privacy affects one person on several levels at once as well as operates interpersonally. The categories are more intertwined than he lets them be in the paper, whether or not he does so intentionally.

36. Mark Alfino, "Information Ethics in the Workplace: Misplacing Privacy," *Journal of Information Ethics*, vol. 10, no. 2 (2001): 5-8, http://libproxy.uoregon.edu/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.libproxy.uoregon.edu/scholarly-journals/information-ethics-workplace-misplacing-privacy/docview/1850663213/se-2?accountid=14698, 7.

37. By "modus operandi" I am prioritizing the way in which embody their thoughts and act them out.

can be helpful to do so.[38] The ability to privatize personal space and knowledge is why I have found that anonymity is paramount in relation to secrecy, privacy, and integrity of thought that may come from it. By recognizing the way these two specific types of privacy subtly demonstrate a stress on genuine action when they are compromised, I am pointed back to a reserved personal sphere that is separate and necessary for operation in relation to acting with minimal outside influence.[39] The opportunity to create this space comes from the ability to shield it. Thus, again, anonymity is a required first for whatever may come of this space subsequently.

Judith Jarvis Thomson's conception of privacy is that of a cluster of other rights from which the right to privacy is derived. In "The Right to Privacy," Thomson proposes a number and variety of scenarios through which she evaluates the potential for violating the right to privacy or other rights less frequently considered a part of the privacy equation. Some examples she considers include: someone stopping to listen to her and her husband fight overheard through open windows, using an amplifier to listen in to a public conversation, and possessing and hiding a secret pornographic picture.[40] She questions which rights exactly are being violated in each scenario, as it seems that the right to privacy is a general blanket term, but in these cases, the right to one's own person, the right to private property, and positive/negative rights (in using or protecting property) are more likely the rights that are directly compromised. Thomson is unsure if "there are any rights in the right to privacy cluster which aren't also in some other right cluster," and she suspects that "the right to privacy is everywhere overlapped by other rights."[41] Thomson concludes that we have one right in the cluster because we can appeal to another right in the cluster, and that "it is because I have these rights that I have a right to privacy," making the right to privacy "'derivative' in this sense: it is possible to explain in the case of each right in the cluster how come we have it without ever once mentioning the right to privacy."[42] The right to privacy acts only as an umbrella under which stand the actual rights that are violated. Despite being an umbrella, the right to privacy can only be called upon, for Thomson, by a descendancy of the rights actually violated. The right to privacy is

38. When talking about "private" information, I am diverging from the commonly held view that understands it as information *ownership,* employing terms such as "intellectual property" or "private property rights." Private ownership is often thought of as the delegation of objects or information to a person or group who maintain the rights to govern or use them/it to whatever degree they want. In contrast, I am interested in privacy in the way in which the governing body governs and in what she shelters.

39. I am extremely doubtful of eliminating all outside influence in one's thoughts or how they may be carried out. By this I mean to say that there is a malleable reserved personal sphere, but it cannot be wholly separated from what shapes it. In talking about exhibited traits embodied and carried out, I am not operating within only the internal personal sphere, and insofar as I am working in social contextuality, there is necessarily affectation.

40. Thomson, "The Right to Privacy," *Philosophical Dimensions of Privacy* (1984): 272–289.

41. Thomson, "The Right to Privacy," 284.

42. Judith Jarvis Thomson, "The Right to Privacy," 287.

inferential from the cluster of these other rights, acting as epiphenomenal and inactive, thus untouchable in itself.[43]

