



The tools I love are made by awful people

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Every few years, I install Linux on my computer, use it for a few weeks, give up, and go crawling back to my Mac.

Also, every few years, I move all my writing, journaling, note-taking, and task management to fully analog systems powered by paper and pen. I use my analog systems for a few weeks, give up, and go crawling back to the digital apps I've been using for the last decade.

My urge to use Linux and my urge to eschew computers altogether both come from the same place: I believe the companies that make our computers and the accompanying software are unethical, exploitative, and harmful to society. Using their products makes me uncomfortable, as if I'm complicit in the harms they're causing.

Running Linux on my computers is a way for me to opt out of giving money and lending legitimacy to these businesses. Switching to analog systems allows me to opt out of computing altogether.

Why am I in this state of tension with computer products when I use a multitude of non-computer products made by corporations that cause much

more harm to people and nature?

I drive a Hyundai car, shop at Reliance stores, wear clothing made by Zara. Why am I not concerned about the poor behavior of these other organizations? It's not like they're any better than Google, Microsoft, or Apple.

Honestly, the reason is not entirely rational.

The connection I have with my computer when I'm programming in my IDE or writing in my favorite writing app is the same connection a musician might have with their favorite guitar, or a tennis player with their racquet. It's something sublime, something spiritual. When I'm using my computer to create something, when I'm in that state of flow, I forget where my mind and body end and where the computer begins. A melding of human and machine takes place. It's greater than the sum of its parts — the stuff of cyberpunk dreams.

It hurts me to know that the tools I share such a deep connection with are made by corporations that exploit workers in developing countries, greenwash their products while generating tons of electronic waste, fight against the rights of people to repair their possessions, engage in malicious compliance when governments try to regulate them, spy on their users, hold their users' data hostage, and commit a long list of other crimes that would take too long to recount here.

To make matters worse, these corporations openly and gleefully [disrespect art and the tools used to make it](#) while indulging in [vulgar displays of power](#) over artists and their work.

I understand that my switching to Linux won't really fix the basic problem that large corporations are bad for society. As long as I'm using a computer, I'm complicit to some degree in the harms caused by the technology industry. But I believe, maybe naively, that using libre software is at least a tiny bit better for the world compared to proprietary software.

And of course, if I can get away from using computers entirely for some or all of my work, I can opt out completely from the snakepit of deception and exploitation that is Silicon Valley, wash my hands of the whole bloody affair, and finally stop being complicit in destroying the planet and society.

But at least for now, my life does not permit me to walk away from the digital prison I'm trapped in. Maintaining a Linux system or using pen and paper to manage my life both require more spoons than I possess at the moment.

The [tyranny of convenience](#) has all of us in its grip, and I'm no exception. I understand that this is entirely my own failing.

We've structured our society so that the best products and services are made by the worst people in the world. *Of course* you can deliver packages earlier than everyone else if you overwork your employees. *Of course* you can sell the fastest computers at the cheapest prices if you keep moving your manufacturing operations to countries with the worst labor and environmental laws. *Of course* you can build the smartest AI models if you slurp up everybody else's intellectual property without asking for consent first.

It makes little difference to how tech businesses operate when a smattering of concerned individuals opt out of using their products and services. Things will only change when democratically elected governments across the world

step in with regulation, drag Big Tech through the courts, and fine them billions of dollars.

Things will only change when being an asshole stops being a competitive advantage.

Until that day arrives, I have to learn to live in a state of tension with my tools. I have to acknowledge and accept the fact that I use tools built by awful people to create beautiful things.

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