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CSCI 330 Computer Architecture

November 27<sup>th</sup>, 2024

### The Ethical Meme

In the history of time, the internet itself is still rather new. While initially something rather stagnant and not much of anything back then, by the 2000s and 2010s, the internet took off in its expansion. The culture around the internet exploded and developed, creating a massive multi-subculture world full of whatever is possible. A part of this comes in the creation of memes, which initially an inside joke, soon blew up into a creative output around the internet as a way to express humor in a creative, inclusive way. Though as they say, there always ends up being a butt of a joke, and some people are often found on the wrong side of these. This can create a rather awful environment for those found on the wrong side of the joke, as the internet can be a rather cruel place.

To start with, there are no ways to really implement a law to stop memes. They can use a person's image but really trying to go after people who create memes in and of themselves is impossible. It is possible to copyright memes of course, "as with nearly all original creations, copyright can arise automatically in a newly created meme (Schwartz 2024)" which thereby can make it someone's property. The owner of said meme then has the rights to market, manufacture, and profit off the meme as much as they wish to. This can work against larger media companies, though against an average person, this basically has no weight, as there is usually no profit in what they do. Going too hard on these laws can also impede on one's free speech, which

in turn creates other issues. A person's likeness is fair use in most cases, less it of course is used for profit to infringe on IP.

Memes can spawn from any source or field, so identifying a source and holding them responsible can be found to be impossible. A meme can be used for slander easily, as a meme can be made for just about anything and likely get away with such a thing. In the IEEE Code of Ethics in section 7.8, it says "to treat all persons fairly and with respect, to not engage in harassment or discrimination, and to avoid injuring others". The problem is that holding people accountable proves quite impossible with online anonymity and lack of actual cybercrime laws. The most there can be is moral ramifications and "cancelling" (driving a user off the internet in one way or the other) for certain memes or things said, though really it ends up being rather limited. The most that can be said is that people behave better, or to treat people with kindness, though the internet itself holds no such kindness on mass.

Ultimately as well, memes can come out of any place and fall under fair use laws as well. A meme can be created and there is no real guideline for it to be based off of and nor should there be. Fair Use Laws even state that the "purpose and character of the use, including whether such use is of a commercial nature or is for non-profit educational purposes ("What is Fair Use?" n.d.) which memes usually do not fall under profitable. They are created as jokes, satire, or criticism of what is being talked about. To the positive or detriment of others, there is not a good way in being able to create a guideline that everyone wins. Fair Use Laws are about the closest we can get to such things, and at the end of day, appeasement to all under these laws will never occur in perfection.

## References

Copyright Alliance. "What Is Fair Use | Copyright Alliance." *Copyright Alliance*, 12 Nov. 2024, [copyrightalliance.org/faqs/what-is-fair-use](https://copyrightalliance.org/faqs/what-is-fair-use).

*IEEE Code of Ethics*. [www.ieee.org/about/corporate/governance/p7-8.html](http://www.ieee.org/about/corporate/governance/p7-8.html).

Schwartz, Benjamin D. "Who Owns Memes?" *The National Law Review*, 25 Aug. 2023, [natlawreview.com/article/who-owns-memes](https://natlawreview.com/article/who-owns-memes).