The right to privacy may act as a wide-ranging and unspecific term for Thomson, but that does exclude it from being productive for me. Though it may not necessarily be mentioned in the conversation about which rights are violated, the comprehensiveness of the cluster of rights under the right to privacy is not moot; it may well be that the right to privacy is the precondition for the other rights to occur at all. The other rights could not exist without the grounding concept of the right to privacy, as a private zone must first be established for any personal right to be violated, and likely could not be articulated as such without at least a general theoretical privacy positively disclosing other rights. In Thomson's examination, the rights of property, preservation of life, and bodily freedom are all predicated on other similar rights, rights that are explained by appealing to other rights that also include them.[44] It is in this sense that the right to privacy is overarching but inaccessible for Thomson. But, while I think she is right to question what rights are expressly violated, notably in a legal and punitive setting, I do not believe that the right to privacy ought to be thought of as idle or static. Instead, it is the right to privacy that constantly acts as a foundation on which other rights are to be built. The other rights would be free floating if not for the right to privacy, which may perhaps remain unclear or intangible, but also allows for the other rights to have weight in their own contexts. Similarly, anonymity allows for the occurrence of flourishing as a layer over which development may unfold, but without which might be sporadic and deficient. By this I mean that anonymity is a precondition for creating space for autonomy and, while it may remain invisible, holding a space containing the potential for anonymity gives a level of security that is generative, which I will delve into in subsequent sections. Personhood, property, and protection are all at stake in this example, where information and thought are thwarted; anonymity as the imperceptible is brought to the fore as it becomes the main component of felt and rationalized inhibition.

Autonomy

At this point, I have outlined the way in which I am using the term "privacy" and why I am

---

43. Epiphenomenalism is the philosophic view that mental events are caused by physical events in the brain but do not have an effect on any physical events. William Robinson, "Epiphenomenalism," S*tanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Summer 2019, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2019/entries/epiphenomenalism. The mental events synthesized by the physical events do not have an active role in events playing out. This term lays claim on Thomson's argument because she deems the right to privacy as such by saying that the right to privacy has no causal power in the matter of violation of rights. Instead, the right to privacy is equivalent to the mental events that do not actually affect the physical events playing out, the right to property, person, etc. that are violated.

44. Thomson, "The Right to Privacy," 286.

accepting the overlapping of the term's definition—I think it right to allow this ambiguity for the sake of comprehensiveness. Privacy is a key aspect of this thesis because it points toward a personal boundary that is valued and with which we continuously play. The limits of this boundary are tested in what we show and allow people to see, granting autonomous action in being able to singularly stretch that boundary. What autonomy and privacy together provide is a foundation for deliberate anonymity. For my thesis, this discussion below on the origins and legitimacy of autonomy will play into the conditions that are created for genuine autonomy, from which we can consider the way anonymity also perpetuates these conditions. Whether or not self-governing can be pinned down is not the answer I am after, but rather the question of whether anonymity is primary in setting up the consideration of the reasoning, motivation, and influence that goes into the functions of self-government in the first place.

Personal autonomy is broadly recognized in the philosophic literature as the type of self-governing that is necessary to being a full moral agent, one who initiates one's actions.[45] The singular power of the agent herself to act begets the authority over her own actions, as she is the only one able to exercise this power over herself. Thus, her actions are entitled to her only by way of her commitments to acting because they are not entitled to anyone else.[46] The philosophical debate lies in whether influences on the agent's actions erode personal autonomy, putting into question the motivation of actions and, controversially, how they might affect self-governing. For example, someone on a diet seemingly has a choice to not eat sugar, but sugar is also one of the most addictive substances, and diets are a common fad. The debate in this scenario is whether the chemical predilection to eat sugar and/or societal pressure compromises personal autonomy because self-governing may not be considered a genuine choice.[47] There are several modes of thought that follow on whether agent's actions can be fully, partially, or irrelevantly tied to external influences.[48]

---

45. Sarah Buss and Andrea Westlund, "Personal Autonomy," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Spring 2018, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2018/entries/personal-autonomy/.

46. Buss and Westlund, "Personal Autonomy."

47. In this case, a genuine choice is not only one free of external coercion in the form of social, physical, or psychological determination, but also one in which the agent can explain her reasoning, which is devoid of external influence and the actions that follow from it, but, again, I am not sure if this is possible.

48. Approaches include but are not limited to: the coherentist, reasons-responsive, responsiveness-to-reasoning, and incompatibilist approaches which discuss the conditions for which autonomy may or may not be undermined or solidified by the motives behind them. Buss and Westlund characterize the coherentist as the most internal, in that the agent's motivations correspond to a mental state. For the other approaches, this is insufficient as, respectively, to really self-govern she must reckon with the reasons behind her motives, examine the motives of others and adjust her own, or recognize that all motives can be attributed to an external source. They are not mutually exclusive; in fact motivation as attributed to other factors and reflected upon is likely laden within each argument. Here, I take the position of those that seriously scrutinize the motivations as opposed to the foremost approach that is satisfied by the most surface level motives that prompt action.

