

In recent years surveillance technology has undergone a revolution. Spy satellites are now so accurate that they can be used to track the movements of individual people, and even read license plates on cars. It is now simple to intercept faxes, pager messages, and telephone messages, for rooms to be bugged, and for tracking devices to be installed on vehicles, goods, and even individual persons. Spyware software can now be covertly and remotely implanted onto Internet-linked computers to monitor the keystrokes that their users make and the websites that they visit. And in many areas of the developed world persons now live much of their public lives under the panoptic gaze of closed-circuit television monitors that record their every move.

This revolution in surveillance technology is often regarded with horror. Discussions of its ethical implications frequently draw analogies between it and Big Brother's sinister surveillance of the citizens of Oceania in George Orwell's *1984*. Worse yet, as many of the participants in such discussions note, the surveillance capabilities that are now available to governments and corporations dwarf that which Big Brother had access to. In *1984*, people could be sure that they could not be watched by Big Brother's telescreens if they were in a crowd.¹ Face-recognition software now renders such a hope futile. In *1984* people could escape the omnipresence of Big Brother's telescreens by going out of the cities and into the country, where they only had to take care that their conversations were not monitored by hidden microphones.² Such escape is now impossible, for spy satellites can be used to monitor people wherever they go.

With the dystopic vision of *1984* lurking in the background, it is clear that one need not possess any pronounced Luddite tendencies to oppose the expanding use of surveillance technology. It will be argued in this paper, however, that rather than opposing such an expansion of surveillance technology, its use should be *encouraged*—and not only in the public realm. Indeed, the State should place all of its citizens under surveillance at all times and in all places, including their offices, classrooms, shops—and even their bedrooms.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE ARGUMENT

At first sight, the conclusion that the State should place all of its citizens under constant surveillance is alarming. Yet this alarm can be dispelled once it is realized that this conclusion flows naturally from the plausible and widely held view that, in certain circumstances, it is morally permissible for the State to secure information about past events. It is, for example, widely held that in certain circumstances it is morally permissible for the State to compel witnesses to testify about past events in criminal trials. The State, however, can only use hindsight to determine what information it is morally permitted to have access to, for it will only become clear in retrospect what information is relevant to (for example) solving a crime or judging mitigating circumstances. To ensure that it gleans all of the information that it is morally permitted to access, then, the State can gather information about all events that occur, provided it only accesses that which it is morally permitted. Given this, then, the State is in principle morally permitted to place its citizens under constant surveillance. The purpose of this paper is not, however, only to show that the State is morally permitted to place its citizens under constant surveillance. It is also to show that a situation in which the State used such surveillance would be morally *preferable* to one where it did not. To establish this it will be shown that under such a system of surveillance it is likely that crime will decrease, that justice will be better served, and that fewer costs will be imposed on witnesses. Finally, four objections to the use of such a system of State surveillance will be examined and rejected: that it would be open to abuse, that it is not morally permissible for the State to secure information about past events, and that such surveillance would violate citizens' privacy, or autonomy, or both.

Before moving to develop the above argument in favor of constant State surveillance an important initial clarification is in order. This argument is based on two claims: (i) that if it is ever morally permissible for the State to secure information about past events, then it is morally permissible for it to do so through the use of