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Ephesians 4:28 states, “Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need” (*English Standard Version,* Ephesians 4.28). The idea of copyrighted material is not a fairly new and groundbreaking concept. Whether it be movies, books, music, or fashion, all are protected under copyright laws. However, what if I were to market a program that calculates the circumference of a circle? On the surface, it seems as though all is well. I went through the proper channels to sell “my” software. Yet, instead of utilizing my own programming skills to write this seemingly simple program, I committed a taboo: I stole John Doe’s program from his Github. As a result, I will be the subject of a federal lawsuit from the United States government, face legal ramifications from John himself for violating his software license, and will have to reevaluate my own moral obligations as a programmer.

According the United States government, a computer program is “a set of statements or instructions to be used directly or indirectly in a computer to bring about a certain result” (United States, United States Copyright Office). Initially, computer software was not effectively protected by copyright laws due to the lack of computer software being a fixed, tangible entity. However, in 1974, the Commission on New Technological Uses of Copyrighted Works (CONTU) decided that computer software is in fact, eligible for copyright protection. This lead to several additions to the United States Code. As a result, the computer science world was changed forever. No longer could programmers use another programmer’s program without permission, without running the risk of facing severe legal consequences. Yet, what if I wanted to still actively distribute my program whilst protecting the integrity of my code?

Thus, software licensing was adopted rather quickly. Essentially, open source licenses are legally binding "contracts" between the author (programmer) and the user of their program. The license turns the software into an open source project. In the eyes of the law, without the open source license, the software is unusable by others. The most common license that the average user would be familiar with is the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) License. According to WhiteSource, a software company that helps software developers legally use open source products, the MIT License is "...one of the most permissive free software licenses. Basically, you can do whatever you want with software licensed under the MIT license, only if you add a copy of the original MIT license and copyright notice" ("Open Source Licenses Explained"). Depending on the project I work on, my license selection may vary. However, the MIT License seems to be the perfect license for me. I am all for open sourcing code. If my code would help further a programming project, then so be it.

The computer science and cybersecurity community could not have made it this far with everyone keeping their code private. For instance, the Metasploit Penetration Testing Framework couldn't have come this far if it wasn't open source. Due to the community's contributions, the Metasploit Framework has countless payloads, ready to be used by any cybersecurity professional. Yet, as a programmer, I still have my own obligations. According to the ACM Code of Ethics, I am to "Contribute to society and to human well-being, acknowledging that all people are stakeholders in computing" (Association for Computing Machinery). If I reuse code from the internet in this important application that I'm writing without crediting the author, should I really care? The answer is yes. Without respecting the people for their work that they put in, the open source community might cease to exist. The world of computing is built on a foundation of trust, and I have a say in that as a cybersecurity professional.

Works Cited

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