Freedom of Thought in Networked Space (Workshop no 99)

Final Programme and List of Participants

Convenors: Patrick O'Callaghan (University College Cork) Bethany Shiner (Middlesex University)

Description of Workshop: Technology is now embedded into our everyday lives to such an extent that we can no longer draw a meaningful distinction between offline and online spaces. Rather it makes more sense to think in terms of a different kind of space, what Cohen calls 'networked space'. In networked space, as Hildebrandt puts it, ubiquitous technology connects 'everybody anywhere with anything everywhere.'

This special workshop brings together scholars interested in the extent to which authentic freedom of thought is possible in networked space. A number of pressures may restrict the breathing room for freedom of thought in networked space, or engage the right to freedom of thought. For example:

 - State actors and corporations have access to data trails of our online activities, revealing information about our communications, what we read and what we research. Evidence tells us that this information is analysed using big data and data analytics to reveal information that is not explicitly visible.

- Developments in behavioural science have shaped digital commercial advertising strategies that engage with emotions in order to tap into spaces between deliberate decisions and impulsive decisions. This strategy has been mirrored in political communication in the form of micro-targeting and other means of opinion shaping.

- The public nature of communication on social media means that thoughts expressed on such media are subject to the chilling effect of group norms. In addition, the avalanche of tailored content directed to us on social media makes it difficult to sift through information and diversify thoughts by exiting echo chambers.

The special workshop will consider four core questions. A discussant or discussant will lead the discussion on each question.

1. What is freedom of thought? (Bethany Shiner; Richard Mullender)

2. What are the necessary conditions for authentic freedom of thought? (Patrick O'Callaghan)

3. In what ways is the breathing room for freedom of thought restricted in networked space? (Susie Alegre; Gianclaudio Malgieri)

4. Can and should law-makers respond to these developments? If so, what should the appropriate responses be? (Leslie Francis and John Francis; Cláudio Colnago)

Please note that this workshop will be an **open discussion** revolving around these four questions.

List of Participants:

Susie Alegre, Doughty Street Chambers
Cláudio Colnago, Faculdade de Direito de Vitória
John Francis, University of Utah
Leslie Francis, University of Utah
Gianclaudio Malgieri, Vrije Universiteit Brussel
Simon McCarthy Jones, Trinity College Dublin
Richard Mullender, Newcastle University
Richard Nunan, College of Charleston
Patrick O'Callaghan, University College Cork
Bethany Shiner, Middlesex University