

**RENÉE MARLIN-BENNETT, *KNOWLEDGE POWER: INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY, INFORMATION & PRIVACY* (BOULDER: LYNNE RIENNER PUBLISHERS, 2004)**

*By Scott Shefloe\**

In her latest book, *Knowledge Power: Intellectual Property, Information & Privacy*<sup>1</sup>, Renée Marlin-Bennett lays down this question the question: How do the ability to own intellectual property and information as well as the ability to control how information flows become a source of power? She sets out to answer this, and other related questions, while describing how information came to be owned and how it came to be valued.

The book begins by providing an extensive introduction to intellectual property. A brief background of its historical development puts modern day intellectual property laws into perspective. All the forms of intellectual property, such as copyright, trademark, trade secrets, and patents are described along with the relevant legal protections and policy issues concerning them. Several examples demonstrate what may be protected as intellectual property and why there is a need to protect intellectual property rights.

Intellectual property on the global scale is dealt with extensively as well. Many issues stem from the growth of the global economy and the differing values concerning intellectual property protection which exist around the world. Marlin-Bennett helps make sense of the international issues and cultural backgrounds that lead to current regimes and controls for international intellectual property protection. This global governance includes the World Intellectual Property Organization, the World Trade Organization, and several other treaties on intellectual property.

The policy questions that arise in the global governance of intellectual policy are discussed, with special attention given to pharmaceutical patents, genetic material, digitized works, and domain names. At the domestic level, the policy arguments at the global level attempt to strike a balance between public good and private good.

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<sup>1</sup> René Marlin-Bennett, *Knowledge Power: Intellectual Property, Information & Privacy* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004) [*Knowledge Power*].

The second major topic Marlin-Bennett deals with is information and, more precisely, owning information. Information is described broadly at first and in terms of who owns and controls it. Then the rise of information as a commodity is traced, explaining how information gains value, often through the act of compiling it. Two types of information are studied in detail: information about the planet and information about people. Marlin-Bennett demonstrates the interplay between owning information and the value of the information. Here, it becomes quite evident how the control of information can be a source of power, which is the premise of the book's central question.

The discussion on information about people leads nicely into issues of privacy, the third and final major topic of the book. The concept of privacy is introduced, along with personal privacy boundaries. The crossing of these boundaries is where most issues of privacy lie. Who controls the flow of information into or out of our personal information boundaries, and are these boundary crossings legitimate or illegitimate? Protecting privacy and personal information is a huge task in the information and digital age, and Marlin-Bennett elaborates on the current trends in Internet security and digital data protection and dissemination.

Finally, the tools used to protect privacy are described. Current tools include legislation, such as criminal codes, consumer protection acts, and government body regulation like the U.S. Federal Trade Commission. Additional tools consist of social norms which encourage respect for privacy and the guarding of personal information, and technical tools such as encryption, encoding, firewalls, and identity verification.

In Marlin-Bennett's conclusion, the ability to gain information and control the flow of information to others is directly linked to power. The tools needed to control this information flow seem to be increasingly in the hands of the private sector and the government, and less available to private individuals—a trend which needs to be cautioned against as policy and law adapt to the rapidly developing information society.

The chapters of *Knowledge Power* are well organized, with several subsections allowing for quick reference to specific topics and clear delivery of information, from introductory overviews

to in-depth discussions. The book draws from an exhaustive list of primary and secondary sources (including an extensive bibliography) to provide both an introductory guide for anyone interested in these issues and an excellent resource on the development and current state of these issues for those already versed in the subject.

Renée Marlin-Bennett is an associate professor of International Relations at American University. She is chair of the Global Intellectual Property Project and has previously published works on Internet governance and international trade disputes. She continues to research in the areas of global surveillance, collection of data, and the dissemination of results.