Privacy as virtue

Moving beyond the individual in the age of big data

van der Sloot, B.

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Privacy as Virtue discusses whether a rights-based approach to privacy regulation still suffices to address the challenges triggered by new data processing techniques such as Big Data and mass surveillance. A rights-based approach generally grants subjective rights to individuals to protect their personal interests. However, large-scale data processing techniques often transcend the individual and their interests.

Virtue ethics is used to reflect on this problem and open up new ways of thinking. A virtuous agent not only respects the rights and interests of others, but also has a broader duty to act in the most careful, just and temperate way. This applies to citizens, to companies such as Apple, Google and Facebook and to governmental organizations that are involved with large scale data processing alike.

The author develops a three-layered model for privacy regulation in the Big Data era. The first layer consists of minimum obligations that are independent of individual interests and rights. Virtuous agents have to respect the procedural pre-conditions for the exercise of power. The second layer echoes the current paradigm, the respect for individual rights and interests. While the third layer is the obligation of aspiration: a virtuous agent designs the data process in such a way that human flourishing, equality and individual freedom are promoted.
PRIVACY AS VIRTUE
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Moving Beyond the Individual in the Age of Big Data

ACADEMISCH PROEFSCHRIFT

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Promotiecommissie:
Promotor: prof. dr. N.A.N.M. van Eijk, Universiteit van Amsterdam
Promotor: prof. dr. B. Roessler, Universiteit van Amsterdam
Copromotor: Prof. dr. N. Helberger, Universiteit van Amsterdam

Overige leden:
prof. dr. C.J. Hoofnagle Berkeley Law
prof. dr. R.E. Leenes Tilburg University
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prof. dr. E.E.O. Roos Lindgreen Universiteit van Amsterdam
dr. F.J. Zuiderveen Borgesius Universiteit van Amsterdam

Faculteit der Rechtsgeleerdheid
CONTENTS

Chapter I
Introduction ............................................................... 1

Chapter II
The Transformation of the Right to Privacy and the Right to Data Protection .... 11
1. Introduction .............................................................. 11
2. The right to privacy ...................................................... 13
   2.1. Right to complain .................................................. 17
   2.2. Interests ............................................................. 23
   2.3. Assessments ......................................................... 29
   2.4. Enforcement ......................................................... 35
3. Data Protection .......................................................... 39
   3.1. Obligations of the data processor ............................... 48
   3.2. Rights of the data subject ....................................... 52
   3.3. Assessments ......................................................... 55
   3.4. Enforcement ......................................................... 65
4. Conclusion ............................................................... 69

Chapter III
The Challenges for and Alternatives to the Current Privacy Paradigm .......... 71
1. Introduction .............................................................. 71
2. The challenges Big Data poses to the current legal paradigm ....................... 71
   2.1. Big Data and Data Protection ................................... 72
   2.2. Focus on the individual ............................................ 75
   2.3. Regulation through legal means ................................. 76
3. How the ECtHR is gradually moving beyond the individualized privacy paradigm ......................................................... 81
   3.1. Reasonable likelihood (hypothetical harm) ..................... 82
   3.2. Chilling effect (future harm) ...................................... 85
   3.3. In abstracto claims (no individual harm) ...................... 88
   3.4. Conventionality ..................................................... 92
4. Alternatives for the current privacy paradigm in the scholarly literature ....... 96
   4.1. Constitutive interests .............................................. 97
   4.2. Group and collective interests .................................... 99
Chapter IV
Developing an Alternative Privacy Paradigm through Virtue Ethics
1. Introduction ......................................................... 107
2. Virtue ethics and legal regulation .................................. 108
   2.1. Virtue ethics .................................................. 108
   2.2. Virtue ethical approach to the legal realm ...................... 114
   2.3. Building blocks for an alternative privacy paradigm .......... 127
3. Counterarguments against adopting a virtue ethical approach to privacy ... 129
   3.1. The correlation of rights and duties .............................. 130
   3.2. Is-ought fallacy ............................................. 135
   3.3. Action guidance ............................................. 140
4. Conclusion .................................................................. 143

Chapter V
Embedding a Virtue-based Approach in Privacy Regulation
1. Introduction .......................................................... 145
2. Minimum requirements ............................................... 147
   2.1. Regulating 'data' .............................................. 148
   2.2. Applying the rule of law test in abstracto ....................... 156
   2.3. Regulating the analysis phase ................................ 160
3. Aspirations .................................................................. 167
   3.1. The limits of aspirations overriding privacy interests ........ 168
   3.2. Aspirations directed at promoting human freedom .......... 172
   3.3. How to embed aspirations in a juridical framework .......... 177
4. Analysis .................................................................... 181

Chapter VI
Conclusion
1. Main argument ......................................................... 187
2. Outline of this book ................................................... 192
3. Conclusions ............................................................ 196
4. Theses ................................................................. 199
5. Nederlandse samenvatting .............................................. 200

Bibliography ................................................................. 203