

# Guarding and Rescuing the FSF Titanic

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## Introduction

Originally this was written to assist FSF members in bolstering the success of the Free Software Foundation. Now it is written to assist other free software advocates in continuing the success of the FSF instead.

Fewer assumptions were made in the previous approach to this writing-- now we assume some things:

1. The FSF isn't just threatened, it will hit a large iceberg in the future that changes it permanently.
2. It will not change course on its own, nor will it carry enough lifeboats for such a tragedy.
3. It likely will continue in its mission, in an increasingly diminished capacity.

Of the greatest concern is not what capacity the FSF will have in terms of money and numbers. Whatever happens in the future, the FSF will likely manage to pull through in terms of funding and having some purpose. The most important things the FSF still does and will likely focus on in the future, include:

1. The RYF campaign will continue to promote hardware that meets the requirements of the FSF.
2. The FSF will continue to collect funds to help pay for various programmes, organisations, and software development.

3. They will continue to host the FSF website, maintain licences and the Free Software Definition.

Presumably they will continue to lobby against any legal challenges to these activities, which is also valuable.

Other key accomplishments of the FSF include establishing the free software movement, creating the GNU operating system and creating free software licences such as the GPL.

These include some of the most important contributions to free software of all time, and no effort is being made to make small of these things.

So what could go wrong? Some things have actually been going wrong for several years.

One of the worst things that will happen to the FSF will be the eventual loss of its founder. Stallman is not going to be with the FSF forever, and has said before that he has no replacement.

For those who feel the FSF has already spent years ignoring some important new threats to software freedom, and given that he has already said he has no replacement-- it is reasonable to speculate what sorts of problems the FSF will experience without Stallman as its president or on its board of directors.

The greatest failure of the FSF already, is its failure to produce more Richard Stallmans. Not that you have to be Richard Stallman to run the FSF or promote free software, but it would certainly help. We have few complaints about him that wouldn't apply just as readily to anybody else in the FSF.

And let's be realistic-- even if it were part of the mission of the FSF to replicate its founder, that's a taller order than the one the FSF actually exists to serve; nobody but nobody is RMS.

Not to single out the FSF on this matter-- Microsoft continues to be run by Gates with a lapdog at the helm, as it did with Ballmer at the wheel. Apple is just not the same at all without Steve Jobs. These corporations may outlast their founders, but few will survive intact. The future of the FSF is mostly likely not the FSF-- or it is, we suspect, the FSF with other organisations to pick up the slack.

We keep a list of people most likely to fill Stallman's shoes-- hopefully it will not be John Sullivan, as he already fills the role he is best suited to. Sullivan would be, at best, the Tim Cook to Stallman's Jobs. Compared to RMS, he is uncharismatic, unimaginative and businesslike. That doesn't mean he isn't useful to the FSF, but without RMS it's hard to imagine the FSF becoming anything under Sullivan except increasingly boring and middle-of-the-road. In fact it may have already become that, not to pin it unfairly on a single person.

Better candidates would include, as always-- Ben Mako Hill, who is shy compared to Stallman though not too shy to do a good job, Alexandre Oliva who is probably more like RMS than any other person alive-- too bad (in a way) that he's already an asset to FSF-LA or perhaps he could naturalise and work for the FSF in Boston.

Denis Roio works for Dyne.org and lives in Europe, or he would otherwise make an interesting replacement. And Kat Walsh could make a good President, if she cares enough about free software (she probably does) and her ties to "Open source" aren't strong enough to conflict. (Ben Mako Hill has them too, but has spoken openly against the threat they present.)

Eminem, if he cared about free software issues, would make a great stand-in for Richard Stallman. He is great at arguing his points, he knows the people he criticises intimately, and he never backs down from an argument regardless of how powerful his opponent is. Stallman is a little more honest, and finding someone as honest as RMS is unlikely but preferable.

Now this looks like a job for me

So everyone, press lots of keys

Cause we need to liber-- ate our PCs

They would be so non-free without me

Open source has made great effort in twisting every reasonable critique free software has made of monopolies, into something deeply controversial or overzealous. They have simply rolled over for a corporation that not only refers to their actions against all competitors

(including free software and open source) as war-- but one that was founded on referring to hobbyists as thieves for sharing software, at a time when the industry was just transitioning away from software that was (by default and common practice) in the public domain.

Let's be really clear about this-- around the time Microsoft was founded, most computer enthusiasts already shared software, which was generally legal to share. Copyright and industry practice then changed dramatically, Bill Gates started calling people thieves for sharing, and Stallman started working to preserve a non-corporate (non-monopolistic) way of developing and distributing software.

Ever since, free software was painted (by corporations and by Open source) as overzealous and unreasonable-- simply for not wanting monopolies to take over what was once the right of every computer enthusiast on earth.

When companies who literally own the media corporations want to destroy your occupation, your hobby and your rights, and paint you as a zealot for simply arguing for those rights-- it does you no good to be an overly agreeable person.

Apart from being good at arguing for liberty, you also need to be able to bring people together. Stallman has proven himself to be wildly successful in this regard, without the false compromises and weakened goals (artificial victory) of Open source.

In addition, some of the things that needed to be solved-- like the creation of a free operating system and large-scale software support-- are already solved, and only need to be defended. The FSF's defense of this resource is both minimal and insufficient, there are several other threats to the FSF that could do harm to all they've done so far, and they need someone running the ship that is going to be able to protect its existence and advance its mission in the 21st century.

They aren't ever going to find someone as qualified as Stallman, so we really should be talking about what's needed and how we can find (or produce) enough people that can do those things.

While we are at it, we should be talking about other ways in which the FSF has failed and what we can do about those problems as well.

## Free as in Speech

The FSF used to say "Free as in Speech", and now you hear a lot of "Free as in Freedom". This is subjective, and perhaps they say plenty of both. But "Free as in Speech" made more sense in the earlier days of free software.

Free speech isn't just the basis for free software, it's the basis for all expression technical, political, philosophical and artistic. So many people are bent on creating new exceptions to free speech and free expression, and this is already bleeding into censorship of art and even code repositories. The threat to free software is real, but the people who want such a threat of course do not think it is a problem.

While a new breed of so-called anarchists campaign against expression that even the state allows, people are also foolishly overplaying the relevance of the state to free speech issues-- as if it's not a freedom issue when a project is increasingly thought-policed, because the thought-policing isn't on a state level. This is pedantic and misguided for so many reasons.

First of all, it is technically true in some ways-- that's where the ignorance starts. From a purely technical point of view, the Constitution protects against laws that abridge the freedom of speech. That's all.

So the First Amendment has very little relevance, technically speaking, if someone comes into your house and insults you, and you tell them to get out. You don't really have to explain this to people every time this conversation comes up, but it's understandable why people do that. It's because they don't care about the issue enough to be honest.

When people talk about free speech outside of this narrow but primarily correct definition, they are talking about **the absence of censorship**. This is not a usage that comes out of ignorance or lack of education, as the minimalists and pedants imply. Rather the Constitution protects **natural rights** from laws, liberty is a natural right, and free speech is a subset of liberty. (Free software in turn, is a subset of free speech.)

You can certainly look at this in various other ways, but to constantly insult and negate what people are saying based on ignoring the validity of this perspective, merely insults the intelligence of everyone you bother about it. It's a deeply condescending, stupidly narrow definition of free speech to limit it exclusively to "whatever the state does not infringe is (sufficiently) free."

