

Tor is Peace,  
Software Freedom is Slavery,  
Wikipedia is Truth

The Political Philosophy of  
the Internet

on: 30th of December 2010

at: 27C3

by: Adam Obeng ([adamobeng.com/27c3](http://adamobeng.com/27c3))



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# The Political Philosophy of (some of) the Internet

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Politics: the study of power

Politics: the study of power

$$\text{Power} = \frac{dW}{dt}$$

$$\text{Power} = \frac{d\text{Work}}{dt}$$

Political power:  
make other people do work

Politics happens  
wherever there are people



MAKE ME A SANDWICH.

|

SUDO MAKE ME  
A SANDWICH.

|



WHAT? MAKE  
IT YOURSELF.

/

OKAY.



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Unix

The real world



# Unix

# The real world

```
$ sudo something
```

# Unix

# The real world

\$ sudo something



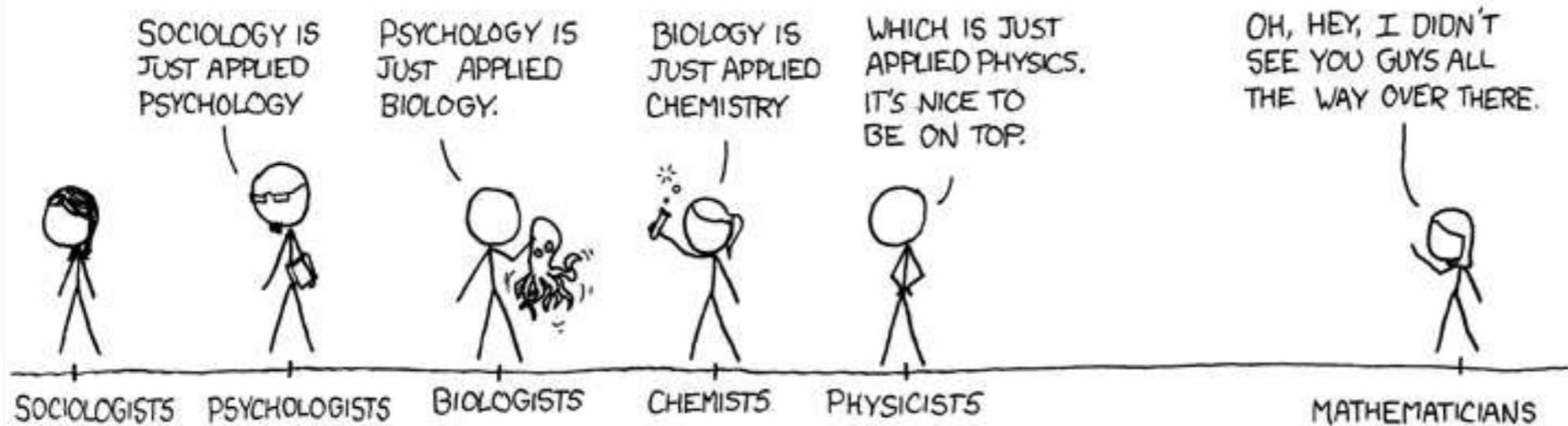
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Philosophy:  
thinking about stuff

