

# Should Google use Ad Tracking or Targeting?

## Introduction:

Companies like Google are using our search engine results to send us ads targeted towards hoping for an impulse buy or using what we search against us. Tracking of our search engine results and IP address by Google raises concerns of possible violations of privacy by many people. People such as Steven Aftergood state that we are beginning to have a higher lack of privacy and our data.<sup>1</sup> Everything from our web browsing data, search engine results, and cookies are being tracked by both the government and third party sites to either send us targeted ads or to have something against us in the case if we ever get into any trouble.<sup>2</sup> Deborah Hurley states, "We need to take account our human rights when it concerns our privacy."<sup>3</sup> The purpose of this paper is to bring about awareness of this current issue through a logical, yet philosophical standpoint.

## Premise of Kant's Arguments:

1. According to Kant lying is morally impermissible meaning that if you lie, even to do good, it isn't justified.<sup>4</sup>
  - a. By giving your private information to Google or trusting in the government you believe what you do is freedom of privacy, yet they are using the information to track you or be held against you which isn't only lying but entirely immoral.
2. All humans are born with dignity, logical and rational reasoning.
  - a. This leads to the question if what if one of the people Google were tracking had an irrational way of thinking? Does it count as morally impermissible?

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<sup>1</sup> Scott, Jeramie, and Julia Horwitz. *Privacy in the Modern Age: The Search for Solutions*. Ed. Marc Rotenberg. N.p.: n.p., n.d. 19-23. Print.

<sup>2</sup> Cockburn, Andrew. *Kill Chain: The Rise of the High-tech Assassins*. 1st ed. New York: Henry Holt, 2015. Print.

<sup>3</sup> Scott, Jeramie, and Julia Horwitz. *Privacy in the Modern Age: The Search for Solutions*. Ed. Marc Rotenberg. N.p.: n.p., n.d. 70-71. Print.

<sup>4</sup> Mazur, Tim C. "Lying and Ethics." *Mark Kula Center for Applied Ethics*. Santa Clara University, n.d. Web. 19 July 2015.

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3. It is immoral to use another person as means to justify an end.<sup>5</sup>
4. End doesn't justify means is basically what Kant is trying to say:
  - a. If Google does something that benefits our safety yet invades our privacy then that would be immoral as they are taking away our personal freedoms as a human.
5. For every action there is a reaction so that must mean we must think logically even in the case of Hypothetical Imperatives.<sup>6</sup>
  - a. Should we be using google knowing that they track our data?
  - b. Is it a rational decision to have a gmail account knowing you are giving away personal information?
6. Kant argues to act only in the Maximum of the Universal law:
  - a. Act to treat humanity always as an end and never as a means
    - i. By google tracking your personal data, would they want the same thing to happen to them?<sup>7</sup>
    - ii. When they are lying about not collecting our personal data in the interest of themselves or the government, aren't they treating us as a means?
      1. This is why according to Kant lying is morally impermissible.
7. I believe that we as humans should be treated with dignity thus granting us certain rights to privacy and the freedom of how companies should use our information.<sup>8</sup>
8. Kant believes that we should only look at things through a formal aspect. This means that we have formal duties not related to consequences.
  - a. Granting our freedom can be looked at a formal argument

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<sup>5</sup> "Categorical Imperative | Philosophy." *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*. Encyclopedia Britannica, 11 Oct. 2014. Web. 19 July 2015.

<sup>6</sup> "Kantian Theory and Human Rights" <http://www.follesdal.net/ms/Follesdal-2014-Maliks-kant-hr.pdf> Reidar Maliks and Andreas Follesdal; Date Accessed: 7/19/2015.

<sup>7</sup> Silverman, Jacob. "Big Data's Big Libertarian Lie: Facebook, Google and the Silicon Valley Ethical Overhaul We Need." Saloncom RSS. Salon Magazine, 26 Apr. 2015. Web. 19 July 2015.

<sup>8</sup> McCallion, Jane. "Data Privacy Should Be a Human Right, Says EU." *Alphr*. Alphy.com, 14 Jan. 2015. Web. 19 July 2015.

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- b. You can't lie, a lie is always wrong therefore Google lying about not tracking us is unjust regardless of the results
9. We have a moral duty to treat someone in a just way, we can't do an injustice in order to do justice.
  - a. As I said before, there is no exception that Google should be invading our privacy as humans<sup>9</sup>
  - b. Even if you know that Google is invading our privacy or lying, it still won't make it right. That is the hypotheticals I talked about earlier.<sup>10</sup>
10. The internet was released to the public as unregulated, then regulating us through search engines like Google would therefore be a lie.<sup>11</sup>
11. A person can think through reason and therefore they can differ from right or wrong. Since a person can think through reason they know lying is wrong as it is not in accordance with the universal law. This means though we can differ from right or wrong it must constitute with the universal law of reasoning and rationality.<sup>12</sup>

