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## Software Licensing Ethics Paper

When considering public domain licensing, both GPL and BSD seem to be equitable options, both with different perks and shortcomings. The concept of providing an attainable version of source code follows ethical conduct. “Computing professionals should not unduly oppose reasonable uses of their intellectual works. Efforts to help others by contributing time and energy to projects that help society illustrate a positive aspect of this principle. Such efforts include free and open-source software and work put into the public domain” (ACM Code of Ethics). And based on that directive, I believe that there are sensible reasons for both of these licenses to exist, but I would probably advocate for GPL over BSD. GPL seems to ensure better protection of creators and their work. Even though BSD seems to give more freedom for using source code, there could be a situation where too much freedom is given, leaving little to no accountability on what happens to intellectual product. On one hand, the option of more freedom can be very helpful and beneficial to society, but it also leaves a wide opening for unethical practices and immoral uses of code. In the computing field, we have an obligation, “to hold paramount the safety, health, and welfare of the public, to strive to comply with ethical design and sustainable development practices, to protect the privacy of others, and to disclose promptly factors that might endanger the public or the environment” (IEEE Code of Ethics). Meaning that we must carefully consider an even scale between protection and freedom.

“Developing new ideas, inventions, creative works, and computing artifacts creates value for society, and those who expend this effort should expect to gain value from their work.” (ACM Code of Ethics). While considering protection of these creators and their rights, we should also consider that, “When you build a new house, make a parapet around your roof so that you

may not bring the guilt of bloodshed on your house if someone falls from the roof’ (Deuteronomy 22:8). This quote highlights the responsibility of computing professionals to maintain an ethical and trustworthy environment for each other, not only for their own sake of upkeeping the computing profession but also for the sake of others safety.

This should be considered a trolley problem because by choosing one option over the other, you ultimately disadvantage someone. By choosing commercial over public domain, you impede the people that can’t afford or access the product. And by providing public domain and eliminating commercial, you forfeit an option for those that prioritize better reliability, accountability, and/or security over accessibility. “Technologies and practices should be as inclusive and accessible as possible and computing professionals should take action to avoid creating systems or technologies that disenfranchise or oppress people. Failure to design for inclusiveness and accessibility may constitute unfair discrimination” (ACM Code of Ethics). Not everybody benefits by the same thing, and by taking away the people’s choice you disregard a whole group of people.

In my opinion there is nothing unethical about commercial licensing, but the moral issue lies within failing to provide open-source options for those that can’t invest in or gain access to the licensing. “When organizations and groups develop systems that become an important part of the infrastructure of society, their leaders have an added responsibility to be good stewards of these systems. Part of that stewardship requires establishing policies for fair system access, including for those who may have been excluded” (ACM Code of Ethics). In the field of computer science, we have an obligation to make efforts to better our society, which includes giving everybody an equal chance to utilize today’s technology and therefore allowing them to contribute to our increasingly advanced technology-based society.

## Works Cited

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