

While driverless cars have long been part of our collective future imaginary, they have only become a reality in the last few years. In “Feds Should Ask Tech Innovators to Seek Forgiveness, Not Permission,¹” Matthew Feeney frames driverless cars as an issue of safety but connects it to a bigger question - what is the role of the government in regulating technological innovation? In a similar piece in *The Spectator*,² Gary Shapiro names driverless vehicles as a key innovation in reducing the number of road fatalities. “[N]inety percent of car crashes can be attributed to human error” [1] and, although the number of fatalities has decreased recently, that decrement can be attributed to increased automation “such as collision avoidance, automatic braking, and steering assist, which further remove human error from driving” [2].

Feeney and Shapiro agree that each additional automation makes driving safer and challenge those who might be hesitant to consider all of the lives that will be saved. The authors compare waiting until driverless cars are perfect to waiting to release a life-saving cancer drug - they draw on the ethical grey area of “letting die”³ and imply that increased regulatory delays are akin to letting people die on the road. Riley Walters makes a parallel argument in *The Heritage* about the Internet Of Things,⁴ saying “Congress and regulators should refrain from using regulations to preempt unknown risks that might deter innovation and development of newer technologies” [4].

Unlike the FDA demanding that things are thoroughly tested and pre-approved before they can go to market, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) allows cars to be released and, if faulty, recalled after release. Under this model, driverless cars can be released

¹ <https://www.cato.org/blog/tech-innovators-should-ask-feds-forgiveness-not-permission>

² <https://spectator.org/how-driverless-car-technology-can-save-lives/>

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Letting_die

⁴ <http://www.heritage.org/technology/report/understanding-the-internet-things>

now and we can trust that “carmakers are large, bureaucratic organizations that have strong incentives” [1] not to hurt us, unlike smaller manufacturers that may have fewer incentives to protect the public. Furthermore, technology moves at a much more rapid pace than Congress can make laws; it’s very likely that any legislation designed to “protect” us may actually harm us by regulating outdated technology [4].

The authors use some effective arguments throughout. Firstly, the authors emphasize that innovation needs to be allowed to proceed nearly unrestricted and that any restrictions that driverless cars *may* need (but we cannot predict them, and thus should not regulate them) will occur organically, through natural market forces. Secondly, they capitalize on our nationalism by mentioning the ways other countries handle innovation - they are ahead of us with some technology, and benefitting greatly from it. And thirdly, they again tap into market forces by insisting that corporations are trustworthy; so trustworthy in fact, that we should literally trust them with our lives: “profit-maximizing firms have incentives to not kill or injure their customers” [1].

In all, these articles paint a clear and convincing picture of allowing driverless cars and other technological innovations, to be released. If we trust in the market, we will be rewarded with both new technology, and a better future.