

Technology IP, Homesteading, and Food Labeling



Send him mail.

“One Voluntaryist’s Perspective” is an original weekly column appearing every Monday at Everything-Voluntary.com, by the founder and editor Skyler J. Collins. Archived columns can be found [here](#). OVP-only RSS feed available [here](#).

This past week, Everything-Voluntary.com passed the 50,000 page view mark, a month short of our one year anniversary. This week I’ll be talking about Google and Apple, vacant land homesteading in the City of Detroit, and GMO food labeling.

Google and Apple and IP Spending

It was reported this past week that Google and Apple have combined (last year) to spend more on patents and the intellectual property front than on research and development. This is very disturbing. Rather than focus their capital on coming up with new ideas, new products, and improving their existing products, they are instead spending it on patents and lawsuits regarding patents. I believe that Google has taken on a far greater defensive position with their patent purchases than has Apple. Apple is suing everybody. Their former CEO, Steve Jobs, was originally a proud “pirate” of ideas, but flip-flopped once his company was no longer the little guy. Hypocritical, indeed.

Intellectual property as a concept is flawed. Ideas cannot be owned, cannot be property, because they are non-scarce, and therefore non-rivalrous. Two people can hold, in their own heads, the same idea simultaneously. Not so with tangible things, like a shoe, or a car. My using your idea does not deprive you of your use of it. Copying your idea cannot be considered theft because, once again, you still have use of the idea that still resides in your head. For the state to make laws and issue “patents” and “copyrights” creates artificial scarcity in ideas, backed up by violence. Voluntaryists may come up with nonviolent, non-statist, means to protect their ideas, such as software licensing, contracts, authorized editions, among other things, but they will not threaten or use state violence to prevent their ideas from being copied and shared.

(Other voluntaryist perspectives: Boldrin, Levine, & Nuvolari, Stephan Kinsella)

Homesteading in Detroit

If land is vacant, undeveloped, and without plans to develop, it is for all practical reasons un-owned. Apparently, there's a lot of un-owned land in the City of Detroit. So much so, that residents, acting well within their rights, have taken to homesteading vacant lots and re-purposed them for various uses, mostly agriculture (sometimes art). I'm sure they'll be harassed at some point by the state though they have yet to violate anyone's rights. The land was simply un-owned. It would be just as ethically justified for the voluntaryist to homestead the vast amounts of land that state and federal governments have arbitrarily locked up. Unless they do something with the land and, of course, with private funds, the land remains un-owned. Good on these homesteaders in Detroit. They're a wonderful example of a free and peaceful people making the best use of scarce resources. That's progress. If, or more likely when, the state intervenes, injustice will be served.

(Other voluntaryist perspectives: Jesse Walker, Karen De Coster)

GMO Food Labeling

As a voluntaryist, I don't believe in legislation. Legislation presupposes the state, a centralized, monopoly law maker. On the contrary, I believe in the free market discovery process, of tort-based, private law. Would a voluntaryist demand that content of food be labeled? We may demand it privately of the company either directly with letters and protests, or indirectly by boycott, personal or organized, but we will never demand it be forced by the state.

Enter the GMO controversy. GMO stands for "genetically-modified organism," meaning the food's genetics (or non-food products like weed killer) have been tampered with for a variety of reasons. Is the final modified product good for us? Could be, but maybe not. The voluntaryist isn't so much concerned with dangerous products as he is with dangerous processes. If GMO foods are dangerous, people in a free society will discover it and publish what they've found. The company will either suffer losses or reap profits. Consumer and producer freedom is the test.

Of course, this particular controversy isn't so simple. GMO food producers I believe have swindled states into all sorts of benefits, the least of which is being allowed to legally hide the fact their food is GMO. In other words, the market is demanding GMO labeling, but the state is helping companies like Monsanto get away with hiding their true ingredients. Whatever the details, the state should be abolished and GMO should live or die on the market. That is the voluntaryist position. No forced labeling or state privileges.

(Other voluntaryist perspectives: Karen De Coster, Lew Rockwell)

Final Thoughts

I would like to re-emphasize that voluntaryism is primarily a means. The free society is the

end. Electoral politics, violence, threats of violence, legislation, none of these are the answers because they are all aggressively invasive. Voluntary interaction, the freed market, nonviolence, private and peaceful arbitration are voluntaryist strategies for achieving the free society, free from uninvited and violent intrusion into our peaceful lives. That is the ball, may our eyes be forever on it.