**W.D Ross's take on this:** According to Ross, companies have a moral duty to be honest. This would mean that Google needs to be honest and tell us which ways they use our information<sup>13</sup> and how they are tracking our data.<sup>14</sup> Without Google doing this, we are forced to use the internet in fear of what we write, say, search, etc. on the internet can come back to haunt you. That applies even if it was something 7 or 8 years ago.<sup>15</sup> Ross would argue that we have a prima facie duty to never treat people as a means. This means to treat people through moral obligation not moral judgement. Google's moral obligation would then mean to always be open, honest, and never lie regardless to where it leads the company as a whole.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Williams, Garrath, "Kant's Account of Reason", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/kant-reason/>.

<sup>10</sup> "The Syllogism of Necessity." *Hegel's Science of Logic*. Marxists.org, n.d. Web. 20 July 2015.

<sup>11</sup> "The Birth of the Web." *CERN Accelerating Science*. CERN, n.d. Web. 20 July 2015.

<sup>12</sup> Silber, John. *Kant's Ethics: The Good, Freedom, and the Will*. Boston: Walter De Gruyter, 2012. 190-95. Print.

<sup>13</sup> Website: <http://donttrack.us/>

<sup>14</sup> Flux, Elizabeth. "Google Maps Has Been Tracking Your Every Move, And There's A Website To Prove It." *Junkee*. Junkee.com, 14 Aug. 2014. Web. 21 July 2015.

<sup>15</sup> Epstein, Robert. "Google's Gotcha Ya: 15 Ways Google Monitors You." *US News*. U.S.News & World Report, 10 May 2013. Web. 21 July 2015.

<sup>16</sup> "W. D. Ross's Moral Theory." *W. D. Ross's Moral Theory*. Department of Humanities: Michigan Tech University, n.d. Web. 21 July 2015.

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## The Premise of Peter Singer's Argument:

1. Peter Singer states that if two issues coincide with each other, you have a moral obligation to consider the consequences and think of which one will have the better outcome.<sup>17</sup>
  - a. This would mean that if Google used our information as a method of protecting us for example, than it would be morally right
  - b. This also means that you can treat someone as if they aren't human if you are providing better benefit as a whole
  - c. However, Google using our information to make themselves more secure rather than making us more secure would be morally impermissible
2. One can argue that since Google is spying on us, that is actually making us less secure in a sense rather than protecting us as a whole
  - a. Another person can argue, "What if a terrorist<sup>18</sup> was searching how to build a bomb on the internet<sup>19</sup>, if we didn't track his search engine results, a catastrophe could have happened.
  - b. However someone can also argue that people shouldn't be tracked if they are just normal people. Imagine you are searching for butt rash ointment and then suddenly you got third party results all over your search engine<sup>20</sup>
3. Overall Peter Singer can argue that since Google is working with the Government to detect possible security threats through our search engine results that it is morally okay, however if you went by Kant's argument, it would be morally wrong and dishonesty therefore not following ethical code. <sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Singer, Peter. "The Triviality of the Debate Over 'Is-Ought' and the Definition of 'Moral'" *Utilitarian.net*. American Philosophical Quarterly, 1 Jan. 1973. Web. 22 July 2015.

<sup>18</sup> Bolan, Kim. "Fort St. John Man Arrested on Terrorism Charges." *Www.vancouver.sun.com*. Vancouver Sun, 11 July 2015. Web. 22 July 2015.

<sup>19</sup> McPhee, Michele. "Son of Boston Police Captain Arrested as Possible Terrorist." - *12 News*. 12 News Now, 13 July 2015. Web. 22 July 2015.

<sup>20</sup> Koetsier, John. "Google Planning Its Own Ad-tracking Tech to Compete with Today's cookies." *VentureBeat*. VentureBeat.com, 17 Sept. 2013. Web. 22 July 2015.

<sup>21</sup> Bach, Kent. "Self-Deception Unmasked." *Philosophical Psychology* 15.2 (2002), pp. 203-206.

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## The Deontological vs. Utilitarian Argument:

A Deontologist would argue that it is never okay to treat a person as a means but always as an end. This prevents you from dishonesty or lying to them for Moral Obligation. The Utilitarian argument would basically state that it is okay to treat someone as a means if the consequence would result in a more positive difference. A Deontologist would be a constructionist, while a Utilitarian would be a consequentialist.