That sort of pedantry only demands that we throw away the words "free speech" as being as limited as they insist it is, and focus exclusively on matters of "censorship." This is pointless, when Wikipedia begins its article on "Freedom of Speech" with the words:

Freedom of speech is a principle that supports the freedom of an individual or a community to articulate their opinions and ideas **without fear of retaliation, censorship, or sanction.**

Far be it to suggest that quoting one line of a Wikipedia article proves anything at all, but can anyone honestly insist that it's ridiculous to treat free speech as the opposite of censorship? Or is it the pedants who are being deeply dishonest? Either way this goes, what good are they?

If the FSF lent more credence to the relationship between modern copyright and censorship, and the relationship they themselves established between Free software and free speech, they wouldn't likely be looking for exceptions like whether we should be able to freely adapt "works of opinion" or whether you should be able to make unlimited paper copies of a manual under an **allegedly** free licence.

Alas, the FSF has painted too many exceptions to free speech (or for you pedantic idiots-- the **lack of censorship**) and is likely already having key figures (including Stallman and Torvalds) stifled over those exceptions. This is self-defeating, but it also harms other movements that promote works that are "Free as in Speech."

The (more honest) truth is that free speech is a more complex and nuanced issue than Randall Munroe has painted it in the most

ignorant XKCD ever shared online.

There are people who want to add to the censorship in the world, they are successful in actively doing so, and they are eager to get away with it using flimsy justifications and dishonesty. You are free to lie, until the fraud does enough harm to the freedom of others, but when you twist reality to limit a quest for freedom you make an enemy of yourself. At that point you are no better than a politician, and you have earned the disdain reserved for the worst among them.

In the past, the FSF has found it necessary (and rightfully so) to turn to philosophy while Open source relies on sophistry. These days, when you argue against censorship you find the internet is overrun with sophists and trolls and armchair authoritarians. If that truly represents what free software has become in this century, then you can keep it.

But that is not how free software began, what made it viable, nor what it needs to be in order to fight against censorship.

**There is no free software, without free speech.** And if that's not true, then free software ought to be dropped as a movement, and replaced with free culture, which is a superset of free software and still a subset of free speech.

Natural right begets Liberty,

Liberty begets free speech,

Free speech begets free culture and free software,

Free culture (by definition, if not common practice)

includes free software.

Free software advocates ought to be able to understand this. If they cannot, it is one more area where the free software movement has failed and become sterile.

Of course even if free software were dropped for free culture, the specific areas where free culture pertains to software would be no less important. All that would really change is the sacrifice of greater

idiocy for greater honesty.

As it happens, free culture (broadly speaking) cannot seem to wrap itself around the importance of using free software, either. So both movements are hampered without the other. And too few can appreciate this, or bother to promote it-- both movements cost themselves key allies and success in the process.

If they were really at odds, like free software and open source, such alliance would be a false compromise. Since they are ultimately working for the same freedom, free software and free culture should acknowledge their similarities and help each other. But neither side wants to admit the truth about their existence and philosophical heritage.

Just as open source does not want to admit that it co-opted free software (even when OSI co-founder Bruce Perens said they had when OSI was no more than a year or two old) Free software does not acknowledge the importance of a broader copyright reform movement, when free software was only necessary due to regressive expansion of copyright itself.

Free software is far more honest than Open source, but on this matter it too rewrites history to make itself out to be (a little) more authoritative and central regarding a subject than it is in reality-- that of copyright reform.

The FSF has-- and should have-- no monopoly on copyright reform. Its lack of willingness to find its true context in matters of liberty leads it to overplay its hand regarding non-software matters ("Why this license?") and to misrepresent arguments about copyright reform in other areas. It should not be allowed to perpetuate such dishonesty, even if dishonesty is rarer indeed for the FSF than most organisations.

Either the FSF is a secular non-profit with a mission to promote what it says, subject to the same scrutiny as all other institutions-- or it is a cult with a leader and devotees that cannot err. Sadly, on matters of broader liberty barely outside of software, it behaves less like a secular institution and more like a cult. Some of its largest competitors are cults as well, but they are cults to corporation and control, rather than to software freedom.

On matters related to free software directly, the FSF deserves its recognition as the authoritative voice of the free software movement. For purposes of (among others) the unfettered and scientific expression of ideas, we will challenge their authority-- but not deny or negate it as Open source has unjustly done for decades at a time.

As for the Code of Conduct, it is a trojan horse that in practice lets corporations limit free software along lines that the government will not. It is a shot in the foot, and all for a false promise. "Love thy neighbour" it was once said, is the whole of the law. There's nothing wrong with that, but you should remain free to speak against your neighbour as long as you speak the truth.

With no culture of free speech, there will be no protection against laws that limit it either. For a government claimed to be of the people, for the people, by the people-- it is delusional to assume or rely on the government to protect and preserve anything that people are not willing to stand for themselves.

You cannot reduce "free speech" to the Constitution, without dooming it to lose further ground to censorship. The FSF may continue their mission, though their followers, bylaws and customs are increasingly eroding the Free Software Foundation's foundation.

The tools free software produces to liberate the user, are promoted and run primarily by people dedicated to using them to control speech, not make it more free. Freedom 0 is the freedom to use the software for any purpose, but what we are inching towards is a future where software repos will be divided along political lines. The recently-adopted GNU Kind guidelines include a welcome glimpse of free software's past, when words like this rang true:

The GNU Project encourages contributions from anyone who wishes to advance the development of the GNU system, regardless of gender, race, ethnic group, physical appearance, religion, cultural background, and any other demographic characteristics, **as well as personal political views.**

Those words do not reflect the politics of free software today, nor do they reflect the reality of the culture of the Free Software Foundation. It is an ideal we should strive for, to have diversity of contributors as well as diversity of opinion, but just **try** having your own political views.

Free software should be looking for more ways to enable free speech. At the moment, all communication platforms related to the free software movement are focused on controlling it, which is endemic to the so-called Fediverse.

## Free Software in Education

In the decade that the FSF was founded, computer education was not yet based on applications. By the 1990s, education was moving towards application training, which meant two things: computer training became a lot more superficial, and it better served the market for proprietary software.

Computers are multi-purpose machines, and applications focus on specific tasks. This means that if your education shifts from teaching about computing to training to use applications, you also move from teaching something multi-purpose to teaching something application-specific.

This is fine of course, if all you intend to do with the computer is use those specific applications.

This point should bother every free software advocate. **We are trying to give people control of their multi-purpose machines back**, and they aren't even taught what they can do with that control.

The essence of computing is not applications, but code. Although it is reasonable to assume that most people will not become skilled application developers, **the fundamental understanding of computing** is still missing for anyone that hasn't learned how to code.

Coding in one language to some degree teaches much of what someone would have to learn to code in other languages. When Silicon Valley initiates their teach-everyone-to-code schemes, they are gambling with the compromise that was made to education in the 1990s.

If everyone learns to code, then everyone gains some understanding of how to code in other languages. To a small degree, they get back a part of their understanding of what power they really have.

Nonetheless, education is still focused on teaching a lot of proprietary software. If free software advocates make it a goal, there is no reason we can't create "**free software coding schools**" (they will be cheaper if they're virtual. Consider something less like DeVry and

more like Khan Academy, for starters) and stand up to the non-free-laden **schooling that teaches people to compromise their freedom** long before they're halfway through university.

We have such classes online-- we don't have our own schools, and one should be built. If someone can build PeerTube, we can make Free Software Academy and send all of our friends there.

Silicon Valley is doing this, and we should be doing this for free software.

If we do not reach at least high-school-level students with an education in free software, then we have squandered an opportunity to teach about freedom at an optimal stage.

