

Metaphysical Jurisdiction

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Obligatory Throat-Clearing

- ❖ Thank you
- ❖ I'm sorry I'm a provincial American

One thinker's journey

- ❖ I thought virtual worlds recreated a state of nature
- ❖ Boy, was I wrong!
- ❖ In fact, virtual worlds can be perfect tyrannies!

The big idea

Virtual worlds have a governance problem

It's software's fault

Software can't fix it

Governance failures

- ❖ *The Sims Online* executes Peter Ludlow
- ❖ *Second Life* expropriates Marc Bragg's land
- ❖ *EVE Online* picks winners

Why do virtual world
companies turn bad?

Jurisdiction offline

- ❖ The power “to say what the law is” requires:
 - ❖ Consensus about underlying facts
 - ❖ Consensus that the court has legitimate authority

Jurisdiction online

- ❖ Consensus about virtual “reality” comes from the server
- ❖ Consensus about operator authority does too
- ❖ A virtual “court” can redefine reality itself
- ❖ The guy with a finger on the power switch makes the rules

Some Objections Answered

- ❖ “It’s only a game!”
 - ❖ So nu, games can’t be fair?
 - ❖ Some virtual worlds aren’t games
- ❖ “No one is forcing you to play!”
 - ❖ Sometimes, someone does force you to play
 - ❖ Once you’ve joined, you’re in it for the long haul

Brief pause for breath

Some software “solutions”

- ❖ Virtual property / user-generated content
- ❖ Free/open-source software
- ❖ Peer-to-peer

Virtual property doesn't work

- ❖ The more you have, the more you have to lose

UGC doesn't work

- ❖ The more you have, the more you have to lose

Free software doesn't work

- ❖ A modified client is a form of hallucination
- ❖ Good luck getting the company to let you mod the server
- ❖ Your own server is also a form of hallucination

Peer-to-peer doesn't work-

- ❖ There are two possibilities:
 - ❖ Everyone agrees all the time = metaphysical jurisdiction
 - ❖ Players disagree = no shared virtual world
- ❖ Decentralization hides the authority, but it's still there
- ❖ Federation creates a fragmented network of petty fiefdoms

Conversation . . .