1. Kant: What Google is doing is dishonest and we have a moral obligation not to lie.
2. Singer: If Google ends up lying and does a greater good then them lying is okay

My view on this would be more of a political argument. I believe that we have a right to the freedom of privacy and that the internet should be for public use. I also believe that the Government, Google, Social Media, etc. shouldn't be used against us in terms of our personal beliefs as it is freedom of speech as long as you aren't intentionally taking away the rights of freedoms of others.<sup>22</sup>

1. This would be a constitutionalist argument
  - a. This would go under some philosophical views of thinkers such as John Locke
    - i. We would then have to differ between liberalism and neo-conservatism when looking into arguments such as these<sup>23</sup>
    - ii. Liberalism and Conservatism today is philosophically different then it was at Locke's time
2. This would go under the terms of political science and political philosophy

## It is one Big Scheme:

The technology Google<sup>24</sup> uses involves Automatic Speech Recognition<sup>25</sup>, Nonlinear Optics, Micro-Electronics, Infrastructure<sup>26</sup> systems<sup>27</sup>, and Semiconductors to power a Multi-Billion dollar

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<sup>22</sup> Waluchow, Wil, "Constitutionalism", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/constitutionalism/>.

<sup>23</sup> "John Locke." *History.com*. A&E Television Networks, 2009. Web. 22 July 2015.

<sup>24</sup> Brandt, Richard L. *The Google Guys: Inside the Brilliant Minds of Google Founders Larry Page and Sergey Brin*. New York: Portfolio / Penguin, 2011. Print.

<sup>25</sup> Konar, Amit. *Artificial Intelligence and Soft Computing: Behavioral and Cognitive Modeling of the Human Brain*. Boca Raton, FL: CRC, 2000. Print.

<sup>26</sup> Steiber, Annika. *The Google Model: Managing Continuous Innovation in a Rapidly Changing World*. N.p.: n.p., n.d. Print.

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supercomputer whose electrical bill cost millions alone.<sup>28</sup> They use this technology to not only power their databases but get paid more than the technological cost of this technology by third parties<sup>29</sup> and the government when they get your private information. This same technology have been used in Computerized Warfare, as well as Cyber Security<sup>30</sup> and Big Data systems.

## The Premise of Rawls:

1. Rawls is a political theorist who believes that society should be fair and just. however he thinks the way society have become is corrupt and cruel. <sup>31</sup>
2. Rawls would believe that we as humans should be treated equally
  - a. Since Google would probably not share their information with others, they shouldn't be collecting our information
    - i. In a society that is free and fair, Google won't be needing to collect our personal data or our browsing history
3. All citizens should be of political equal and ultimately should have a balance of powers
  - a. Corporations using us, Government's controlling<sup>32</sup> us, and an Elite ruling<sup>33</sup> us would be unjust in society
  - b. We aren't treated with fairness by Google

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<sup>27</sup> Stross, Randall E. *Planet Google: One Company's Audacious Plan to Organize Everything We Know*. New York: Free, 2008. Print.

<sup>28</sup> Segev, Elad. *Google and the Digital Divide: The Bias of Online Knowledge*. Oxford: Chandos Pub., 2010. 60-65. Print.

<sup>29</sup> McMorris, Brian. "Google: The Next Ponzi Scheme to Fail?" *Seeking Alpha*. Seekingalpha.com, 12 July 2009. Web. 23 July 2015.

<sup>30</sup> Long, Johnny. *Google Hacking for Penetration Testers*. Burlington, MA: Syngress, 2008. Print.

<sup>31</sup> Wenar, Leif, "John Rawls", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2013 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2013/entries/rawls/>.

<sup>32</sup> Cukier, Kenneth Neil. "Who Will Control the Internet?" *Foreign Affairs*. 23 July 2015. Web. 23 July 2015. <<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2005-10-01/who-will-control-internet>> .

<sup>33</sup> Snyder, Michael. "World Bank Whistleblower Reveals How The Global Elite Rules The World." *Global Research*. Center for Research on Globalization, 1 Feb. 2015. Web. 23 July 2015.

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- i. Even Google's smaller ad publishers<sup>34</sup> or small developers<sup>35</sup> who use Google are cheated off their money without many noticing
- ii. What Google is doing would be called an abuse of power<sup>36</sup>, stealing<sup>37</sup>, inequality and non-social fairness

## Conclusion and my Opinions:

I think Google's main goal isn't to make the government more secure but just to make money and monopolize the market. This is further exposed by the way they have been treating publishers on their site as well as how they have been deleting high revenue generating apps for years without violations. Google overall is a cooperation, but regarding what any philosopher says I believe in the deontological argument in this case. I believe that Google brought their was us the ladder through cheating, dishonesty, and stealing.<sup>38</sup>

I believe that overall Google's CEOs are fairly greedy.<sup>39</sup> This is why many app developers turn to third party sites like FireFox or Opera's Mobile Store. Google wants to saturate an already competitive market either by weaving out enemies, making illegal ties, stealing from others, or even psychologically manipulating people into impulse buys.

