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Ethics Paper

Software licensing is an interesting field of discussion in the realm of computer science. As of present, there are many different structures for how computer licensing is handled; and each comes with their own sets of benefits and consequences. In this paper, I will be giving my opinions on GPL and BSD licenses, discussing how their issues pertain to commercial licensing, and determining whether this circumstance is a trolly problem.

First, between GPL and BSD, I would advocate for BSD as it provides more freedoms in its license than GPL. BSD offers a very freeing license that allows companies and individuals to produce and sell BSD software directly unlike GPL's license. Of course, GPL is not entirely worthless because of this rule, as patents that utilize GPL code are free for anyone to use. However, due to GPL's virus-like behavior in prohibiting companies from utilizing its code, companies must resort to rebuilding certain tools already present, making the process of using GPL code redundant and inefficient. In addition, GPL's refusal to allow companies to directly sell GPL code make it a much less profitable license than BSD. Ultimately, this conundrum relates to 1 Corinthians 10:23-24, which states, "'All things are lawful,' but not all things are helpful. 'All things are lawful,' but not all things build up. Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor"(ESV). Even though GPL has the ability to ensure that code using their license cannot be directly sold by anyone, it does not help large or small businesses to receive compensation for the hard work they put into making their code.

Although BSD is a much more freeing license, a claim can be made that its structure allows code to be used for nefarious reasons regarding commercial licensing. One of the only requirements a BSD license demands is giving the original authors credit for their code. While this may seem like a positive rule, there are certain instances where it can damage a programmer's reputation, namely when the programmer's code is used with bad intent. This directly contradicts the ninth point of the IEEE Code of Ethics, which states, "…to avoid injuring others, their property, reputation, or employment by false or malicious actions, rumors or any other verbal or physical abuses…"(ieee.org). Of course, this scenario is not frequently encountered in the programming community thankfully; however, the possibility of it happening still needs to be considered. A possible method to fix this issue would be to provide a disclaimer along with the citation of authorship clarifying that the author is not necessarily aware of the ways his code is being used. That way the public does not immediately find the programmer as responsible for how his code is potentially misused.

The BSD license can bring about a trolly problem under certain circumstances. Deciding whether to restrict BSD licenses can have consequences for either programmers or companies depending on which decision is made. A good solution to this issue can be found in the ACM Code of Ethics, which states, "A computing professional has an additional obligation to report any signs of system risks that might result in harm. If leaders do not act to curtail or mitigate such risks, it may be necessary to 'blow the whistle' to reduce potential harm"(ethics.acm.org). In other words, programmers should take precautions against the potential misuse of their code by, as I mentioned previously, possibly providing a disclaimer emphasizing their detachment from their program's application in other companies' decisions.

**Works Cited**

ACM Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct. <https://ethics.acm.org/code-of-ethics/>. Accessed 14 Oct. 2020.

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IEEE Code of Ethics. <https://www.ieee.org/about/corporate/governance/p7-8.html>. Accessed 14 Oct. 2020.