



A Discussion on Privacy with Noam Chomsky, Glenn Greenwald and Edward Snowden – Part 6

Note: This transcript may not be 100% accurate

Nuala O'Connor:

So our time is almost drawing to a close but I have a couple more questions. The first one is for Professor Chomsky. You have challenged the role of media as the guardian of the power structure but given Glenn's meteoric rise as a journalist, and now Ed's status as a twitter star, although I follow "swift on security" and Joe Lorenzo Hall for my cyber security needs, so I recommend both of them to you, should we be rethinking the fourth estate and is technology disrupting in a good way or is it simply reinforcing traditional power structures?

Noam Chomsky:

We should be paying close attention to the way the media frame, choose, organize, analyze and present materials to us. Glenn mentioned 1984. Another book that you read in high school, I suppose, was Animal Farm. But I suspect that you did not read the introduction to Animal Farm.

Glenn Greenwald:

You mean me personally just was negligent and skipped over it or people generally don't do that?

Noam Chomsky:

In school. Later yes, but not in school. The introduction to Animal Farm bears on this question. It was unpublished for unknown reasons but it was later discovered. Thirty years later in Orwell's unpublished papers. In the introduction he basically says, look, this book.... The introduction is addressed to the people of England. It's called "Literary Censorship in England". And the thrust of it is: this book is a satire on the totalitarian enemy but we people in England shouldn't feel to self-righteous about it. Because in free England unpopular ideas can be suppressed without the use of force, and then he goes into some examples and he has really just a couple of sentences of explanation which are to the point. He says, "The reason is that the press is owned by wealthy men who have every interest in not wanting certain ideas to be expressed." And the other reason which I think is more interesting is a good education. When you have a good education, you've gone to the best schools, you went to Oxford and Cambridge, you have it instilled into you that there are certain things it just wouldn't do to say. And in fact we can add wouldn't do to think. A framework of obedience is instilled into you which shapes what the media present. We see this every time you open a newspaper. I'm often asked to give talks on the media. I never prepare. What I usually do is take that morning's newspaper and talk about it. In any country no matter where it is. So take, say, this morning. There are several examples.

There's an interesting article in the New York Times on the prosecution of seven Iranians for cyber-attacks in the United States, and the report points out that this was probably in retaliation to massive cyber-attacks by the United States against Iran. And it quotes Senator Schumer. Senator Schumer was saying, „Well this teaches us not that we shouldn't be carrying out cyber war but that we should be more careful about retaliation. Well, if it wasn't instilled into you that you should obey the framework of official Washington you could add to that report that the US government regard cyber war as an act of war which justifies a military response. And that NATO has invoked the mutual defense condition which says that if any country is attacked by cyber war all the NATO countries have a right to react in response so that, therefore, when the US and Israel carry out massive cyber-attacks against Iran, that's an act of war which justifies a military response in their case. That's the omitted part of the story. But worth reporting.

There is in fact a kind of a concept of objectivity in journalism which amounts to: tell the truth about what's going on inside the beltway. So report what the Democrats are saying and what the Republicans are saying but don't go outside that. Then you are biased. You are not objective. And what's not objective in that sense is very commonly what's significant. It's not just government secrecy that prevents us from seeing what is going on in the world. It's our own obedience to the framework of conformity that's established in part by things like a good education. We should be cautious about that.

Nuala O'Connor:

It's such a privilege to be able to ask these questions and I am going to do a very short final question for each of the panelists: Ed, I am going to start with you and it's the same question I asked you when we first met a few years ago. Very simply, if you had to do it all over again, would you?

Edward Snowden:

Absolutely. And I wouldn't have waited as long as I did.

Nuala O'Connor:

Thank you for that. Glenn Greenwald, anything you would do differently and did what you did help?

Glenn Greenwald:

Yeah. I mean, when you decide to become a journalist, you become a journalist in order to do a story like this. Where you get to shine a light on the most secretive agency within the world's most powerful government and trigger a debate around the world about incredibly profound topics like the danger of government secrecy and the abuse of power and the value of privacy in the digital age, and the proper role of journalists and their relationship to the government in a democracy. And not only would I do it all over again and do I feel very proud of and vindicated by what we were able to achieve. My greatest hope and actually my belief about what will be the most enduring consequence of the incredibly brave and noble choice of and the act of conscience that Edward Snowden made is not necessarily even what we were able to reveal in the story and not necessarily the documents specifically that got revealed but the way in which he teaches the lesson that no matter how much you are without privilege, and position, and power, no matter how obscure you think you are, no matter how powerless you think you are in the face of injustice that all individuals have within themselves the power to stand up to even the most formidable institutions. And I think that the courage that he displayed, I know it was contagious for us as we worked with him. And just as he was motivated and inspired by Daniel Ellsberg and Chelsea Manning and Thomas Drake, I think there is going to be a lot of people inspired by Edward Snowden to come forward and reveal things that never should have been concealed in the first place.

Nuala O'Connor:

Noam Chomsky, six decades of thinking and writing and scholarship...is there anything you got wrong, anything you want to revise? You get the last word, what's left to be said?

Noam Chomsky:

Instead of answering that question I'll back off and answer a different one.

Glenn Greenwald:

That's the prerogative of six decades.

Noam Comsky:

You get to a point where you're allowed to do that. In brief, I think what Edward and Glen have done is a really impressive and magnificent contribution to our freedom and our democracy and they should be lauded for that.

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