If the idea is to reach people as early as possible, then a practical language that is easy-to-learn as possible should be considered.

A single implementation is probably not the answer. It's a nice goal, but if we had a team of 20 people to work on such a thing we could split them up into 3 or 4 teams to come up with 3 or 4 different solutions. <http://techrights.org/2019/08/10/fig-project/>

Then we could go to each member and ask them which solution they thought was best, and second-best (this means they must vote on at least one solution that is not their own) and ask them to explain their choices. Perhaps the team could then work on the top two choices.

**It would be ideal for developers to try teaming up with educators (or vice versa)** to develop teaching environments that are closer to what educators really need. This is a great opportunity for volunteers. Teaching this sort of computing to educators would also be a great idea.

Of course the FSF isn't likely to do this. It only has so much money and so many volunteers, and **it is not making good use of its volunteers**-- if the FSF were making good use of its volunteers, it could do this. Instead the volunteers are focused on promoting the organisation and its message, much more than they are invited to help develop solutions.

The FSF should be training people to become coders, or trying to encourage people to create an organisation for that purpose and then

supporting that organisation (with money or at least advice and promotion) but they are not. What the FSF cannot do, someone else ought to. Of course this chapter would not be here if we were not inviting all free software advocates to help with this.

This is a specific area where additional free software organisations would be useful-- whether the unincorporated, no-dues no-budget volunteer-only sort, or the more traditional 501c-type organisations (or both.)

But along with Free Software, Free Culture, Free Hardware and OER (Or better yet, "LER" for "Libre Educational Resources") society and free software alike would benefit deeply from an organisation dedicated to free software (coding) and free culture in education.

Lightweight applications for education are also recommended, because even if **your** school has plenty of money, countless others don't. As long as we are creating our own software, we should be standing against Wirth's law.

Simple languages aimed at teaching these basics:

1. Variables
2. Input
3. Output
4. Basic math
5. Loops
6. Conditionals
7. Functions

can make it easier to learn the fundamentals of coding and help transition those interested to more complex languages. Earlier languages can be more forgiving of syntax errors if there are fewer places to get the syntax wrong. Simplifying some of the interfaces needed to build distros and applications would also help immensely.

## **Narcissism in The Community**

This is focused mostly on Cluster B personality disorders and their effects, and mostly on Narcissistic personality disorder, but most of all on its presence online.

It is intended as practical advice and not the result of a formal study of online behaviour. Such a formal study could help, if not compromised by a preferred outcome such as looking for an excuse to further regulate the Internet. Some formal studies are compromised by their sponsors.

People throw around a lot of Ad hom in online debates. A common example is accusing Stallman of being autistic. Stallman has said himself that he could be on the autism spectrum, and there's nothing wrong with that-- it is typically brought up to imply he is incapable of making decisions that fall in line with the real world.

It's a circular argument; if your goal is to change the world, you're not going to be talking about things that begin by ceding that the world will not change. Some changes are more realistic than others, but the FSF has met most of its goals, except for the largest. Nothing written here is really about the FSF failing to meet their goals, only abandoning goals partially and not adopting ones that could be necessary. In terms of meeting goals, the FSF has a great track record.

Being clinically diagnosed as a narcissist is also irrelevant. If someone is diagnosed as having NPD and they are not lying and trolling and trying to destroy free software, then the matter of NPD doesn't need to be discussed. But when there are many people who are lying and trolling and trying to destroy free software, then it is still useful to talk about NPD. If more people understood it, a better handle of online communication could probably be obtained by most people. This is highly relevant to the free software community.

Narcissists are drawn to intelligent people. They take great pleasure in attacking, controlling and defeating intelligent people because it makes them feel smarter and more important. Some narcissists are very intelligent people, but the word "clever" would apply more universally, and narcissism is more about control and dominance than

intelligence. Not everyone who is a jerk is a Narcissist, but some of the worst jerks could well be.

Not all trolls are narcissists either-- a lot of trolling is just a harmless prank that never gets out of hand. At first it is difficult to say whether the trolling is harmful or not, and if it puts you on alert that's alright, but it could be nothing.

Misunderstandings happen all the time. As many misunderstandings are harmless (and they really are, they're worth resolving whenever possible) a narcissist will try to make everything seem like a misunderstanding. Don't let this sour you on trying to resolve honest disputes.

The worst trolls are the better-known, evil awful person, who tries to suck the soul out of you one jerk-move at a time.

Most people probably still think of narcissism as just an inflated sense of self. That definition may have validity but is not too good, when every idealist is trying to find some way to save the world. Oh, you don't want to use software that doesn't include source code? Boom, you're a narcissist. Beyond just trying to do "big things," a narcissist may:

1. pretend to care about you or other people
2. misquote you and speak for you and gaslight you
3. use smear tactics and try to intimidate you, even as a response for anything they dislike about you at all
4. constantly accuse you of things they are doing themselves-- then say they were "just kidding, lighten up"
5. play a hero, pretend to care, but have actions that never match their words
6. play people and groups against each other, often over incredibly insignificant faults
7. routinely miss the point of what you're saying and demand you consider their points (exclusively)-- all conversations with narcissists are one-sided
8. have consistently different standards for what they will tolerate vs.

what they will dump on you

Narcissists do not respond (initially, later on, after repeated attempts, or under any circumstances whatsoever) to logic or honesty with logic or honesty. They only ever double down with fallacy and lies.

Although people say "don't feed the troll," what they don't tell you is that the thing you're feeding them is your happiness and well-being.

This is not just about trolls-- **Narcissism explains most of the ills** that society has. People think that narcissism is rare, but it is not as rare as many assume and we are creating more of them with a society that is perfect for narcissists.

Selfies are not so bad. Prior to camera-phones, they were known as self-portraits, and some of those are amazing. The real problem with Narcissism is just how many people out there are **lying by default**, how good they are at lying, and how great they are at weaseling out of any effort to pin them for it. You aren't just wasting your time going after narcissists-- you're wasting your life.

When feminists talk about "Patriarchy" they are describing male narcissism and narcissistic success. When MGTOWs talk about women, they are describing female narcissism.

Any gender domination in society is a cultural habit reinforced by differences in physical strength. It's not because "men are just like that." But narcissists of all genders are "just like that."

Though they may not always appear to act in groups, narcissists do swarm together. If there's one nearby that you can discern, there are often others lurking around. They feed off your emotions and off the imaginary things they attribute to your feelings-- whether good or bad.

But narcissism helps explain a lot of things-- from non-profits that care more about a fancy, decked-out top office floor than the cause in their mission statement, to the cloying but empty promises in any major political party, to one-sided friendships that seem to always go nowhere (or go crazy) no matter how you work to nurture them from your side, to arguments that start out frustrating and become surreal over time and iteration.

The only protection from trolls is to starve them, and trolls are constantly trying to make good people look like trolls. No matter how many anti-bullying campaigns you run, how many people you ban, how many misguided zero-tolerance policies you write, trolls will thrive if there's food around.

That will continue to happen until the day when everyone educates themselves better about clinical narcissism-- and gives up the argument that a particular troll has it.

If you go too far, and take down everyone who displays one or two narcissistic traits, you will also stop their victims.

You want three things for a victim of narcissistic abuse: You want to give them an opportunity to heal, You want to give them room to speak that the narcissist tried to troll them out of-- and you definitely, definitely want them to fully understand why it is self-destructive to try to go after the troll either directly or publicly.

Turnabout is not fair play-- not just because of karma or some perfect morality-- but because chasing after the troll is just another opportunity for the victim to be abused further.

