

Corporatism

A few years ago I was involved in something of a thinktank/discussion-group that, amongst other things, posited the question as to whether or not the future would incorporate a society based on more or less individual freedoms. The initial assumption was that this was a simple capitalism-socialism discussion. The hypothetical that I considered more likely (or, at least, more interesting) was a future in which there was increased capitalism but less individual freedom. In this scenario individual freedoms are curtailed not by governments but by the “rights” of corporations and other mercantile bodies.



Perhaps there is a current glimpse of this possible future in the area of insurance. I am beginning to rack up a long list of (sensible) activities in both my private and ministry life that have become too-difficult-to-do not because of government regulation but because of the (nonsensical) stipulations of insurance companies. Freedom is reduced by corporate interests.

Another glimpse can be found in the area of electronic distribution channels and the superimposition of Digital Rights Management on the (very free) medium of the internet and other telecommunications. For instance, I read of two stories recently where Apple has excluded from its App Store applications that would otherwise make some information and the support of some cause more accessible: These are Wikileaks and, from perhaps the other end of the social spectrum, the conservative Christian Manhattan Declaration.

In this glimpse we have, to a certain extent, a corporation deciding what it's users can and cannot read or support. This

is not, of course, absolute – the information can still be accessed via the web browser on those devices (although conceivably, that could be prevented also). And of course, a user is technically able to switch to a different provider of technology – unless the loss of the investment made by the user makes the switch financially untenable.

The subject of this glimpse, rendered more starkly than the actual, is this: People restricted by financial penalty from genuine freedom of expression.

It is the end result of absolutising “ownership” of content, with “ownership” of distribution channels, with “ownership” of technology. It’s why people have done this with the Sony Playstation 3 (for example). And it’s why I refuse to call such actions “wrong.”

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