Philosophy:  
thinking about stuff **really hard**

# FIELDS ARRANGED BY PURITY

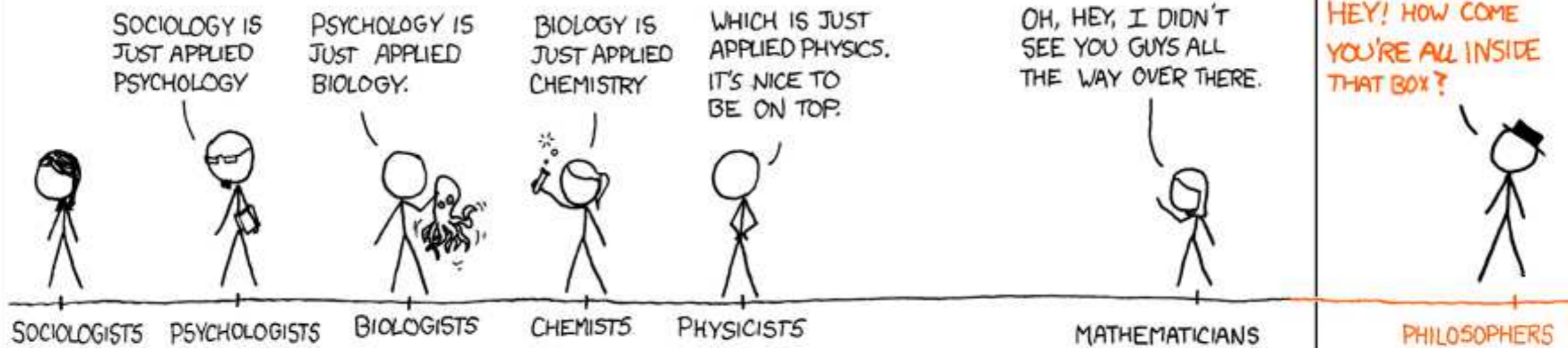
→  
MORE PURE



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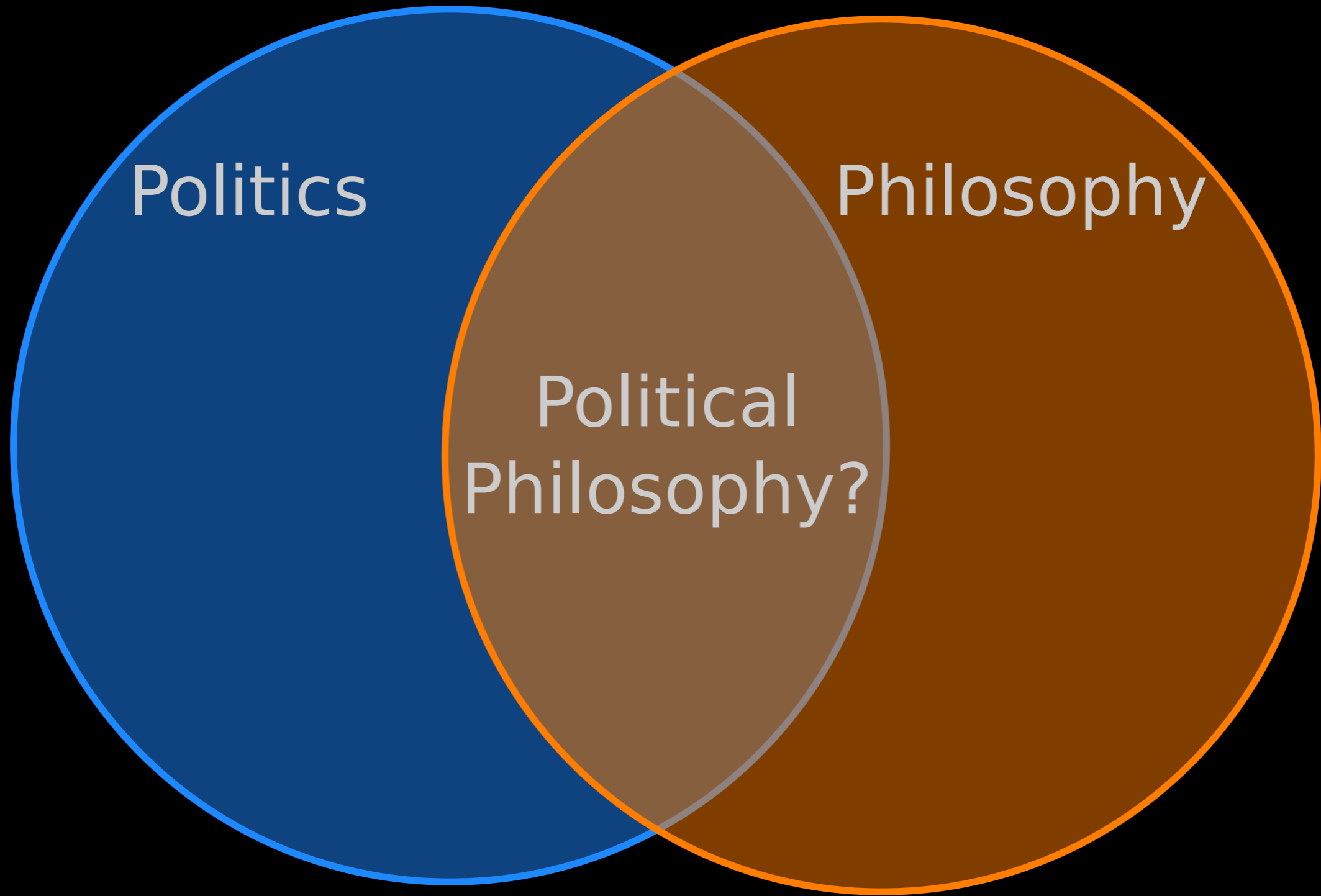
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Philosophy:  
critical,  
rational,  
and systematic



Politics

Philosophy

Political  
Philosophy?

