



The perspective of anyone who works at Google tends to be international. The company’s employees come from all over the world, and they think that their life-enhancing products should be available all over the world. One of the attractions of innovative technology is its ability to break down national borders: it spreads everywhere once it is allowed to. Meanwhile, one of the attractions of being a multinational corporation is the ability to move money across national borders, to where it can do most work (for the owners of the corporation). Google is adept at avoiding tax in the various national

jurisdictions where it operates. It pays as little as it can get away with, on the grounds that it is not Google’s job to fund national governments or to set their tax rates for them. Google is in the ideas business, and good ideas know no boundaries. An international perspective always makes it tempting to look down on government.

However, the road systems on which Google’s self-driving car will operate are still national. They are subject to laws made by national governments, and they are paid for with taxes raised by national governments. In the United States it is even more local than this: the rules and the funding of the road network vary from state to state. Good ideas are not going to break down these boundaries on their own. If your good idea has a crash in California, the consequences will be very different from if that crash happens over the border in Mexico. An international perspective is often blind to the resolutely national basis of the lives most of us still lead. While Google is innovating and its executives are flying around the world spreading the good news, someone still needs to pay for the basic infrastructure on which its innovations will operate. That someone is invariably the governments whose taxes Google tries to avoid.

Champions of the free market argue that it could all be done much better if government would just butt out. Seen from a market perspective, the chaos of multiple different national jurisdictions is hopelessly inefficient. Globalisation promises to render those inefficiencies obsolete over time. Trade between nations will eventually bring all nations together under a single set of rules.