The aspects of the approaches—coherentist, reasons-responsive, responsiveness-to-reasoning, and incompatibilist—address from where and how much significance motivation and influence can be placed in personal autonomy. Respectively, as listed above, the agent's actions may concur with what she wants to do, consider the reasoning behind motives, adjust one's motives according to that reflection of others' motives, and write off the possibility that all motives can be attributed to external factors, challenging self-governing in itself.[49] They each point to a fine line of autonomy that is difficult to identify: "self-government requires two points of view: that of the governing authority, and that of the governed," which are one and the same—the agent.[50] Self-governing is predicated on self-reflection which allows this distance between the one that governs and the one that is governed (though in considering self-government, they are the same person). Additionally, the action of the agent must have some basis that cannot be alienated from herself, which is the desire to govern oneself (the agent wishes to govern her actions and does act)—so she cannot be infinitely distanced from herself.[51] I would like to suggest that the space wherein simultaneous distance, between one who is governing and one who is governed, and proximity, the one who acts is the one whose motives motivate, are generated is in an ability to remain anonymous. These conditions under which autonomous action may come to fruition are established by anonymity by a gap that is procured between myself and myself (again, the governor and governed in one), between the actions to which I am entitled as the agent and their materialization in the world (closely aligned with the exhibition and throughlines of my traits), and the separation between those. We test the boundaries of privacy and, by crafting that self-reflection that lends to self-authorship, we grow out of and into that space that we constantly redefine.

Anonymity, again, the inability to connect the flow between traits which act as an underlying structural association of social identification that is deliberately unpublicized, is necessarily embedded into and brightens autonomy. Autonomy opens up that space wherein action is animated by oneself, creating an internal distance as well as between oneself and others, as mentioned above. But the value of anonymity and its location in autonomy cannot be understated. To retain anonymity, to be able to disconnect others from the flow between one's traits, is to save some of that space for oneself. The thought that creates action for the agent in that space can happen without privacy or anonymity, but at what cost? At risk is not only that space in the main, but also one's relation to that space. I would like to suggest that development and growth, and, importantly,

49. Buss and Westlund, "Personal Autonomy."
50. Buss and Westlund, "Personal Autonomy."
51. Buss and Westlund, "Personal Autonomy."

room for ambiguity in these realms, is what determines humanity in the sense of slack and novelty. To keep some of oneself to oneself allows for choice information to be selected at all. I will move into selectivity in privacy and autonomy in the next section, but I also want to underscore its importance here, where that exclusive, individual, and dynamic aspect of oneself is cultivated and shared.

Centrality of Anonymity

What I will be calling the "centrality of anonymity" has to do with what anonymity does. While I have begun a preliminary analysis and explanation of anonymity as a term, here I will explore the way in which anonymity functions and what comes out of a primarily impenetrable space or landscape that retains the possibility of access by others according to the one who protects it. My conception of the space that anonymity constitutes is not quite a conventional tabula rasa argument of empiricism—that of a cognitive blank slate filled in by sensual experience. Though I will be referring to the experience of anonymity, I do not mean to endorse an account of anonymity as a personal clean slate that gradually becomes besmirched with the muddy details of life. Rather, I believe the space that one's anonymity creates is the opposite of blank or empty—it is quite full with the flow between traits described above in what anonymity seeks to render uncoordinated. This space is simply not available to a third party until the anonymous one decides to make it so, at which point a part of her anonymity is lost to whom she shares information with. As the flow between traits is safeguarded, one can use one's rights to the degree that she connects with them in the innermost personal sphere and, thus, can grow from this place that only she knows. Anonymity functions as a space or landscape uniquely for one's own experience to cultivate, and that space is valuable for its permission of distanced association between agent and others, furthering a more fully examined association between agent and herself. What is shared is then tinged with the self-relation that has been scrutinized for and by no one other than oneself. By this I mean that the privilege of anonymity is a precondition for genuine self-relation. It is not based on what may happen to the information that comes out of it, nor is it based on who will see or recognize it. In fact, it is quite the opposite. Anonymity takes the debate on the role that motives play in autonomy discussed above and furthers it by asking, who cares? Rather, perhaps, why does it matter? Anonymity reserves the freedom to act in the world to the agent by granting the agent the preliminary area of reflection wherein she can develop her actions before they occur for her own contemplation. Anonymity is primary to autonomy, which may follow suit by the actual self-government, and to seclusion, which is decided upon based on the ability to remain anonymous or not. But it is first based on the fact that one could remain anonymous, and to the integrity of