Methods of philosophy

+

Subject matter of politics

Why should you care?

there are elaborate arguments, claims rebutted by unlikely counterexamples, surprising theses, puzzles, abstract structural conditions, challenges to find another theory which fits a specified range of cases, startling conclusions, and so on. [...] some may feel that the truth about ethics and political philosophy is too serious and important to be obtained by such "flashy" tools. Nevertheless, it may be that correctness in ethics is not found in what we naturally think

- Robert Nozick

Philosophers are **hackers**

Philosophers are **hackers**  
Politics is **everywhere** people are

The Internet is  
**like** the real world

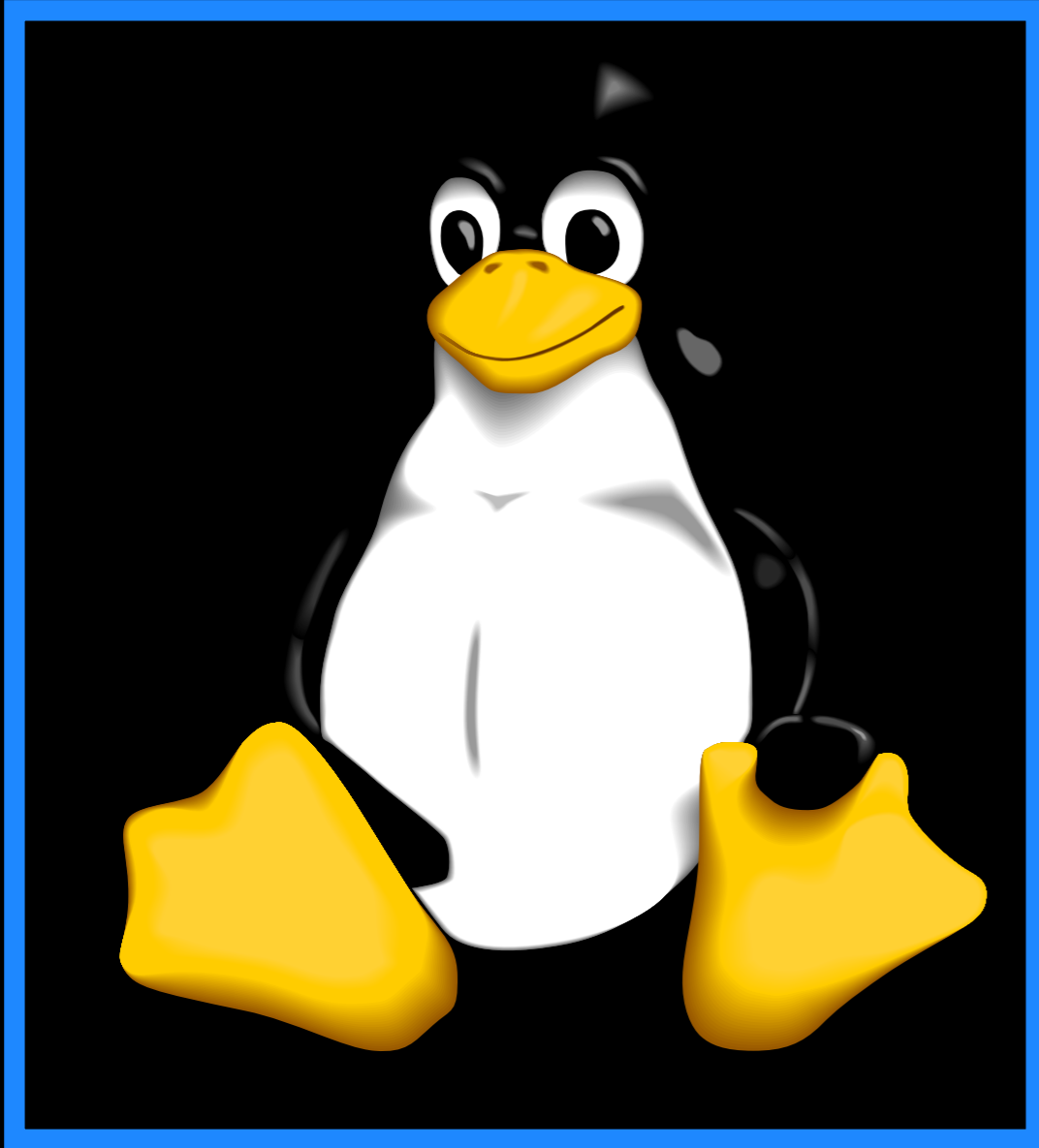


The Internet is  
**unlike** the real world

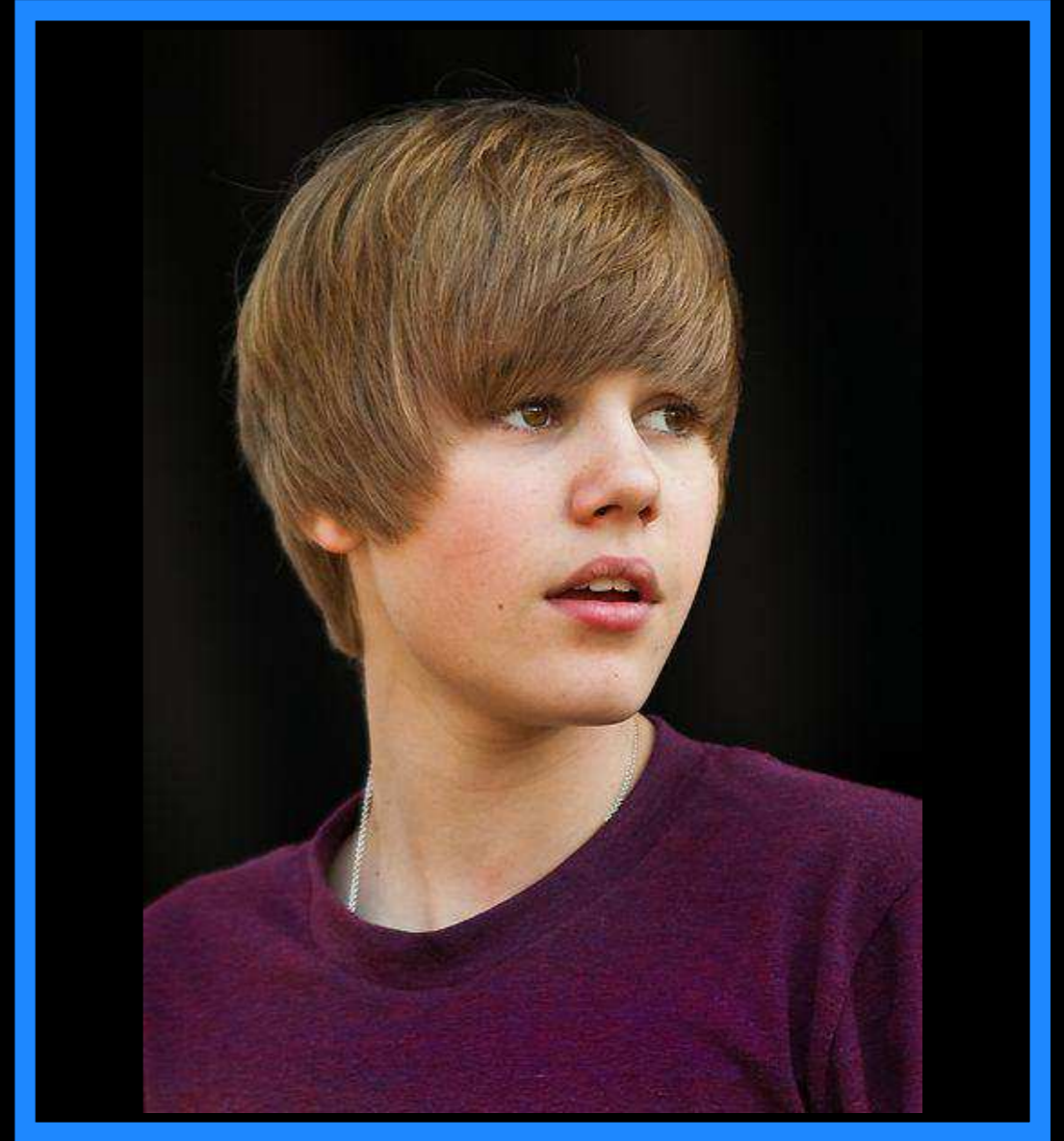
What happens on the Internet...

...stays on the Internet

# Compartmentalization



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Liberty

Liberty

or freedom

# Freedom and FLOSS

# Freedom and FLOSS

Free/Libre/Open-Source Software

'free' as in speech

vs.

'free' as in beer



'free' as in speech

vs.

