

# The Philosophy of Free Software

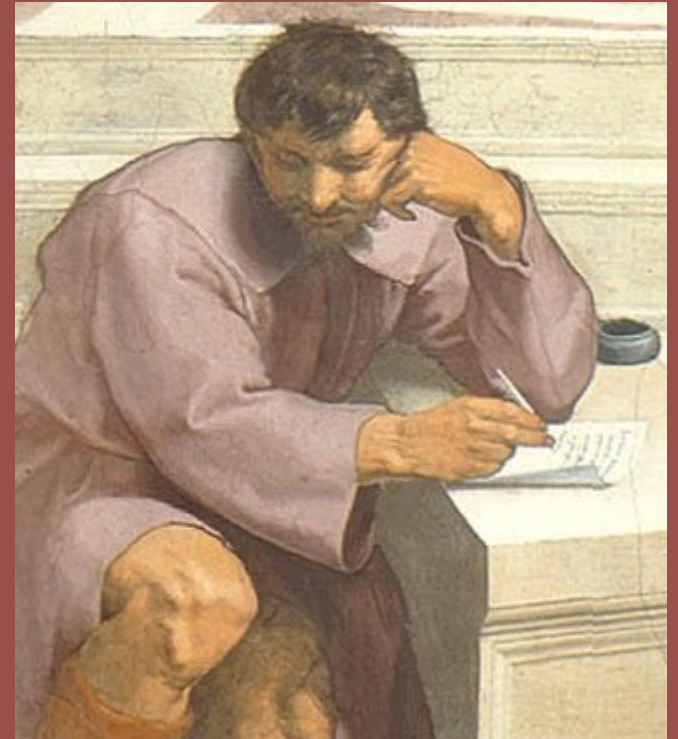
Allison Randal

# Note

- Not comprehensive
- Not endorsement, philosophers have supported crazy stuff (like slavery)
- Tracing a thread through history
- Free Software in isolation
- Free Software in context

# Heraclitus

- 535 – 475 BCE
- Constant change
- 'All the laws of humans are nourished by a single law...'



*The School of Athens* (detail), Raphael  
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# Socrates

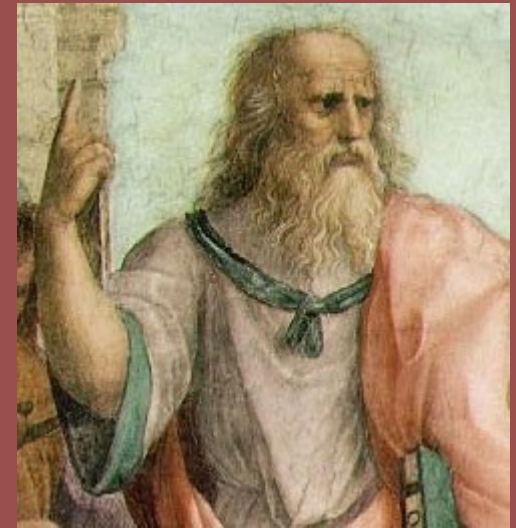
- ~469 – 399 BCE
- As told by Xenophon and Plato
- Value of craft (*techne*) is in benefit to users, not how much money it makes



*The School of Athens* (detail),  
Raphael 1509 (Public Domain)

# Plato

- ~428 - 348 BC
- Student of Socrates
- Theory of Ideas
- Society to meet needs
- Justice to avoid oppression
- Constant legal reform
- Gender equality



*The School of Athens* (detail), Raphael  
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# Aristotle

- 384 - 322 BCE
- Student of Plato
- Property shared but owned by individuals
- Pride of ownership
- Pleasure of sharing or giving away
- Society to respect rights



*The School of Athens* (detail), Raphael  
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# Intermission for Middle Ages (and Free Will vs. Determinism)

# Scotus

- 1266 – 1308
- John of Dunse
- Natural tendency to pursue happiness
- Natural tendency to pursue justice
- Freedom is the power to weigh the two



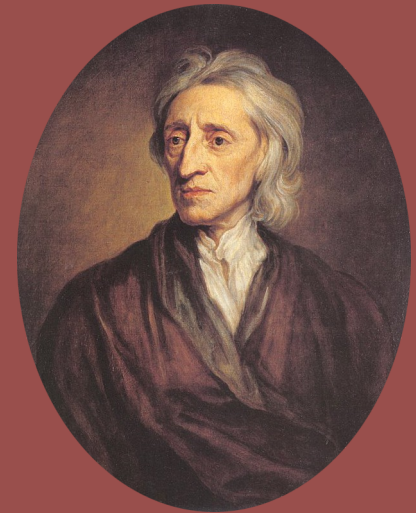
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# Intermission for Reformation (more Free Will vs. Determinism)

# John Locke

- 1632 – 1704
- Humans are naturally free and equal
- Right to property earned by labour
- Society gains security at the cost of some liberty
- Government can enforce property rights better than individual



*Portrait of John Locke,  
Godfrey Kneller 1697  
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# Voltaire

- 1694 – 1778
- François-Marie Arouet
- Scientific and social progress
- Civil rights, protest abuses by governments

