Should the average user care about software freedom?

Essay by Joel Meier

" 'Software freedom' is a term often used by Linux users and other computer nerds to justify their belief that their operating system is superior to other more common operating systems like Windows or MacOS." This is the response a small minority of people would give you when asked about software freedom. A staggering majority of people would say they've never even heard about the term if only a few people know about it and only a minority of them believe it's important, should the average user even care about software freedom? I think they definitely should and that it should be discussed openly in public or even in politics. I will base my arguments on the so called 'four freedoms of free software' which I have provided in the annex.

Software that respects your freedom is called 'free software'. Not 'free' as in freedom of price but because you are free to use it as you please for any purpose. Many people may say that you can use every software for anything you want, but this is simply not true. There is a lot of free of price software that only lets you use their programmes if you don't plan to make any money off it. If you want to make money off your creation you have to pay the creator of the tool you used to create your programme. There are countless more situations where the usage of a software is prohibited by the creator, for example in movies, where you can only show the software being used with the explicit approval of the owner. Thats why you always see knock-off brand in movies and never actual Windows or Apple products. With free software you never need the owners approval.

What's more is that free software rules supreme when it comes to the security of your data. As it is stated in the four freedoms you have the freedom to study the programme to understand how it works. If you find a function which shares your personal data with the developer and you don't like that you can either change the programme to not do that or, when that's not possible without destroying the main function of the programme, you can contact the developer. If he refuses you can contact others who care a lot about data security, they'll either help you convince the developer to change his programme or show you alternatives. In unfree software this is not possible as you have no way to study the programme because the source code hasn't been published, so you'll never know what data this specific programme is extracting and sending the developer. I think this is one of the most important aspects of free software.

I know a lot of people would now say that even if they would use free software, they still wouldn't have the ability to study the programme or adapt the software. In my opinion you don't have to as there are many people who have those abilities and care a lot for software freedom, so much in fact that they check any free software they stumble upon for any intrusion into the users data. If they find any, they let people know through online formums so if you use free software it

comes with a community which checks the programs for you. Also if you ever wish to adapt a software but lack the programming skills to do so, one of two things apply. Either someone also had that wish and implemented it or you can contact the developer who may gladly implement your wished function. This communication with the developer happens mostly on github.com, where you can create an issue which the developer and anybody else can see, so communication is easy and straightforward. Even if the developer doesn't implement it, someone surely will.

In conclusion, I believe that free software has too many advantages over unfree software to be ignored or deemed unimportant by the average user. It doesn't steal your data, it lets you sutdy the way it functions and it has a huge community backing it. Luckily the free software movement is on the rise and many governments are actually trying to switch to free software.

Additional Information

- [What is Free Software?](#)
- Richard Stallman's TEDx video: ["Introduction to Free Software and the Liberation of Cyberspace"](#)

Made exclusively with freedom respecting software

Annex

- *The freedom to run the program, for any purpose.*
- *The freedom to study how the program works, and adapt it to your needs.*
- *The freedom to redistribute copies so you can help your neightbor.*
- *The freedom to improve the program, and release your improvements to the publis, so that the whole community benefits.*