personal information, which is made possible by the control of that information. It allows for information or rights to occur at all. Perhaps to have a secret with one's self is to produce both an important grounding and an important springboard for development.

The connection between anonymity and privacy is not one of primacy or necessity but one of centrality. Anonymity and privacy are linked in because privacy is rooted in desiring some degree of anonymity or a shield from others, so anonymity acts more fundamentally than privacy does. Privacy could be a manifestation of anonymity in the world or for its own sake; its sources and effects are blurry. But anonymity is nowhere near accidental. Again, it is the flow of traits deliberately unpublicized and hidden. By this I mean that anonymity is more central to the argument of a productive and worthwhile inner sphere and more difficult to pin down than privacy is. Most examples of studying personal and public boundaries exude privacy inadvertently, but being anonymous is willfully creating a space for oneself. Being private can also be intentional, but anonymity is more equipped to engender that landscape to develop. Being private and being anonymous work similarly, but being private focuses on the outer sphere whereas anonymity focuses on the inner sphere. By this I mean that to remain private is to push the world and its contents away, whereas to remain anonymous is to invite them in selectively, cultivate the sense of self for self's sake, and then expose the parts that are self-authorized. This selectivity is what I want to make extremely clear as incredibly valuable.

IV. Implications of the "Nothing to Hide" Argument

In order to integrate the practicality of anonymity and how its value ought to be rationalized in the world of data gathering and analysis technologies, I will discuss an argument often used in colloquial and political spheres to discredit privacy and anonymity. Valuing anonymity may change the way one considers what she trades in using this reply, I have "nothing to hide," for a semblance of safety. I suggest that a provision of intimacy with oneself ought to be cherished, and only is possible through safeguarding parts of oneself to and for oneself.

The "nothing to hide" argument is a common retort that argues for data collection and surveillance. Those that use this response to the often unauthorized infiltration of information are under the impression that they have not committed what they deem criminal activity, and so are safe from negative disciplinary action, in a legal or stigmatic form. For example I, angrily, may find a neighbor opening the mail from my mailbox who seems surprised at my reaction to the invasive act he is committing, to which he responds, blithely, well if you have nothing to hide you should have nothing to fear. The argument has serious implications though—in certain contexts it attempts to balance privacy and security, often implying that security ought to triumph over trivial data that is

not criminal or wrong unless it is, in which case it should be prosecuted.[52] Since 9/11 there has been a notable increase in government spending and policy-making on surveillance and data collection proposed in the form of protection and safety. The origins of the argument are not clear, but in a statement, it is what Richard Graham, a Member of Parliament for Gloucester, said in response to a government surveillance bill: "if you have nothing to hide, you have nothing to fear." The problematic quote can be further tied back to Minister of Propaganda for the Nazis, Joseph Goebbels who is believed to use it in 1933 leading up to World War II. Where the argument comes from is not really important; what is significant, though, is how often it is implied in an institutional way as well as between peers. However, there is something amiss in this rebuttal.

This conditional has laden premises and conclusions that make it problematic on a few levels. Firstly, the antecedent suggests that one has something to hide and praises transparency. As I have suggested, there are grounds to encourage the internal sphere. However, in this argument, that hiddenness is tainted with disapproval whereas I will show below, it ought not be. The consequent relies on the premise of future use and concludes upon its uncertainty. What happens to data is characterized, again, by Amoore's notion of actionable data, which I will discuss below in addition to her understanding of incalculable futures, entrusted when they shouldn't be. There is a lot to fear from seemingly innocent data, which are really calculations of the traits and flows between traits that make up a person, in the form of online companies targeting individuals and governments convicting and suspecting innocent people based on algorithms with aggregates of data that inform them.

