

Pause before you judge the Dark Net

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Photo by Szu-ting Chou

Polis Intern and LSE MSc student Jin Yan reports on the latest Polis Media Agenda Talk featuring Jamie Bartlett, author of the book Dark Net and Director of the Centre for the Analysis of Social Media.

In his talk, Bartlett addressed three difficult moral questions raised by the anonymous, untraceable ‘dark net’: online drug markets, online political extremists and pro-anorexia fora. Should internet regulation touch upon these hidden online communities or should we leave them free?

“I’m not trying to judge, and it’s just a series of portray of how people live behind the internet”, said Bartlett. From his experience talking with activists from online communities such as pro-suicide and pro-anorexia, with their strange ‘twisted’ cultural norms he discovered that it is not so easy to

condemn as people might imagine. You can argue, for example, that the predictability of online drug delivery compared to street purchases might help users manage their addiction. Nevertheless, he also thought that proper regulations though how these might work in practice is also hard to imagine.

The dilemma of online regulation relates to the Internet’s pervasive nature. The internet is a global phenomenon; however, law is usually a territorial phenomenon in a confined geographical space. Take the example of online drug market. The sellers are located in different countries, and the website router may not have a fixed site. Who is the subject to the regulation? How would you do that and under whose responsibility? Or should we call for international cooperation?

Another dilemma concerns online anonymity. The Internet allows people to live behind a mask. Who is to blame, and is that the same person behind the same “mask”?

How should you judge whether a secret network should be make legal or illegal asked Bartlett when “the same anonymity that allows the Assassination Market to operate also keeps human-rights campaigners and activists alive”?

This article by Polis intern, Jin Yan

Polis Media Agenda Talks are every Tuesday at 5pm and are free and open to the public – [details here](#)

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