# David Hume

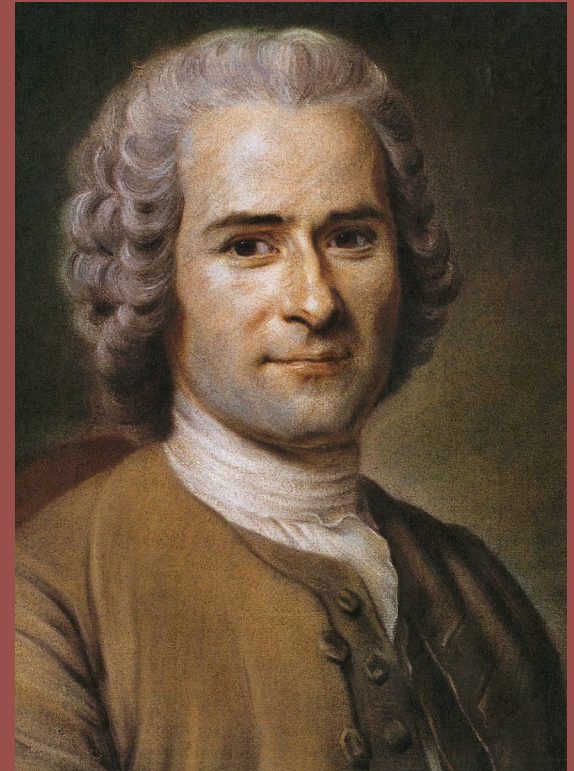
- 1711 – 1776
- Benevolence natural only in close relation
- Justice a convention
- Property rights most important
- Good of stable society



*Portrait of David Hume, Allan Ramsay  
1754 (Public Domain)*

# Jean-Jacques Rousseau

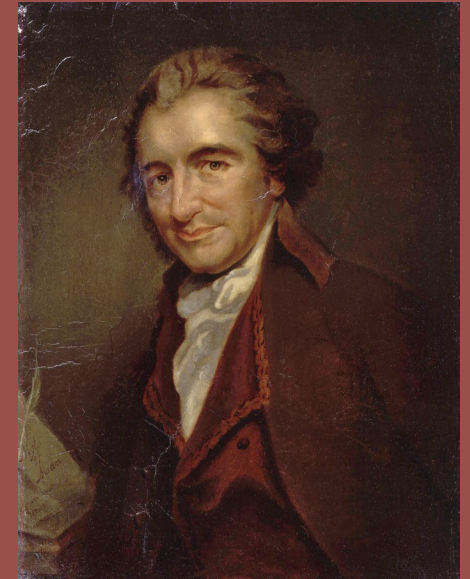
- 1712 – 1778
- Natural state freedom to follow desires, no property
- Society for the purpose of progress
- Side-benefits of property and protection



*Portrait of Jean-Jacques Rousseau,*  
Maurice Quentin de La Tour 1753 (Public  
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# Thomas Paine

- 1739 – 1809
- Natural state all property is common
- Private property arose for agriculture, necessary but not good
- Tax as a payment for the right to hold property
- Those with property provide for needs of humanity



*Thomas Paine*, Auguste Millière 1792  
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# Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel

- 1770 – 1831
- Free self-actualization
- Limited by social institutions, or empowered by the state
- Rights, exercise individual choice
- Life, freedom from slavery, property

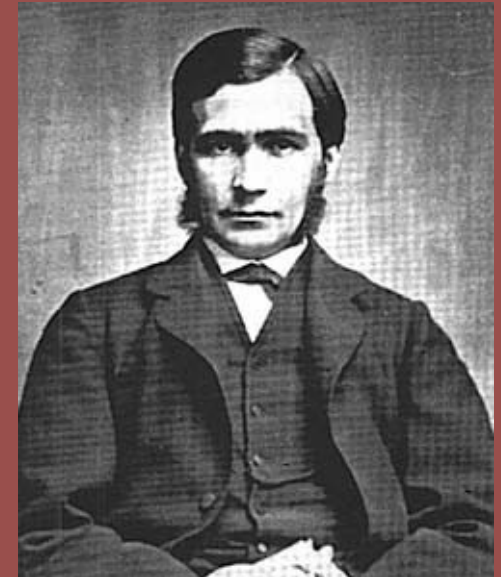


*Portrait of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Jakob Schlesinger 1831 (Public Domain)*



# Thomas Hill Green

- 1836 – 1882
- State should intervene only to protect liberty
- Promote moral development of individual



Liberal Democrat History Group,  
Public Domain



Intermission for Capitalism  
vs.  
Socialism/Communism

# Software as Property

- Initially a “utilitarian good”, not protected as property
- Copyright registrations granted under “rule of doubt”
- 1974, Commission on New Technological Uses of Copyrighted Works (CONTU)
- 1976, Bill Gate's Open Letter to Hobbyists
- 1980, “computer program” added to US Copyright law

# Richard Stallman

- born 1953
- Four Software Freedoms
- Copyleft
- Benefit to users



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# Four Freedoms

- Use
- Study and Modify
- Redistribute
- Redistribute modified versions

# Copyleft

- Software is property
- Developer owns software, product of their labour
- Developer grants four freedoms
- Any who benefit from freedoms, also required to grant freedoms

# Software Freedom

- 1982, Symbolics vs. Lisp Machines, Inc.
- 1983, GNU Manifesto published, GNU Project started
- 1985, Free Software Foundation launched
- 1987, GCC GPL released
- 1989, GPLv1 released

# Further Reading

- Anthony Kenny (2010) *A New History of Western Philosophy*, Oxford University Press.
- Bertrand Russell (1946) *History of Western Philosophy*, George Allen and Unwin. Reprinted (2006) Routledge.
- Mark A. Lemley (2011) *Software and Internet Law*, Wolters Kluwer.
- Richard Stallman (2010) *Free Software Free Society, 2nd Edition*, Free Software Foundation.