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# Ethics Paper

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One of the most controversial area of computer ethics concerns the intellectual property rights connected with software ownership. Some people and companies argue whether companies should own all rights over software or not. It is clear The biggest conflict within this argument is the fact one can four different aspects of a program. The four different aspects one can own are the “source code”, “object code”, “algorithm”, and “look and feel”. According to the World Intellectual Property Organization it is clear that not all aspects of a program is patentable. Each aspect of the program serves a different purpose and, can be critiqued on their patent laws as an individual.

The first two aspects of the program to be critiqued on their patent laws is the “source code” and the object code. The source code is the code written by the programmer or programmers in a high level computer language like C++ or Java. The object code is a machine-language translation of the source code. The source code is patentable based on the amount of innovation is found within the source code. If the source code created out of combination of already defined the functions then it should not be patentable. This because the functions used within your code is already considered common knowledge to an expert in that field. The object code should fall under the same laws and criterias of the source code. This is

because the object code directly derives from the source code. The only reason the object code exist is so, the source code can be read by the computer. Therefore, the object code does not have any uniqueness or useability to someone else to consider it patentable.

The next aspect of the program to be critiqued based on its patent law is the algorithm. The algorithm is the sequence of machine commands that the source code and object code represent. The algorithm is basically determined by how one writes their source code and the mathematical operations within. This means two programmers can have source code that serves the same purpose, but they can have two different algorithms. The algorithm of one's source code can mainly determine the efficiency of their programs execution. Considering performance is an important part of writing successful code in the computer industry algorithms should not be patentable. A programmer should be able to optimize their codes efficiency to the fullest extent without being limited by patents. As stated in the prompt provided, the search on whether an algorithm is patented or not can be expensive and hinders the growth of smaller computer firms. This is considered highly unethical because it allows big computer firms to monopolize the best algorithms.

The final aspect of the program is the look and feel of the program. The "look and feel" of a program is the way the program appears on the screen and interfaces with users. The look and feel of a program is determined by the programmer's choice of design. For example, this can be the color scheme, font layout, and the interactive objects in the program. This aspect of the program should be patentable if the idea and design is original enough. This part of the program can truly show one's innovations as an individual so it should be protected. For example,

someone should never be able to copy the “look and feel” of snapchat because this part of the program is unique to the creator.

In conclusion, only certain aspects of a program should be patentable. One’s program must be new, innovative, and useful to others to be considered patentable. If one’s program contains aspects that can be considered common knowledge to users in that field, it cannot be patented. If the aspect of one’s program falls under any of these categories, patenting it would be unethical to other programmers in the industry.

### Work Cited

"Patenting Software." *WIPO - World Intellectual Property Organization*. N.p., n.d. Web. 24 Apr. 2017.