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Think Ethically

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Developing commercial software takes a massive amount of time, money, and intelligent collaboration. First, a company needs to spend time planning the software's purpose and areas/demographics of use. After this, the team then analyses their plans and creates a blueprint for the development by creating various stages of creation and setting goals for the project. When this is done, a design must be laid out for the architecture of the project. Finally, the development and implementation of the project may begin. After finishing the development, then the company must put the software through testing and then fix all the problems found. When a fully developed software has been formed it now must pass a series of guidelines and fit government standards. Also, the software will go through the process of copyright/patent protection to make sure no one steals their work. All this work goes into most of the software we use daily, and the thought that the creators should not be paid for their efforts is quite appalling.

The idea put forth by Richard Stallman that software ownership should not be allowed sounds great at first. Everyone is working together to achieve better-developed software using the software everyone else made which then is used to further progress future software sounds like an amazing concept. The problem is that there is no form of compensation for the work that is put forth by the creators and helpers. The first paragraph's purpose of giving a rough description of the creation process of commercial software is to highlight how much effort goes into making software. Unless a person is purposefully working for free, why shouldn't everyone that helped create the software be compensated? It should be our thanks to the creators and everyone who helped with the creation. These creators have their own lives and families to live and support, and for most of them, their only income is their software development job. Personally, even on a small scale, it should be a person's right to charge for the software they make. If the price they set is fair, then I see no problem with receiving compensation.

“Software piracy is the act of stealing software that is legally protected. This stealing includes copying, distributing, modifying, or selling the software” (Lantaca). Of course, buying the latest copy of Adobe Premier and distributing it online for profit is illegal, but the line becomes hazy when the distribution is between a friend or two. Letting a friend use your license to access software is technically not the right thing to do, but in all likelihood, a person would not be punished for sharing software with a few friends. The problem with pirating is that sometimes it is the only viable option for some applications. One example is the SNES game Earthbound. Still to this day used copies of the game go for around $200 just for the game cartridge. Buying the game with the box, manual, and other accessories will run you around $1,500 (PriceCharting). The game did poorly when it was originally released, so not a lot of copies were sold. This makes it very difficult to buy years later and until 2013 Nintendo had not released any other option to play the game (EarthBound). This left only two options. Either shell out a ridiculous amount of money or download the game off the internet and play it on an emulator for free. Of course, this is not an excuse to pirate and I am not condoning piracy, but there are many instances where it may be the only good option to get ahold of some software.

Ownership for what someone has made should be a right. The source code, object code, and design of a program should have copyright and patent protection. A lot of hard work goes into making that software, so it is a good idea to apply for a patent right when you formulate your final idea for your product. On the other hand, algorithms are not made, they are discovered. That is for the most case true, but if the algorithm is specifically tailored to a piece of software, then I think that the algorithm should be able to be patented. A natural algorithm like a binary search should not be able to be patented because the algorithm can be used in many places.

Small businesses have it the worst when it comes to checking for copyright and patent protection. It costs anywhere between $1,000-3,000 to perform a patent search, and for software getting the patent can cost over $16,000 (Quinn). This is a lot of money for a small business to spend, so algorithms being patented just adds to that. When thinking about any of these ethical issues it is good to think about how they would affect a small business. Sure, pirating a Disney movie may not affect Disney too much, but if that was a movie made by a small film studio your single non-purchase has a great effect on their ability to keep creating. People put in months and even years developing software, we should try our best to support them in any way possible.

Works Cited

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