Orion Kostival

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Ethical Reflection

Apple wins lawsuit against Samsung

After more than a year of litigations, a jury concluded that Samsung was guilty of patent infringement and ordered the company to pay $1.05 billion to Apple as a result (Associated Press). The lawsuit claims that Samsung used features in their smart phone design that were patented by Apple and were used illegally. The two most prevalent examples are the ability for a user to zoom in on text with a finger tap and a “bounce-back” feature as the user reaches the end of the screen (Associated Press). Apple claims that Samsung stole the ideas as they were struggling to produce their own innovations. Samsung on the other hand argues that they were simply giving consumers what they wanted in the form of a smart phone with large screens and intuitive features. During the trial, Apple’s main argument was that Samsung products look and feel almost identical to the iPad and iPhone Apple products on the market today (Associated Press). There have been similar lawsuits filed in various other countries by Apple and by Samsung over similar issues. In Seoul, it was determined that Samsung did not infringe on Apple’s patents and that Apple had illegally used Samsung’s wireless technology (Associated Press).

Even though the legal feud between Samsung and Apple seems frivolous, wasteful and perhaps even unwarranted on the surface, closer analysis based on the ethical framework of Kantianism suggests that Samsung acted unethically. According to Kant principles, the actions of an entity must not be judged based on what they should do rather than what they want to do. As stated in the article, Samsung was simply “giving consumers what they wanted”. From Samsung’s perspective, the company acted based on what they wanted to do, rather than acting based on what they should have done. Clearly Samsung’s goal was to appeal to a large audience of consumers in order to produce a desirable product that would result in sales. However, due to the fact that Apple already had a patent on the technologies that they desired, they should not have used them in their products. Apple clearly had the idea to use the technology first (or at least obtained the patent first) and as such was entitled to rewards associated with their innovations. On the flip side, if Samsung had patented the technology, there is a very good chance that they would have filed an equivalent lawsuit against Apple. In this case, it is contradictory for Samsung to expect Apple to behave a certain way if they do not hold themselves to the same standards. Ultimately Samsung acted unethically by violating the First Formulation of the Categorical Imperative.

Works Cited

Associated Press. *Apple wins lawsuit against Samsung, as jury awards $1B for patent infringement*. 24 August 2012. 20 February 2013. <http://www.nbcnews.com/id/33882559/#.USZ3QKXbO6M>.