Actionable Data and Nothing to Hide

As I stressed earlier, data does not stand alone. As an example, after visiting a sick family member in India, you flew out of Pakistan because of bad weather in New Delhi. You decided to wait until he or she passed away to leave the country, so you cancelled your flight and paid for your flight in cash because your credit card was stolen. You have now become a security risk upon reentering the United States. Information alone can be innocuous. But what institutions that gather it want is not pieces of information. Rather, they are invested in stories that may be found out to locate and stop dangerous people and groups in the name of protection, but also may be derived, as in the case just mentioned. Amoore puts it aptly, "the data derivative is not centered on who we are, nor even on what our data says about us, but on what can be imagined and inferred about who we might be."[53] There may not be anything to hide, and data can still be inadvertently troubling to some

52. Solove, "'I've Got Nothing to Hide," 747.
53. Amoore, "Data Derivatives," 28.

that, in the wrong hands, can be fabricated into something more harmful. The nothing to hide argument—shortly, if there is nothing to hide, there is nothing to fear—can be thrown out when the consequent, "nothing to fear," is negated. In my view, dubious governmental and corporate interests are enough cause for concern, negating that there is nothing to hide. But also, less pragmatically but nonetheless as significant, there is something to fear in lack of privacy in general.

Secrecy

In addition, the first part of the nothing to hide argument uses shame and criminality implicitly when, in fact, most of the time when we choose to hide something, it is not out of fear. To go back to the example used in the beginning of this section, I may not necessarily be hiding something incriminating in my mail through which I find my neighbor filching. Perhaps I would prefer to keep a love letter written by a faraway partner to myself for reasons more personal than damning. After a simple inquisition one may realize that there are aspects of private life that do not warrant sharing or fearful secrecy per se. Having something to hide does not necessitate that it is hidden out of fear of retaliation; it can be another way of saying there are things you would rather not be known, which, I must underscore again, are acceptable and their morality is to be set aside. What may come of that boundary is where the implications of anonymity and the nothing to hide argument meld. Thus, hiding a piece of one's self, and likely the exhibitions of at least some of one's traits, is not defensive. Perhaps it can be thought of as more proactive—remaining anonymous by guarding parts of oneself is progress with no predetermined path. If some traits and the flow between them remain purely personal, then their exhibition is externally novel once purposefully revealed, allowing for new connections to be made between oneself and others. There is a constant newness that characterizes personhood through anonymity, and being secret about it does not halt development but furthers it.

The Incalculable

In addition to her article "Data Derivatives"Amoore writes about correlational inference in her 2014 article "Security and the Incalculable," in which she elaborates on mathematical theory and its practical application in the conversation on security. She frames her arguments on incalculability within mathematics through the debate between Ludwig Wittgenstein and Alan Turing, who spar on the distinction between and the valuation of pure mathematics versus its operation (what it does). She sets up her argument by investigating Turing's 1936 explanation on the role of integrated intuition and ingenuity in math. For him, intuition consists in "'making spontaneous judgements

which are not the result of conscious trains of reason"' that are "akin to 'inspiration.'"[54] On the other hand, ingenuity consists in "'aiding the intuition' through 'suitable arrangements of propositions, and perhaps geometrical figures or drawings.'"[55] In essence, the spark of intuition guides the movements of the math, which is then explained and rendered replicable by ingenuity, formalizing and formulating the intuitive processes. Thus, an unsolvable problem for Turing is not one barred from achieving the correct answer, but one of not having a method to explain and redo it. She harkens back to her earlier work by emphasizing the associative significance in relations, even if incalculable, as opposed to particular data points. The associative jumps between data points make it possible to rely on theories of possibility that are taken as objective and factual even though they necessarily integrate intuition and ingenuity: "what matters are the correspondences and correlations between the elements—how they are held together by inferences across the gaps."[56] And even though there are unsolvable problems, futures are predictable or actionable, as delved into previously, from their connections with one another. In this case, the incalculable is never entirely incalculable because it is not in question, rather there is always an arrangement that can be reached in advance. This argument focused on ingenuity and forgotten intuitiveness has obvious implications on security, which is based on making the future safer by eliminating those thought to be a potential threat.

