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This House Fears the Large Scale Collection of Personal Data

First Proposition: Dr Jerry Fishenden

“I’m looking at this from a technology perspective”, Dr Fishenden began. Previously Chief Technology Officer for Microsoft UK, he said that this is an era of the “pervasive business model” which thrives on our personal data. He drew the comparison of someone approaching you in the street to say “you want to buy this car, this house would suit you” [...] There is no going back once our data is taken”. He concluded with the point that “none of these devices have been engineered with our safety in mind”.

First Opposition: Professor Christopher Millard

An expert in technology law, Prof. Millard took a quick survey of the room and found that everyone in the House used online networking sites, and so presumably do not fear the collection of personal data, “nor should” they. He argued that using social networking sites don’t require surveillance because users are broadcasting their own personal information. “If you want to do something really radical, you could put your phones down and have an ‘f2f’ conversation”, he concluded.

Second Proposition: Heather Brooke

“I believe in privacy for the private citizen going about their private business, and transparency for the public official making policy decisions which affect us all”, began Ms. Brooke, an FOI campaigner. Prof. Brooke used the example of a woman put on a local council list of potentially violent offenders therefore blocked from fostering a child, because she had written a letter of complaint to a local newspaper about the council, as an example of the harm caused by the collection of personal data. “If we want to be a democracy”, we must support the motion.

Second Opposition: Katie Heard

Durham student and competitive debater, Ms. Heard began by saying “we live in a world in which politicians are always going to be afraid of national security”. She argued that the mass collection of data has small benefits, such as targeted advertising, but larger benefits to security. She further argued that an alternative to the collection of personal data online was stopping and searching ethnic minorities, or intrusive undercover police. “I think fear is bigger when you are collecting data in ways which are more harmful to people.”

Third Proposition: Katherine Dunbar

Ms. Dunbar, Cambridge student and competitive debater, stated that prior to her involvement with this debate she “did not give two shits” about the collection of her personal data, which makes it easy for unregulated companies to target people like her. She stated that studies prove that the collection of personal data do not help target terrorists, it only allows companies to “profit” from you. She concluded by stating that fear is beneficial, as evidenced by the opposition, because it results in a discussion and legal protection.

Third Opposition: Edward Lucas

“We have a thing called the Doomsday Book in this country”, Mr. Lucas began. He stated that as technology develops there are always those who fear the new. The government can use our personal data, but it is held accountable by “public opinion, the law and elected officials.” Leaving the EU would be detrimental to national security because of the strength of their regulations on personal data collection. “We are not living in North Korea, we are not living under the constant scrutiny of Big Brother.”

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For footage of the event go to <https://www.youtube.com/user/cambridgeunionsoc>

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