Many people think this is just about protecting emotionally fragile people's feelings-- or creating a "perfect" code of conduct, or that this is just an opportunity to squash more free speech.

Unfortunately, it can be all those things-- even if those things won't work. That's a very substantial reason why a global understanding of narcissism would result in a better world, better environments and communication online and offline, **less** perceived need for zero-tolerance policy and censorship and controlled speech, and greater harmony and success.

If you critically examine the news and advertising, we are constantly being played against each other as a society. Corporations do this because it makes us "better consumers" by their definition of "better." (Malleable.) So don't think for a moment that trolls are just some obnoxious kids on an internet forum.

Trolls create and sustain monopolies, they use marketing to psychologically manipulate the public, and they create a society in

which we cannot work together to do anything meaningful against them. Understand that power, and you can learn to feed it less.

Will using a fully free operating system help? By no means was all of this said just to sum it up as "use GNU," but yes-- a free operating system would help substantially because it starves corporations that are bent on controlling not just your computing via their software and social media platforms and ridiculous "Smart" devices-- but your entire life, via your computing.

Using free software, unlike using "open source" is a political and ethical act. Using free software promotes freedom (and choice as well) and it teaches that sometimes, "the shiny" is actually just poison.

That said, there is a lot more to freedom than just software. So many things run on digital platforms now, that the relevance of free software to other (more conventionally thought of) freedoms is understated. This is not just about free software-- it is about free society and a better mankind.

Above all, it is most certainly **not** a call for more censorship-- but instead, an idea that may help people realise why more censorship is not needed, and wouldn't help much anyway.

When you increase the number of tools and features for controlling people and groups, narcissists tend to find better uses for those tools than the rest of us. This is true whether you're talking about technology or politics.

Narcissism is not just male or female, left or right, rich or poor, eastern or western. It is a fundamental evil that has plagued humanity for millennia. But between overpopulation, extremely scientific marketing and global communication, it is very likely that the problem is worse than ever in history.

A thorough understanding of the problem is the best first step towards ideal solutions; while a misunderstanding, uncorrected, is a small step towards chaos. The internet is full of misunderstandings, and this is one it really can't afford. If you are tired of being trolled, or have friends that are tired of the same, a good understanding of narcissism is the best medicine you could have. It won't help you fix the narcissists, but properly applied it will save you a boatload of trouble.

## **The Simplest Ways that AI will Change Computing**

AI enhances automation; one way to think of AI is "A lot more computing-- both good and bad." For art? Great. For surveillance? Sometimes bad. Apply it to everything-- people will. And it will be a great multiplier of things; of all computing tasks, more or less.

Not all at once. And this is not to hype it, but to describe the effect it will have-- as a multiplier:

Another way to think of AI is "enhanced computing." Because in many ways, it is fundamentally "just computer processing." Anything a computer does is "just computing." But with AI, this becomes something more; the scope of what can be touched with computing becomes richer-- for good and for bad.

Computing is very flexible, by design. We can actually say something about AI while being this vague-- it is essentially like computer processing, except that it can do a little more, it can do more with more modest requirements-- it may take a while-- but with home computing equipment you can suddenly do things that you would expect of companies like Pixar.

Certainly not at the resolution for a (feature-length) film like Pixar makes. They will still use large computing farms to get the job done in a reasonable amount of time, at least for now.

AI can possibly seem to violate Moore's law, but it won't violate the laws of physics. If we are doing 1/3 of what our CPUs can do, then AI will make it so we can do the other 2/3 as well. And we can be really amazed at the results.

Also with "enhanced computing", things that once seemed incredibly difficult to program are now at least possible. Not necessarily "easy," but what once would take a team of 25-50 people (at least) can now be done sometimes with a team of 3. That's not a general rule, just that some things that once took many people can now be done with few, and faster than when it took more people.

Wizard-like stuff that once took a team can now be done by individuals. So the term "enhanced computing" is both telling and

probably accurate.

If you want, you can say that what computers could do already 10, 20 years ago is almost like magic. We know better, but it still feels a little bit like magic.

If you think of Harry Potter-- Ollivander said of Harry's nemesis: "He too did great things. Terrible, yes-- but great." It wasn't a compliment, it was an accurate measure. Of course for a young boy who just learned he was a wizard, it's creepy enough.

AI will do great things. Some of them will be terrible-- but great. And hopefully more of them will be Harry-like than Voldemort-like.

But really, it will be both. AI is already used to help kill people. We should be cautious, and know that the best rules we come up with (like no doing magic outside the school grounds) won't be followed all the time.

No "Ministry of Artificial Intelligence" is going to be free of corruption or poor decisions-- nor would it be enough to stop all bad things that are done with or without approval. Either way, AI is here.

Perhaps the biggest difference between AI and human thought is the superficiality and bias. Humans have that sometimes, in very stupid ways, but we are more flexible. AI can magnify our stupidity-- think of the old adage about "knowing just enough to be dangerous." That's AI, and its potential to try to make computers do what we think we want-- and getting far worse versions on average.

That's going to be very common; even humans have done this now and again throughout history. AI will lead us to a greater capacity for such mistakes. Just as AI can solve things that would take 100 people to solve, it can make mistakes that would take 1000 people to create.

At least with laws, there's a judge and jury as long as it's not artificial. We are certainly building corporations that have more power than a judge and jury do. But AI could do that too.

Politically, AI lends itself to many things, but may lend itself best (or at least most easily) to fascism. Or that could be post hoc-- it's corporations and governments that are the most interested in it, so this could be describing what it lends itself to most easily by

extrapolating it from the product of governments and corporations working on it. Still-- what we are developing now is like that.

People are trying to think of whether AI will be more good or more bad, and this is no argument for a neutral stance. If you look at all that computers have done both for our lives, and also to our lives, computing that is suddenly enhanced in ways that at least seem to go beyond the reach of Moore's law is exciting, but also justifiably scary.

What AI does is pattern recognition, and it can also impose patterns. This is said broadly because that's the broadness of the application-- you can find patterns similar to the way a person would, you can impose patterns similar to the way an artist would. Computers can do that without AI, but not at the same level as a person.

Today, we are designing software that can do those things faster and more tirelessly than people-- with similar (or sometimes superior) skill. Manipulating video, audio, tactile environments-- targeting, surveillance-- these are being expanded and developed all the time, not just in the future.

AI may have future applications in sabotaging free software:  
[http://techrights.org/wiki/index.php/Librethreat\\_Database#AI-assisted\\_software\\_engineering](http://techrights.org/wiki/index.php/Librethreat_Database#AI-assisted_software_engineering)

Strips is a framework for creating project plans with AI. If given the outline of a project and a desired outcome, AI can be used to drive the project towards success.

If given the "desired" outcome of making a project untenable or fail, plans could be created (with or without Strips, it is just an example of a real AI planning framework and may have no direct relevance to this argument) to undermine or disrupt the viability of a business, organisation or free software effort.

Computers have already been used for years to simulate and project outcomes of real life processes-- the FSF has never done this, but it shouldn't surprise us if software monopolies do run such simulated campaigns.

There is an opportunity to do more testing of whether certain plans will help or hinder future efforts, with the very big warning that the

previously mentioned examples of bias are still likely relevant, and engineering circular arguments that reinforce or negate the merits of a plan of action is not only possible, but could be difficult to avoid.

A positive of AI and AI-based planning could be to streamline and automate the creation of GNU/Linux distributions. This is about how the distro is put together, and may prove more relevant to building distros than say, package management.