'free' as in beer

Different FLOSS groups

Different FLOSS groups

Different licenses

Different FLOSS groups

Different licenses

Different freedoms

Different FLOSS groups

Different licenses

Different freedoms

BSD vs. GPL

The BSD license

The BSD license  
is permissive



# The BSD license

Redistributions of source code must retain the [...] copyright notice, this list of conditions and the [...] disclaimer.

Redistributions in binary form must reproduce the [...] copyright notice, this list of conditions and the [...] disclaimer in the documentation and/or other materials provided with the distribution.

The GPL  
is restrictive

# The GPL

Nobody should be restricted by the software they use.

There are four freedoms that every user should have:

the freedom to use the software for any purpose,

the freedom to change the software to suit your needs,

the freedom to share the software with  
your friends and neighbors, and

the freedom to share the changes you make.

# Copyleft

Copyleft is a general method for making a program (or other work) free, and requiring all modified and extended versions of the program to be free as well.

# Copyleft

Copyleft is a general method for making a program (or other work) free, and requiring all modified and extended versions of the program to be free as well.

## The First Principle

First: each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive scheme of equal liberties compatible with a similar scheme of liberties for others.

Is Copyleft Less Free?

# Is Copyleft Less Free?

Take 1: Steiner and Measuring  
Freedom

# Measuring freedom:

Freedom  $\propto$  things you can do



# Restrictions in licenses

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Version 3, 29 June 2007

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The "Corresponding Source" for a work in object code form means all the source code needed to generate, install, and (for an executable

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a) Convey the object code in, or embodied in, a physical product (including a physical distribution medium), accompanied by the Corresponding Source fixed on a durable physical medium customarily used for software interchange.

b) Convey the object code in, or embodied in, a physical product (including a physical distribution medium), accompanied by a written offer, valid for at least three years and valid for as long as you offer spare parts or customer support for that product model, to give anyone who possesses the object code either (1) a copy of the Corresponding Source for all the software in the product that is covered by this License, on a durable physical medium customarily used for software interchange, for a price no more than your reasonable cost of physically performing this conveying of source, or (2) access to copy the Corresponding Source from a network server at no charge.

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A separable portion of the object code, whose source code is excluded from the Corresponding Source as a System Library, need not be included in conveying the object code work.

# Is Copyleft Less Free?

Take 1

Yes:

more restrictions, so less freedom

# Is Copyleft Less Free?

Take 2: MacCallum and Tripartite  
Freedom

# Measuring freedom:

Freedom  $\propto$  things you can do

# Measuring freedom:

Freedom  $\propto$  things **\$you** can do



# Measuring freedom:

Freedom  $\propto$  things **you** can do

**Who is 'you'?**

# MacCallum's Tripartite Freedom

$x$  is free from  $y$  to do  $z$

# MacCallum's Tripartite Freedom

$x$  is free from  $y$  to do  $z$

$x$  = agents

$y$  = conditions

$z$  = actions

# BSD license

Redistribution and use in source  
and binary forms[...]

# BSD license

$x$  is free from  $y$  to do  $z$

$x = \text{redistributors}$

# The GPL

"free software for all its users."

# The GPL

$x$  is free from  $y$  to do  $z$

$x = \text{all users}$

All Users

Redistributors



# Is Copyleft Less Free?

Take 2

No:

more freedom for more people

positive and negative freedom

'redistributors' are individuals

'redistributors' are individuals

'all users' is a group

Copyright is Positive Freedom

# The General Slavery License

*Each user is required to contribute 4KLOC or 500 man-hours, whichever is higher, to maintaining, updating, or improving the Software*

# The General Slavery License

*Each user is required to contribute 4KLOC or 500 man-hours, whichever is higher, to maintaining, updating, or improving the Software*

The group is **more free**

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The group is **more free**

Individuals are **less free**



# Arguments **against** Positive Freedom:

If restrictions are part of freedom,  
freedom means **being ruled**.

# Arguments **against** Positive Freedom:

Different people have different goals,  
all restrictions are **not compatible**.

# Is Copyleft Less Free?

Take 3

Yes:

freedom is a property of individuals

TL; DL version:

Copyleft reduces freedom...

... unless you misdefine freedom.

Positive freedom **considered harmful**.

Copyleft really does reduce freedom.

Nothing I just said matters

Software freedom  
*isn't just* about freedom

Tor is Peace,  
Software Freedom is Slavery,  
Wikipedia is Truth

## The Political Philosophy of the Internet

Credits and bibliography available at [adamobeng.com/27c3/lecture.pdf](http://adamobeng.com/27c3/lecture.pdf)