The expectation to calculate the incalculable is profound for a few reasons. Firstly, what we anticipate from our changing data system makes those working with the incalculable culpable. In other words, not acting upon the anticipated future renders one guilty according to those most concerned with the possible outcomes, even if certainty is not guaranteed. For instance Amoore uses the case of Italian scientists found guilty for not predicting an earthquake to exemplify that data ought always to be actionable.[57] They were expected to figure out pathways to possibilities, and act on them, despite lack of confidence in future events and were held accountable for the lives lost at their hesitation. Additionally, Amoore points to the threat of conjecturing with already actionable gaps in data as false confidence in calculability. It begs the question of other "incalculables" that may be at stake. To take but one example, Tavani briefly mentions the "self" and how other authors have described it vis-à-vis informational privacy.[58] I do not mean to contribute an effort to that endeavor, but only wish to state that perhaps the self is another actionable incalculable. I do not take up any

54. Alan Turing, cited in Louise Amoore, "Security and the Incalculable," *Security Dialogue*, vol. 45, no. 5 (2014): 423–439, doi:10.1177/0967010614539719, 427.

55. Turing, cited in Amoore, "Security and the Incalculable," 427.

56. Amoore, "Security and the Incalculable," 431.

57. Amoore, "Security and the Incalculable," 423-439.

58. Herman T. Tavani, "Informational Privacy: Concepts, Theories, and Controversies," 138.

one assumption or preconception of the self, philosophically in this thesis, but I would like to set aside space for its ambiguity. By this I mean to say that these overlaps and inconsistencies in the debate point to some version of the self's potential for growth. It may act as an incalculable because the self may grow unpredictably but is acted upon by the reactions of others and oneself. To be anonymous is to keep a bit of oneself to oneself, leaving room to grow but cutting off the attempt to anticipate and act on those anticipations. As such, anonymity may cultivate a sense of space for oneself and also space into which one can develop genuinely, with no predisposed plan, and technological algorithms and the debates surrounding them threaten this opportunity.

V. Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued for the importance of anonymity, especially in a digital age. I defined anonymity as the inability of any second or third party, beyond oneself, to connect the flow between traits which act as an underlying structural association of social identification that is deliberately unpublicized. I argued that anonymity is central to arguments on privacy and autonomy. Privacy, while the views on its characteristics and reach are divided, is nonetheless valued for the personal sphere it suggests and highlights. Simply, privatization promotes the recognition of an internal space that one keeps to oneself, which ties back to anonymity—in short, our ability to maintain that boundary. Autonomy, an agent acting on her own volition, tests that boundary by keeping a tight grip on her disclosure of personal information; by retaining a degree of anonymity, she puts the exhibition of her traits, and thus herself, in her own hands. Chiefly, being able to remain anonymous allows for a space to examine oneself, for oneself, and shape those boundaries and traits. In the latter sections of my thesis, I rebutted the nothing to hide argument in its legitimacy and in what it suggests—a depreciation of anonymity that is plainly regretful.

Lastly, I would like to add that this thesis is not meant to be prescriptive. While there is ample reason to be extremely wary of technology and the future it will certainly affect, this thesis should not be taken as reason to discredit all of contemporary technology's advances. There are undoubtedly aspects of technology that are beautiful and inspiring; human connection, medicine, education—they are all the better because of the technology that sustains them. I do, however, intend to emphasize that there are serious implications of personal data that is collected, aggregated, disseminated, and acted upon. Growth, personhood, and agency are so tightly attached to the ability to be anonymous, and our lack of recognition of it will result in erosion retrospective regret if we do not begin to venerate it. I consider this thesis and its analysis to be a preliminary first step in articulating the centrality of anonymity and hope that it serves as the start of a future conversation in which everyone can find a voice.