

(Not) Regulating The Internet

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“Avoid all regulation, let users police the Internet wherever possible”. That was my message to a meeting of the [DCMS Convergence Think-Tank](#) and it’s a view implicit in the latest [report by MPs](#).

The headlines for the [Culture Media and Sport Committee](#) report say that MPs are demanding regulation on the Internet to stop children watching violent or explicit videos. YouTube gets told off for not removing nasty stuff quickly enough, for example. Conservative Chair of the Committee, John Whittingdale said:

“We had a lively debate with YouTube [who said they have] millions of users who act as regulators... They understandably say they can’t look at all the material uploaded.”

And that’s the point. Whatever the legislators may desire to do is limited by the reality of the Online world.

The [Byron Review](#) also said it wanted the Internet policed to protect children but it ended up setting up a [UK Council For Child Internet Safety](#) to look at self-regulation.

There will be cinema-style ratings on video games, but how does that work when you can play online?

In the end there will be a mix of more advice for parents, more guidance on products, better codes for websites to adhere to and pressure on ISPs to speed up the deletion of unpleasantness.

That feels about right to me. Any further and you clog up the system destroying the utility and creativity of the Internet. You also ruin it as a business.

Does DCMS Secretary of State Andy Burnham understand this? He has made worryingly interventionist [noises](#) about regulating the Internet. He also wants to ‘crack down’ on Internet Piracy and thinks ‘we should all pay for music’. He talks about the Internet as a ‘lawless zone’. This is bonkers. Is this his Catholic morality emerging or just latent Labourite Statism?

The Internet is not lawless. National laws apply where practicable. It is also policed by websites who want to control their reputations and by users who choose what they want to read (and use technological or personal controls to control their children’s viewing).

People use the Internet BECAUSE it is not regulated by the nanny state and corporations cannot control access.

A very good article by John Naughton along the same lines [here](#):

“The committee’s proposals are so daft one begins to doubt Bertrand Russell’s argument that democracy has ‘at least one merit, namely, that a member of parliament cannot be stupider than his constituents, for the more stupid he is, the more stupid they were to elect him’.”

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