I believe that Google has an agenda of globalization.<sup>40</sup> They have stolen our personal data for years. They have lied to us on how they are using our information. They have become so big that they can literally make their fanbase do almost anything.<sup>41</sup> Google also manipulates

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<sup>34</sup> "YouTube Gaming: Google Stealing Mobile Ad Revenue From YouTubers? (BO1 Gameplay)." *YouTube*. Tbits, n.d. Web. 23 July 2015.

<sup>35</sup> Helft, Miguel. "Meet Cyanogen, The Startup That Wants To Steal Android From Google." *Forbes*. Forbes Magazine, 23 Mar. 2015. Web. 23 July 2015.

<sup>36</sup> "Google Steals Web Content for Ad Revenue | Incredible Bot." *Incredible Bot*. Incrediblebot.com, 10 Apr. 2015. Web. 23 July 2015.

<sup>37</sup> Stampler, Laura. "CHART: How Google Destroyed U.S. Print Media By Stealing All Its Ad Revenue [THE BRIEF]." *Business Insider*. Business Insider, Inc, 14 Nov. 2012. Web. 23 July 2015.

<sup>38</sup> Dice, Mark. *Big Brother: The Orwellian Nightmare Come True*. San Diego, CA: Resistance, 2011. Print.

<sup>39</sup> Vise, David A., and Mark Malseed. *The Google Story*. New York: Delacorte, 2005. Print.

<sup>40</sup> Cleland, Scott, and Ira Brodsky. *Search & Destroy: Why You Can't Trust Google Inc*. St. Louis, MO: Telescope, 2011. Print.

<sup>41</sup> Assange, Julian. *When Google Met WikiLeaks*. N.p.: n.p., n.d. Print.

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rankings and search engine results to saturate the market even more which is why SEO is a very competitive field and why reputation management is such a huge deal.<sup>42</sup>

## Why I agree with the Deontological Argument:

I believe that people have the given right to be treated as humans regardless of the situation. We should never treat persons as means but always as an end to themselves. I am a supporter of the Kantian theory when it comes to situations like these. Although I presented both sides of the argument, I believe I also exposed the dark side of Google or at least provided insight to it being a dominant market. People can argue a business is a business, and even if they are dishonest, that it correct in Business standards. However, I believe a good business should care about who they serve and treat people as people.<sup>43</sup> This is regarding whether how large or how small they may be. <sup>44</sup>

## Quotes on Liberty:<sup>45</sup>

1. "Give me Liberty or give me death", Patrick Henry
2. "What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet lose his soul", God
3. "I'm a lover of my own liberty, and so I would do nothing to restrict yours.", Gandhi
4. "Those who would give up essential Liberty, to purchase a little temporary Safety, deserve neither Liberty nor Safety.", Benjamin Franklin

## Bentham on Liberty<sup>46</sup>:

1. Bentham would argue that liberty can only be obtained through the legal system.

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<sup>42</sup> Assange, Julian, Andy Müller-Maguhn, Jacob Appelbaum, and Jérémie Zimmermann. *Cypherpunks: Freedom and the Future of the Internet*. New York: Or, 2012. Print.

<sup>43</sup> Biro, Meghan M. "Are You A Character-Based Leader?" *Forbes*. Forbes Magazine, 30 Sept. 2012. Web. 23 July 2015.

<sup>44</sup> Rotimi-Sosanya, Lola. "30 Motivational Quotes by Marcus Lemonis, Host of CNBC's The Profit." *TIPS ON STARTING A SMALL BUSINESS*. Inspire the Entrepreneur, 29 Mar. 2014. Web. 23 July 2015.

<sup>45</sup> "Liberty Quotes." *BrainyQuote*. Xplore, n.d. Web. 28 July 2015.

<sup>46</sup> Jeremy Bentham." *The Concise Encyclopedia of Economics*. 2008. Library of Economics and Liberty. 28 July 2015. <<http://www.econlib.org/library/Enc/bios/Bentham.html>>.



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- a. This would mean we could end up gaining certain liberties by losing certain liberties for what may seem better in the current situation<sup>47</sup>
  - b. This would also mean that he is saying the opposite of those I just quoted<sup>48</sup>
2. Bentham would be in support of treating people as means if it can make the current situation better so he would be a utilitarian at the end.

## What is Liberty?

Liberty is essentially our rights as humans. We think of ourselves through logical reasoning, rationality, and good will. We as humans must never be treated as a means according to the Deontological argument. This would mean we should never have to lose privacy or have our data stolen without our consent. The Utilitarian argument may seem tempting, but in my opinion it is history repeating the same mistakes over and over again.

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<sup>47</sup> "Bentham on Liberty." *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. University of Tennessee at Martin, n.d. Web. 28 July 2015.

<sup>48</sup> "Bentham on Human Rights and Liberty." *D5.4: Anonymity in Electronic Government: A Case-study Analysis of Governments? Identity Knowledge: Future of IDentity in the Information Society*. N.p., n.d. Web. 28 July 2015.