The more that is done to reduce the work of building a distro, the more freedom the user will ultimately have. None of this is intended to paint AI as solely a threat, or solely a benefit. Computing has always had good points and bad points-- it is very arguably not neutral, but it is nuanced. The future is interesting, and not everything is hype.

## There is More Than One Iceberg Ahead

The Free Software Foundation knows that a licence can have vulnerabilities, just like computer code. Tivo found such a vulnerability in GPL2, created an exploit, and the FSF patched it in GPLv3.

If a licence can have vulnerabilities, then any argument that relies on "it's free software, so..." is an oversimplification. **Software is free because it gives you the four freedoms in the Free Software Definition**, the definition is implemented via the GPL and similar licences, and a vulnerability works around (despite) that implementation. It may even work around the definition itself.

**The most tiring hubris from the FSF is that free software is by nature, immune** to the sort of attacks that Microsoft outlined years ago in the Halloween Documents. It is not immune, it is resistant. The Four Freedoms create substantial **resistance** to lock-in, bloat, bad security, and monopoly.

It shouldn't take half a decade to explain to the FSF why a great strategy for **reducing software freedom** is to take a bunch of projects that are well-designed, stable, reliable and vital to free software-- glue them together into a single project from a single maintainer, and then make it more work to separate them again.

This strategy is not far from when Microsoft talked about "de-commoditizing protocols" in the late 90s, as part of their plans to control, dominate, and end Open Source and Free Software. When faced with this prospect and threat, the FSF and its fans tend to compartmentalise. To oversimplify, at great risk of a straw man:

**Things are good or they're bad,**

**Free software is good,**

So everything under a free software licence is good.

Of course the FSF knows better than that, they aren't stupid. But when presented with arguments why systemd (as the primary example) are designed to reduce freedom and have reduced freedom, the FSF falls back on defensive apathy and indifference:

Using indifference towards a better viewpoint is a normal and common example of this. It can be caused by someone having used multiple compartment ideals and having been uncomfortable with modifying them, at risk of being found incorrect. This often causes double-standards, and bias.

[https://web.archive.org/web/20190816135721/https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Compartmentalization\\_\(psychology\)#Vulnerability](https://web.archive.org/web/20190816135721/https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Compartmentalization_(psychology)#Vulnerability)

Although it is not the inspiration for the title, given that the overarching metaphor chosen is the Titanic, it is hard not to compare the indifference and denial towards this threat to the insistence that the Titanic did not need lifeboats.

Do we need to preserve **choice** for free software? The FSF has always suggested otherwise, even if this seems (and ought to seem) very backwards from a perspective of freedom.

Choice and freedom are certainly not the same thing-- freedom is broader than choice, and while freedom seems to imply choice exists, choice can exist (as it does in most any proprietary software) without something that even resembles freedom. Preserving choice-- the modularity that made UNIX so easy to rebuild with free software-- is not and never was a priority for the FSF.

Trying to find a quote about Stallman saying that other desktops are fine, but not needed because the FSF already has GNOME, may turn this old quote instead:

Since we already have GTK support, there's no reason we could not have equivalent Qt support, if it someone wants to maintain it.

However, GNOME is the main GNU desktop, and **GNU packages are supposed to support each other.** It would **not be right for Emacs to have more support for KDE** than for GNOME.

<https://lists.gnu.org/archive/html/emacs-devel/2004-03/msg00209.html>

Giving priority to a GNU project makes plenty of sense for GNU, but this is just one more quote that suggests that the FSF has never considered choice to be important. This comes up again in a conversation with Alexandre Oliva of FSF-LA, who goes so far as to imply that preserving choice might go beyond the FSF's mission and that perhaps another organisation could tackle something like that.

Is that really what it would take? Granted, that's very nearly the premise of this writing-- but can the FSF really not do anything in this regard? It seems bizarre, but either way we will attempt to help people understand why choice is vital to software freedom.

We live in a society where monopolies are considered "too big to fail," and the Titanic was also considered too big to fail-- we also communicate with a global network, the concept of which was presented to then-monopoly AT&T as an alternative to their **vulnerable, overly top-down** system with a **single** point of failure.

Without the preservation of choice, both GNU and the FSF itself have a single point of failure. "Choice" does not mean, just to state the obvious, that "all combinations of anything are possible." It means that freedom has redundancy (and better caters to diversity), and that things must fail **multiple times** on several levels before the failure is catastrophic.

Although the "lifeboats" metaphor is primarily intended to refer to a safe escape if the Free Software Foundation itself fails, (the global chapters do not really operate in practice like redundant or autonomous nodes, they are more like foreign bases of operation coordinated by a primary node and will likely fail if the main office does) if a large project like GNOME is no longer suitable, additional desktop environments (preferably **smaller ones** that are simpler and **less likely to fail**) could also act as lifeboats.

If this concept is too foreign (it shouldn't be) for the FSF to acknowledge the obvious importance of, they can certainly recognise that users strongly feel a need to have alternatives for just this reason. The denial and rhetoric from free software supporters (with some very notable exceptions) on this matter is pathological, but relentless.

The FSF has made its decision on the matter, and the 5 years of development time stolen, along with the power consolidation of too many projects by a single commercial monopoly-- which was recently purchased by an even larger commercial monopoly-- and is hosted on servers owned and controlled by their largest sworn enemy (of freedom itself) you might really ask yourself what the hell they're thinking. We have an answer: **they're not**, denial is something different.

So the FSF doesn't need lifeboats, yadda yadda yadda. We've heard that one before. Even if the FSF doesn't need them, **We** as "passengers" on this thing do, so we will provide them if we want to stay afloat. And as long as we are engineering safety where the FSF courts disaster for their mission, we might as well try to provide **their safety** along with our own. They may ignore our warnings, but we still care deeply about what they're doing.

Lifeboats for us then, and lifeboats for them. And like the resistance of a licence to a monopoly dedicated to free software's destruction, this metaphor can only go so far, so to construct "lifeboats" it is really necessary to talk about what will "sink" without them-- namely the threats and possible disasters that free software may encounter or have already encountered, now, recently, and in the near future.

If we understand and don't deny the threats, it should (with luck) help us work on ways to address them. With a visit to the Librethreat database: [http://techrights.org/wiki/index.php/Librethreat\\_Database](http://techrights.org/wiki/index.php/Librethreat_Database)

We find a "malware-threat-like database of threats to libre software". The first threat is "Tivoisation" and the field "**Also recognised by FSF:**" is filled out with "**Yes**". The summary is: "GPL2 not strong enough to prevent DRM/TPM from allowing device owners to change operating system in devices" and the mitigation is: "Migrate to GPL3."

Interestingly enough, that migration to GPL3 was supposed to include the Linux kernel. What went wrong there was a multipronged attack to a singleprong (licence-based) solution. The GPL3 is a good licence-- in many ways it is a clear upgrade. But the attack was followed up by lobbying from the Association for Competitive Technology (covered in a story by Infoworld in 2007) which according to Techrights in 2019,

worked to get Linus Torvalds against it and prevent its adoption for Linux development.

GPL2: [ fail ]

GPL3: [ ok ]

ACT Lobbying: [ fail ] WARNING: This will cause Linux to remain GPL2

Both **licences and organisations** can fail to protect free software from interference from monopolies like Microsoft. Just implying that free software is immune to their tactics "because it's free software" is a falsehood and a way of pooh-poohing a threat.

Historically, the FSF has a very good track record (indeed, the best record) of recognising these threats and responding to them. The point is simply that they too can fail-- the FSF is fallible, human, imperfect. Regarding some of the things they have spent the past 5 years or more in denial about, systemd is the largest example.

