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Mrs. Menzel

A.P. Language and Composition

<div align="center">Freedom of Software: The Next Revolution</div>

Here in America, we like to talk about freedom. From an early age, we all learn about the various freedoms our ancestors fought for: freedom of speech, freedom of press, freedom of religion.[1] As the times change, so does the way we live our lives, and as a free society, we find ourselves both redefining these basic freedoms, and discovering new ones. Today I want to introduce you to a relatively new, emerging freedom: the freedom of software.

It is undeniable that we all use computers in our day-to-day lives. Most of you probably have smartphones. We all probably have laptops or desktop computers at home. When you use those devices, you have a very important freedom: you get to choose what software you're running. I'm guessing that right now, most of you don't care about the software that you run, or if you do, you only care about convenience. Maybe you've grown up learning how to use Microsoft Windows like our school teaches, and now since it's the only thing you know, it's what you prefer to use. Or maybe you prefer to use a Mac at home because you find its interface simpler. But there's another aspect of software that you might not have considered before; some software respects your personal freedoms, and other software does not.

When you turn on your iPhone for the first time, you have to scroll through a statement that tells you how the software on that phone is licensed, what it does, and how you're allowed to

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[1] Parallel structure and asyndeton.

use it. I've heard jokes about how you're unknowingly signing your soul away to Apple when you press that "Agree" button. While it's not actually possible to give away your soul in a license agreement, the iPhone does **epitomize** proprietary software: you're not allowed to make copies of the software. You're not allowed to make changes to the software. You're not allowed to make an analysis of the software,[2] and in many cases, the software's code is actually **obfuscated** so you cannot read what it is programmed to do.

Now, you might think that if you're not a programmer, then you don't need to worry about what software is on your computer. After all, you're just trying to get your work done. But let me repeat myself: if you're running proprietary software, you can't see what your computer is doing. You have to take some company's word for it. And corporations are known for being **machiavellian**. For all you know, your computer is tracking everything you type and sending it to the NSA for processing. Maybe it's not. Nobody can see the code, so there's no way to tell for sure.

The reason why you, as an ordinary computer user, should care about the software you're running is this: if you're not in control of your computer, then your computer is in control of you.[3] I don't mean that literally. Your computer itself might not be in control of you. But whoever's behind the computer-- whether it's a developer, a corporation, or a government-- has power over you.

Personally, I don't like that. So on my computers, I choose to use free software. Free software isn't always free of charge, but it's always free of the restrictions that proprietary software has. With free software, I'm allowed to read and check and improve[4] the source code.

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[2] Anaphora.
[3] Chiasmus.
[4] Polysyndeton

Now, believe it or not, I don't actually know how to read code-- at least, not very much. I don't think anyone in this room knows how to read code. But that's okay, because there are a lot of people in the world who DO know how to read code, and they're reading it and checking it and improving it for us… or, more accurately, they're improving it for themselves, and then they're passing the improvements on to us because they're decent human beings. They can only do that with free software.

If you use free software, you're supporting the people who check for bugs and security flaws. If you use proprietary software, you're supporting companies, who don't want individuals to check their code. If you use free software, you get the security of thousands of people reviewing code for backdoors and tracking functions. If you use proprietary software, like you probably are now, the only people reviewing your code are working for a company, and they might be the ones writing the backdoors. Don't be fooled; I'm not blowing this out of proportion. In the past few years, more and more government-requested features have been discovered in programs we use every day. Did you know that if you use an Android phone, Google reserves the right to track your location? The Google Maps application is proprietary, so we can't remove that functionality. If it was free, you or someone you hire would be able to remove that privacy-infringing "feature" and distribute the changed application to anyone who wants it.

If I haven't lost you yet, then I don't want to push my luck, so I'll keep this short. Free software is written and reviewed by the people, for the people,[5] and the only way to know that you're in control of your computer is to use free software. Lots of people think that the free software movement is **quixotic**, and the movement has admittedly been **lethargic** for the past

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[5] Epistrophe.

few years, but hopefully I've piqued your interest and you'll start to rethink the software that you use. Instead of using restrictive software like Windows, you can use free software like Linux. Instead of using restrictive software like Microsoft Office, you can use free software like LibreOffice.[6] It doesn't matter if you're good with computers or not. It's a matter of securing your personal freedom-- and as long as you're using free software, no government, company, or individual can take that away from you.

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[6] Parallel structure.