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Legal Issues

Coverage of legal issues surrounding the use of copyrighted information can be found in the media on practically any day. This issue is an international one, seeping into practically every field. While I believe that artists should have the right to copyright their works, I do believe that these copyrights stifle innovation.

Although intellectual property rights can be said to protect an individual, I do not feel that they serve the best interest of a society. When information is free and open—like it is on Wikipedia, for example—people can be seen to do amazing things with those resources. As a longtime editor of Wikipedia and a contributor to a variety of other “Free Culture” initiatives, I have seen this first hand. MIT’s OpenCourseWare is another example of the benefits of open knowledge and tools; students from around the world can learn and create across a variety of different fields for free.

Though I understand the desire to protect one’s own work, I do feel that this overprotective attitude harms the potential of our society to use information to do great things. When people are allowed to use existing resources, the sum of human knowledge is nothing but expanded. While artists should have the right to protect their work, we should encourage them to consider the bigger picture at hand.

PMR

This essay was interesting to write; as a longtime contributor to several open source software and free culture initiatives, I had the background to write an informed opinion piece qualifying the “• Enforcement of intellectual property rights stifles innovation” assertion.