Security researchers, professional bloggers and journalists, higher-ups from other free software organisations such as Dyne.org and users and administrators have all spoken out against systemd, and the FSF has done nothing to help them or give them a real voice. If the FSF has any members paying for the privilege of being ignored and dismissed with the rest of us, we don't know much about them.

The FSF fails as a megaphone for free software advocates, it does not always listen very well to advocates, but perhaps it should do more of that. As to what response its critics should have made, perhaps a formal petition to the FSF should have started to get them to drop their support of the systemd takeover, similar to the petitions the FSF made regarding DRM and UEFI.

One of the undeniable failures of those against systemd is that no such petition was ever presented to the FSF-- instead, our actions always fell short of one. (If you think it's not too late, let us know or perhaps go ahead and start one.) In the future we would recommend formal petitions to make the FSF take threats like this more seriously. It's one thing to say "we can't do anything." Saying there is nothing that needs to be done is probably false, and there's no excuse.

We maintain that systemd could be a weapon against software freedom. We can't say that on the Debian mailing-list, but we know that one or more companies remain out to do harm to free software, we know their tactics have never changed with their marketing rhetoric, we know that systemd does things that are strikingly similar to the tactics outlined in corporate documents designed to wage war against free software. So **why wouldn't it be** a weapon against software freedom? It looks like, walks, and quacks like a duck. How is it actually different? **Oh, the licence?**

Even when the same people who talked about the problems systemd would cause, look back on 5 years of cleanup that could have really been better spent improving software rather than salvaging it from wreckage, the FSF remains silent. If it only hurt the FSF then perhaps we could let them live with it, but what about the rest of us? The FSF ignores and denies the problem, ignores what we say, and ignores the damage done to all of us. Thankfully, some of us have worked on alternatives. Unfortunately, there is a threat (or category of threat) similar to systemd that is even bigger:

[http://techrights.org/wiki/index.php/Librethreat\\_Database#Redix](http://techrights.org/wiki/index.php/Librethreat_Database#Redix)

Redix

Threat type: Broad category

Affects: Free software development, stability and reliability, autonomy, organisational structure

Summary: **Disruption of POSIX**, EEE of free software projects, **Infiltration of organisations** that offer free software

Recognised by: Free Media Alliance, some critics of Systemd

**Also recognised by FSF: No**

Mitigation: Avoid / fork / replace / document examples of Redix in software, use Systemd-free distros, assist Hyperbola developers

Examples: Pycon, Systemd

The FSF does not talk much about infiltration of FLOSS organisations by employees of monopolies like Microsoft, even when such

monopolies and related lobbying organisations did so much to thwart GPLv3, which patched critical vulnerabilities in their primary defensive weapon (the GPL.) Neglecting threats of this nature continues to weaken the FSF's defenses in the 21st century, and the evidence is everywhere. Monopoly forces continue to move farther and farther into our territory. Why is the FSF so quiet?

Again, we recommend petitions. They may not be enough, but they are a good place to start. They can even be informal, provided that they are well-documented enough (we don't need to use change.org, for example.) The point is fighting to be heard, something that shouldn't be necessary but clearly is. (We have fought hard for a year, other organisations have fought for years longer, to no avail.)

If the FSF is not a megaphone for its members, we continue to build one that you can use for the purpose. We should build a network of megaphones, so that when free software is headed for yet another iceberg, the FSF cannot dismiss the noise so easily.

But the larger threat is to POSIX itself. Stallman coined the term, and we insist it is the glue that holds free software together. Perhaps you can destroy POSIX altogether, and systemd along with zircon (the kernel of Google's Fuchsia operating system) are two projects that may aim to do just that. Microsoft themselves said decades ago:

Systematically attacking UNIX in general helps attack Linux in particular.

<http://www.catb.org/~esr/halloween/halloween2.html>

In modern terms, there is not a better description of "UNIX in general" than POSIX. At this point, it is far more relevant than UNIX.

Once again, if we move past systemd and look at the threats to POSIX, we do not come up wanting. We can show that POSIX itself is in the crosshairs, we can give this strategy a name: "Redix." We can show that systemd is the Redix flagship, but someday it could be retired, and replaced with a new flagship. We would rather point out the trend, the strategy, than just a single example or implementation.

If the FSF has any contingencies against this, they are silent and are certainly fooling us. Do you have reasons to ignore this threat as well?

Is there something we left out? The Free Media Alliance talks about more details related to this all the time; you can ignore one example, how about five? Ten? How many examples would it take to make this credible in your opinion? As long as free software is threatened, it the job of those who care to do something, to at least admit the threat exists. Why wouldn't we?

Unfortunately, systemd proponents have spent the past 5 years beating us down and shutting us up. Even as new organisations form, the struggle to be taken seriously continues. The FSF went through that for many years (arguably they still do) and there's no reason we won't have to do the same. But it's a terrible shame, when the same rhetorical tactics used to fight free software itself, are used by free software advocates to silence those sounding the alarm.

We recommend the Librethreat database as a primary radar for new threats to free software, and no one can make you take each threat equally seriously (we don't. Some of it is pure speculation.) It includes threats that even the FSF recognises, but why stop there? The FSF has proven itself unable to respond fully to Tivoisation. GPL3 was an effective licence measure against it, we can't fault that. Only the sale to Torvalds failed, due to lobbyists that may claim to "♥ Linux."

Companies who wish to "Tivoise" can simply get the same GPL2 kernel as before, Tivoise it all they wish, and then-- they can't use newer GPL3 applications, can they? No, like Apple they will simply dump those and use non-GPL applications. Perhaps there are threats bigger than Tivoisation out there. And if there weren't, perhaps the FSF's plan to patch free software against it would have worked.

Are we ready to acknowledge the severity of these threats yet, or will it take another 5 years?

Let us know.

## Distro-libre and feature-schema

Hundreds of distros exist, many of them with very similar features. We know there is duplication of work, but everyone needs to understand why so many distros exist.

Every time a distro does not suit a user's purposes, and it is less work to adapt the distro on one's own than to affect the distro in any other way, a distro is born. Ego is a factor too, but rarely mentioned is the educational aspect.

If **more** people created distros, then more people would have experience or interest in maintaining (contributing) to existing distros. The real trick is facilitating that.

Stallman has said that we don't need more distros. "We" also don't need more text editors, or "hello world" programs. Other people say we don't need more programming languages.

Each of these arguments are subjective (who is "We?") and can be refuted by pointing to a single need that no distro caters to. But in recent years, many more (once-reliable) distros are lacking than before. Are people really saying they don't need to be fixed?

Because they are more likely to be repaired by forking. Control over distros and of software by monopolies is increasing, and if the Halloween documents mean anything then this is a problem the FSF and OSI once acknowledged (hosting the documents on their own servers, though OSI has removed them since) though **now that it is a more critical and everyday problem**, they are saying nothing about it.

If we need more freedom, then we need more distros. In fact Stallman said "We don't need more distros" before the FSF gained Hyperbola, one of the very few (and arguably most dedicated) distros to work to remove the monopolistic tentacles of systemd, which GuixSD should also be suitable for, but Hyperbola should be a lot more friendly and mainstream.

We would say that Trisquel probably does not need more distros, but also that Trisquel probably needs a swift kick in the ass.

Incidentally, we have a script that automatically removes systemd from the Trisquel live ISO and spits out a fixed one, but it relies on upstart which is being abandoned by Ubuntu. So while Debian still has some people working to keep "not systemd" an option (if it were really optional, they would be done by now...) Trisquel and Ubuntu are most likely slated to have nothing in that regard. What a shame.

