John McAfee
On the Erosion of Privacy and Freedom

By Joshua Philipp | Epoch Times Staff

NEW YORK—John McAfee, who created the world’s first antivirus computer program, VirusScan, in 1989, and founded McAfee Associates in 2003 when he was on the run from the law in Belize, gave a subterranean interview about how we are allowing technology to slowly erode our privacy, and with it, our basic freedoms.

"People are missing the fundamental truth of privacy," said the McAfee Associates founder, in an interview with Epoch Times. "Governments, phone companies, and Google would like us to believe that if we have nothing to hide, we have nothing to fear. That is an extraordinarily naive understanding of privacy."

When you go to the grocery store and meet a new clerk, do you tell that clerk all the details of what you did the night before? asks McAfee. "What about your bank? The mortgage on your house? When you leave the store, maybe you bump into an acquaintance, and with that person, you make small talk about how their family is doing. But you don’t divulge to this person the level of information you would a close friend, he points out.

"We have a social structure and order and process for such interactions, and they involve very limited choices," McAfee said.

We have different levels of trust for each person we encounter, and the amount of personal information we divulge by level of trust. Privacy, he said, is built by the "constant decisions and actions that each of us makes thousands of times per day."

McAfee views privacy as "the glue that holds our society together." There’s the understanding that if we all divulged every detail about ourselves — our drafts both viewed and read, all of our political views, all of our thoughts and opinions — it wouldn’t be our simulations that stick out any more, but rather our differences.

The human race tends to be as judgmental as it is loving, he said. "If people know the mistakes, betrayals, and bad thoughts of everyone around them, it could lead to riots in the street."

"It is the negative qualities that require privacy in order to have a smoothly functioning society," McAfee said.

The abhorrence of sharing information and ideas online would somehow help people to better understand each other. "As we have become providers of the information now on display, we just had to decease the means. Does any of that make any sense?"

For all that people can exchange ideas online, the level of debate is far from functional. McAfee believes people are judgmental and fixed in their opinions. "If I like Trump, then there is nothing that you will tell me about Hillary Clinton that will change my mind."

He said reality differs from the optimistic view that sharing information about ourselves online can bridge differences. "I still believe that the hopes for technology, I don’t think we will be achieving."

As people divulge their deeper ideas, people with different views are often left feeling offended. The divulging of information, in this case, is leading to calls for the enhancement of online viewpoint and information. "We’re now perusing all eight political commentators could be seen as a worrying precursor.

The Information Dictatorship

The idea of a single authority having control over information, the ability to discredit ideas and opinions, and the ability to censor as will, brings prospects that McAfee believes we as a society should find deeply concerning.

We are already seeing, as major technology hubs like Facebook and Google become the storagehouses of our personal information and the choke points of information we are able to receive. "Google has prohibited power, has unconscionable power," he said.

Many people take Google search results as fact, but overlook the sources of that information, and how Google selects which to put at the top of the list and which to bury. "The next dictator, McAfee said, "will not be a political, head-of-state dictator."

"Who has that vault of power? Right now, it is Google."

In the endless barrage of information, the challenge becomes knowing what is fact and what is fiction.

"The fake and the real cannot be distinguished if one person controls the delivery of the truth," McAfee said.

"Anyone informed by that person, he said, is going to be colored by their own prejudices and judgments, no matter how kind the person may be.

Big Brother Through Big Data

People also underestimate the significance of the data they generate, said McAfee. Beyond the bits and bytes of information about smartphones, people leave a wealth of information behind with every website they visit and every purchase they make.

Everything from Facebook comments to phone calls leaves data to be harvested.

"It's easy to find out what life in the electronic world is," McAfee said.

Our personal data is being traded, used, and monitored. Businesses like Google are using it to serve us advertisements. Corporations are using it to watch for threats, or to prosecute us if we step out of line.

McAfee noted that most military leaders were great because they could predict the actions of their enemies. Now we are divulging data that can be used against us, in just the same way, right down to our most basic activities, interests, opinions, and beliefs.

"The goal of every dictator has not been absolute power," he said. "It has been the assimilation of the population, because a dictator who knows everything about you — who you are, who you vote with, what you say about that man will never be unseated. This has been the search of all dictatorships since Adolf Hitler."

"This is George Orwell’s ‘1984,’ where you re-write history every day. This is the horror."

As we enter a new world of big data and the loss of privacy, there exists a power of dictatorship unprecedented in human history, an ability for a government to know the intimate details of its citizens, and shape their reality according to its machinations.

"This is that combination of what the dictator knows about the individual, and what the dicta- tor allows the individual to know about his or her reality," he said.

"We are standing on the edge of a cliff, fasting."