

CAN WE EVER REALLY OWN IDEAS? ACTION-BASED PROPERTY

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Can We Ever Really Own Ideas? Action-Based Property
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About this Piece

Niko Laamanen · Apr 24, 2025

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Chapter 1

Can We Ever Really Own Ideas? Action-Based Property

Can we ever really own ideas?

At Consensus Network, we publish books and deal with Intellectual Property (IP) on a daily basis. Libertarians disagree on whether ideas can be owned.

Here's my take.

What's IP?

Copyright © for creative works

Patents for inventions

Trade Secrets for business edges

Trademarks ™ for brands.

I'm focusing on copyright—my wheelhouse as a publisher.

Why the Debate?

In 2025, digital media is everywhere. Copying is instant and free. So, can you own a song or book when it's shared globally? What's your take on digital copying?



“Whenever someone starts talking about 'fair competition' or indeed, about 'fairness' in general, it is time to keep a sharp eye on your wallet, for it is about to be picked.”

— Murray N. Rothbard



Copyright's Roots ©

In the 18th century, copyright let creators control the distribution of their works. If a printer copied a poet's book without permission, it was considered theft. Fair? Maybe not.

Fairness vs. Contracts

Talking about fairness leads to murky debates about the 'greater good.' Contracts are clearer. If I share my idea under a contract and you break it, you have violated a contract, not stolen an idea.

Digital Age Twist

Copying digital content doesn't take anything from the creator. It's not like stealing an apple (that'd make you a jerk). Ideas aren't scarce, but the work to grow and share them is.

You can't own (raw) ideas.

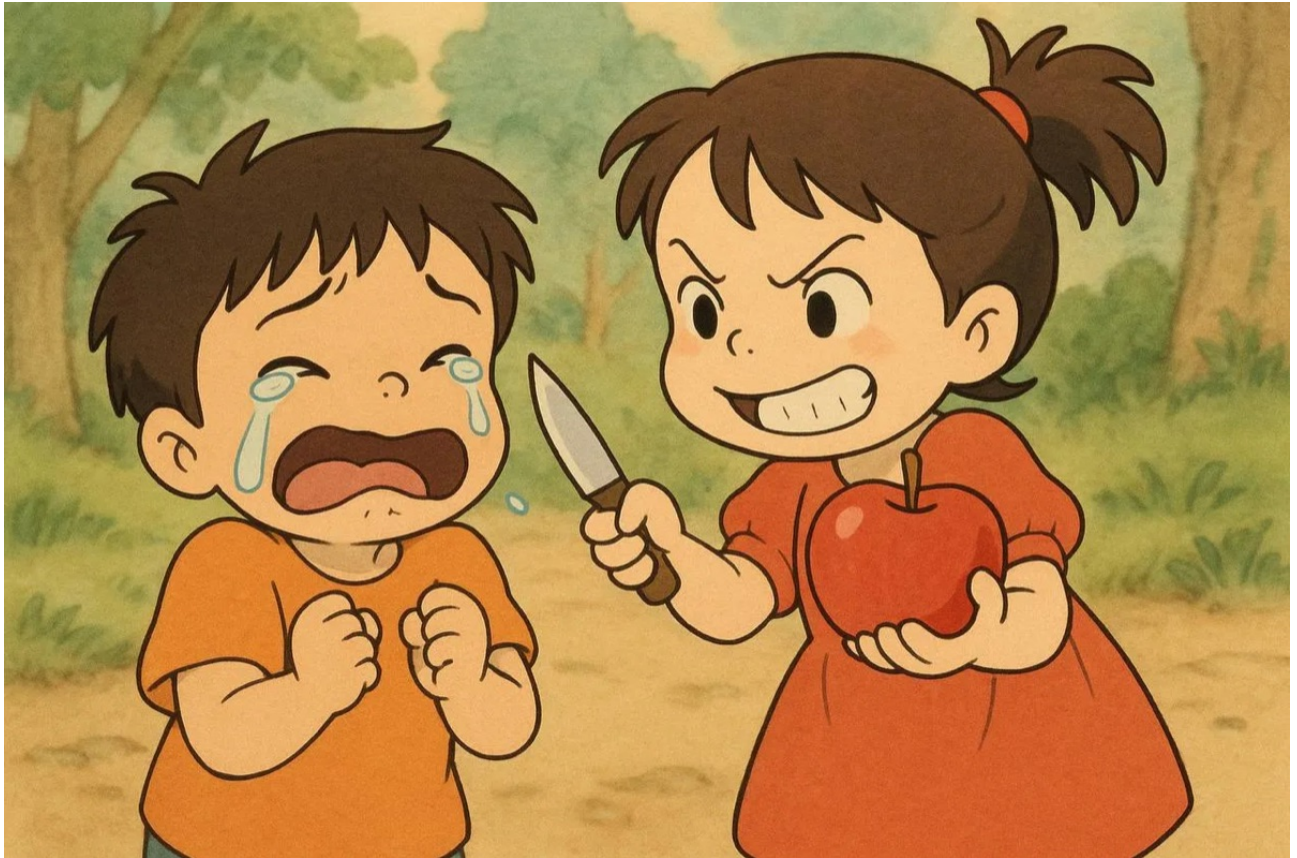
Per Stephan Kinsella (@NSKinsella),

"A system of property rights in "ideal objects" necessarily requires violation of other individual property rights, e.g., to use one's own tangible property as one sees fit."

Trying to prevent anyone from interacting with an idea restricts their freedom of action.

Yes, his book is available for free at [mises dot org](http://mises.org).

My idea for a book is free; take it. My book is not free; buy it.



If you take my book and sell it as your own, I will come for you. I have made my idea scarce by acting as its steward and protector.

Welcome to *Action-Based Property*.

Action-Based Property

A framework of ownership that emerges through acts of creation, use, and cultivation. Not established by exclusion or enforcement, but by participation and ongoing contribution.

Our way at @KonsensusN.

We publish paper and electronic books. Some are free, some paid, some remixed. We don't believe in state-backed IP laws or patents. We believe in private contracts. Buy a book, and it's yours—per the contract.

Did you like this thread?

Then, please share it and read the full write-up on Substack: <https://maximumfreedom.substack.com/p/can-we-ever-really-own-ideas>

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Source

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