We honestly think that **every** user should make a machine-readable list of features they want in distros, and that this would be extremely valuable data.

On the drawing board is a **feature-schema** prototype, which in the friendliest machine-readable way possible outlines the desired and optional features of a distro such as **distro-libre**.

The key to this schema is indentation, a simulation of XML that requires zero syntax but must develop some kind of standard keywords. If everyone (we mean everyone) made a list of features they want included, this non-industry standard would be easier to develop.

Distro-libre is a growing script that can automatically remaster various live ISOs, ensuring that people can have bootable CDs and DVDs with a receipt (the script) of every possible change. It is written in fig, one of the lowest-syntax, most consistent and minimal (friendly) languages in use today. You could also do distro-libre in python, but then fig translates to python.

Unlike systemd, distro-libre is intended to be easily forkable. We hope that the future of remastering (and building) distros is **the application**, not the distribution. Instead of maintaining a distribution, what we would like is if you could download a program and either use it to customise a distro (with help from automation, not just by duplication of manual work) or even build one.

We expect mockery and ridicule, but instead of just talking about these things, the Free Media Alliance offers working prototypes. The prototypes increase in sophistication over time, and would increase further with more people forking them. We encourage **collaboration between forks**, rather than worrying about setting up a large organisation (but you are welcome to do that as well.)

As a remaster tool, the way distro-libre works is not entirely new, but it works like this:

Download ISO -> **run automated remaster script** -> New ISO

The remaster script can even download the ISO for you.

The automation serves two purposes-- by default, the script IS / defines the "distro" itself. Instead of downloading "fig os," you download a script that produces fig os. Instead of changing fig os, you change the script.

The automation that produces the default ISO can also assist you in making changes. This is very basic automation, and it can be made even friendlier by moving more distro-libre logic to our indented feature-schema. That way you can still change the code and use the custom "language" (or functions) within distro-libre, but most people will use the more abstract and user friendly schema to do many of the same tasks.

In every step of the process, we encourage the use of languages and tools that are modeled after successful educational languages like Logo and BASIC. We say "modeled after" because these aren't 1:1 duplicates, with artifacts like line numbers or type sigils-- Logo has evolved and remains very low on punctuation, people use it to code without realising they are coding. That's the sort of computer language we want people to have at their fingertips.

But because these are remastering and build **applications**, there is no monopoly. If you want to fork a distro, change it entirely, you can just fork the application-- written in a language that high-schoolers and perhaps junior high-schoolers can learn to use easily enough.

We need more distros because we need more distro maintainers. Obviously, the way distros are currently made lends itself to all kinds of political and organisational issues.

**We do want distros to be more generic**-- installers that work across more than one distro (family) like Calamares and Refracta installer, remaster tools that work across more than one distro (family) such as Refracta tools, we even want build tools (applications) that help inexperienced users build their own distro as an educational

experience (the FSF does **not** get education!) in the same way that using SBCs are an educational experience, and so on.

We need more distros-- an entire new generation of distros-- because the **current distros are gas-guzzlers**, both in terms of what they take to run and **especially** in terms of what they take to build. And it is terribly sad that the primary and original free software organisation in the world lacks the imagination or ambition for such a scheme.

We do encourage Guix and Hyperbola OS to keep up the good work, because they are probably the most innovative distro builders that the FSF already recognises, but the old way of building distros **limits freedom** and limits opportunities for education (possibly even to fewer people than we need to keep them going, and that's a very serious problem if it's true-- do we need more evidence than GnewSense folding? If done the way we suggest, you could carry on GnewSense yourself!) And (per the charter) our job **is**:

the free media alliance is happy to promote free software, but also welcomes thoughtful critiques of the fsfs methods and "extraneous requirements" (other than the 4 freedoms and gpl licenses)

to create strategies for bolstering the FSF if possible, and salvaging the FSF otherwise.

We are not a monopoly: <https://freemedia.neocities.org/remix-us.html> we are the seed of a **free software federation**. And the gas-guzzling distros (mostly in terms of what it takes to maintain one, and the political costs and limited freedom that comes with those methods) can be phased out-- voluntarily-- with better ideas.

We are not suggesting (indeed we regularly criticise) top-down solutions like systemd, which consolidate power in the hands of even larger communities, and we are looking to make distros easier to fork, not harder.

The reason is simple-- when you take enough projects, packages, standards, even **people**-- and you put a single corporation in charge of them, you are building a monopoly. Systemd is made from projects that were easier for smaller communities or fewer developers to maintain.

By consolidating those projects first under Red Hat, then into systemd itself, they were lumped together (yes, we've read the nonsense that claims to refute this, it is bunk-- pure denial of something they seem most clearly aware of themselves) into something that takes a large corporation to maintain.

Don't believe it? How long has it taken to "separate" back into smaller projects? If it were really modular, it wouldn't take dozens of people to work systemd back into modules. How much more obvious can that point become?

This is also, in a less sinister way, how distros themselves are created. And unlike systemd, those **were** created of necessity-- it was, once upon a time, far too much work for people to just make a "GNU/Linux Boot Disk" and throw on whatever programs people wanted.

Today that is increasingly possible, and the best direction for distros to go in. Alas, it is not like egos and monopolistic attitudes do not exist in the free software community.

On the contrary-- distros want to remain distinct and are often opaque. It is the opacity, not the distinctions that are the real problem.

Everyone is free to create their own free software, we are not suggesting that everyone give that up and "do it our way." All we are saying is-- if **freedom** is the real goal, let's put that freedom in the hands of the user, not just the distro maintainer. Let's make distros that (like free software) are as forkable as possible, so that no user feels they are "locked-in" to theirs.

Lock-in is a monopoly tactic, and has no place in free software distributions. If it is created inadvertently and there is a practical way to reduce it, then reducing it is also a good thing.

All the same, distro-libre is a simple prototype for liberating even the distros that do not participate! It is not about putting control of all distros in the hands of a large monopolistic corporation-- It is, like free software itself, about **putting control of all computing in the hands the user**. The old distros don't do that as well as they could, and it's time for an overhaul (you do you, but consider these words) of the concept itself.

## **A Free (as in Freedom) Library, and Federation of Advocates**

Amazon ebooks are an existential threat to libraries, and modern copyright is an existential threat to culture. For such an ominous global attack on all human culture, very little is being done about it. The Free Software foundation says to boycott such ebooks and DRM, and that's a great place to start.

To promote free culture would be an obvious next step, since (legally and historically speaking) the threat that free culture mitigates comes from the same late-20th-century changes in law and industry that made the free software movement necessary. But the FSF sidesteps this connection, and their take on free culture is fairly condescending and surprisingly dismissive.

The sad thing is that the free culture movement has gotten off to many false starts, and while it continues to grow it does so at a glacial pace. At the same time, freedom within the absurd confines of modern European copyright is breaking down at what you might consider (in this age of climate change) to be a "glacial pace." If only there was a movement that stood against this... Oh, there is.

Whether the free software movement impresses you already or not, we strongly recommend making a more important issue of it. The FSF absolutely will not do so, but they have contributed their videos from LibrePlanet, so that is valuable. Stallman's essays might work just as well if delivered as presentations at LibrePlanet, but those presentations bear Free Culture licences, and his essays do not.

Copyright is the wrong tool to protect the integrity of expression, not only because it does not do so. The public domain is not a licence to misrepresent people, there are separate rules about that regardless of copyright, and fair use allows some people a way around the copyright but fair use is also a terrible (inadequate) tool for this purpose-- free culture licences are a better one.

Considering all this, someone who believes that modern copyright is problematic has no sane reason to think CC BY-ND is a useful licence. It basically says "You can't do anything at all with this, but we won't sue you just for having it." And the FSF actually promotes this licence.

We don't expect to change the FSF's position about this, we will simply let them have their weird, magical thinking about how despite LibrePlanet presentations being reasonably licensed, the FSF's webpages do not need the same benefit because of Stallman's "Works of opinion" shtick.

Obviously he is entitled to his opinion, even if it limits the benefit people get from the FSF website, and even if "Works of opinion" is blatant special pleading, and even if it misses the point of free culture. (We recommend Nina Paley's "Rantifesto" on this topic.) Stallman and the FSF are free to do that, it's simply a shame.

You could easily and most likely legally reconstruct the videos from LibrePlanet into a better free software website than the FSF's, although it would certainly be missing a fair amount of useful information.

The nice thing about such a website would be that it had a licence that allowed people to share the information on it with the same four freedoms that they enjoy with software. The FSF does not consider that important, but LibrePlanet videos mysteriously (and thankfully) give you those freedoms anyway. Perhaps a future tagline for their events could be "We have no opinion!"

Whinging about what the FSF won't do can only accomplish so much, and while we would recommend a petition for the FSF to stop misrepresenting free culture (with the straw man arguments and special pleading they tend to use to dismiss and argue against free culture-- not completely unlike, incredibly, the ones Open source uses against free software) we also have our own solution to this:

Let's do what the FSF won't.

Let's create our own free software and free culture library, as we have started doing with the Free Media Alliance:

<https://freemedia.neocities.org/library.html>

This is intended as a node of such a library, not the library itself. We hope it will continue to grow, which is why the "donations" we ask for are not monetary-- the way you "donate" to the Free Media Alliance is to create free works (four freedom works) or give us links to free works. As was policy for Debian for some time, we do not accept

works under the GNU FDL. If you think the FDL is a good licence, or a Free licence, answer these two questions:

1. Why is it "more free" to restrict paper copies of a free cultural work?
2. If it is "more free" then why did Wikipedia abandon the FDL as its license for articles, and why did the FSF help them do so?

Works licensed under the FDL exist against a backdrop of a better-licensed Wikipedia and better-licensed OER works. OER is one of the greatest success stories of free culture, and we proudly support it.

There is no licensing standard for OER, and we would suggest a "Libre Educational Resources" (LER) standard based on our recommended licences page: <https://freedia.neocities.org/recommended-licenses.html>

Essentially, we would recommend (and are not the first to recommend) a standard for LER based on the four freedoms, of course.

There are at least three ways to add works to our library:

1. Create a useful or enjoyable work under a free licence. We may find it and add it ourselves.
2. Give us a link to a useful or enjoyable work under a free licence. We may add it to our library.
3. Create a free library similar to ours.

We strongly recommend the CC0 copyright waiver for your listings. This allows your library to grow without you even tending to it, as people can incorporate your listings into their own libraries. It also makes it easier for our library nodes to grow-- easier than just sending links to individual works (which you are also extremely welcome to do and we appreciate it!)

This library is not just for cultural works, but also for software. And there are many ways for these libraries to link up-- for example, if you choose to licence your listings under CC BY-SA, which we do not recommend (BY-SA is needlessly restrictive for a card catalog) we cannot simply fold your listing into ours, which is CC0, but we can

select a few items from your list and add it to our collection. We can also (because it is at least a free culture licence) link to your library as a node.

Although it is not a requirement at all, we also recommend creating an account on (and supporting, by various means) the Internet Archive: <https://archive.org/account/signup>

It is a non-profit we are proud to promote, and a great resource if you are looking for freely-licensed works. Some of what we do is merely an extension of what they have already done for years-- our informal advocacy and promotion of the Internet Archive has already resulted in more contributed works and awareness.

But if you have a blog, forum, website, social media account or any other place online to talk about free software and free culture, these can be used to help expand our library and donate links to us. They can also be used to advocate for free software and free culture, whether you quote our words or use your own. Let us know about this and help us expand our grassroots network across the world.

The work we are doing is not just the work of a free software organisation, but the work of librarians. Librarians are the global champions of free speech and the preservation of culture. The FSF is not-- they could certainly do more in that regard. What they do for software, to be fair, is exactly what we recommend for all cultural works-- and no other movement is doing as much for free software.

If libraries alone did enough for free software, that would be wonderful. Sadly, there continues to be a divide between the culture and freedom that libraries promote (regarding most of humanity's works over the entirety of written history) and the freedom that the FSF promotes-- we invite you to work with us to unite free software with libraries and libraries with free software. As with many libraries, you do not need to pay us to become a member. You only need to care and count yourself among us.

But we also invite you to help us advocate, not only by parroting our words and essays, but by contributing your own and **helping us to find solutions** to the many crises that culture faces in the 21st century. Doing that on behalf of the FSF is very difficult-- some of us

have tried for years! You can participate in what we do directly or indirectly, you can follow our advice or split off from us like forking an application: <https://freemedia.neocities.org/remix-us.html>

We even have a way for you to create your own unofficial "department" under our umbrella:

<https://freemedia.neocities.org/build-your-own-freedom-lab.html>

The freedom lab movement was devised after the Alliance was founded, and is a way to create your own miniature organisation without the bother and commitment of creating your own organisation. If you find our freedom lab concept inadequate, you could even create a freedom lab to devise better freedom labs.

Ideas and vision are what led to the founding of the free software movement. Free expression is what enriches the physical and virtual libraries of the 20th and 21st centuries. Without it, those libraries would all be diminished.

It is the absolute antithesis of libraries-- and the largest library ever built in human history-- the internet-- to try to crush free expression. For all the thoughtfulness and politeness and cooperation that serve a good purpose, humanity is a great mix of emotions and conflict and struggle. Painting a "nice picture" over all interaction, and reducing the internet to such a picture, does damage to our ability to speak honestly about science, history and the problems facing the world today.

Rather than destroy our libraries, we want to expand them and preserve them in the 21st century. As interest in physical libraries wanes, we hope you will help us find new purpose for them-- as well as preserve the rights needed online to bring the same freedom that librarians have always fought for, back to the internet as it is quickly becoming a place that is anything but "Free as in Speech."

The history of Art and the history of human existence is full of rudeness, horror, ugliness, hatred, violence, exploitation and slavery. While we do not endorse these things, we do acknowledge our humanity. Our libraries do not benefit from authoritarianism and sanitisation, they would only be diminished. The same is true of the internet, and we do not recommend the growing trend of sanitising all

human interaction, conflating everyday speech with violence, and treating modern journalism as a hate crime or other criminal act.

The FSF says "Free Software, Free Society."

We say: Liberate software, Liberate culture, Liberate society.

**It is not just about software anymore.** It is about the survival of human culture and the right to communicate with the rest of the world. These are more important things than the FSF is now capable of making them out to be. The future of free software however, is not its foundation-- but a federation. It is not just **our** federation, any more than it is just our freedom-- it is **yours**.

And the future of free culture is just getting started. Please, protect our libraries. Keep the internet alive, not sterile. We can do all of these things, if there are enough of us working together in our own way-- finding common ground and accepting that it is not possible to have every opinion in common, in a free society. That is no reason to not work to preserve human culture, and it helps in no small way if our computing is free.

Let's keep working to make software and culture more free (as in speech, as in freedom) than ever before.

\* license: **creative commons cc0 1.0 (public domain)**

\* <http://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/zero/1.0/>