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CSCI 301 Ethics Paper on Intellectual Property

The world is a creative place and people deserve full credit for their creativity and should understand their intellectual property rights. In computing, programmers reserve the right to claim ownership of their software and code using the concept of copyright. Legally, copyright is inherent without formal acknowledgement, called exclusive copyright (GitHub). According to GitHub’s open-source guide, Copyright means nobody else can use, copy, distribute, or modify your work without your consent (GitHub). In addition to copyright, professional ethical standards exist such as the ACM and IEEE ethics codes to promote moral behavior among programmers, developers, and consumers. In this paper, I argue that the bible is a clearer code of ethics than the professional codes, and the best way for me to legally follow copyright laws would be an MTI license.

When creating code than you would like to be open source, a license is required (GitHub). This is because if you do not have an open-source license, then everyone who contributes to your project become an exclusive owner like yourself (GitHub). To follow the copyright laws, an MIT license would be the best for me, since as a college student legality is one of my main computing concerns.

Even though I have chosen my license, I am not free to copy or share whatever code I choose online. Both the ACM and IEEE contain minimum expectations for computer professionals to maintain high ethical standards in computational development (ACM, IEEE). The primary focus of these codes is to maintain the welfare/good of the public (ACM, IEEE). The ACM states that “Avoiding harm begins with careful consideration of potential impacts on all those affected by decisions” (ACM Task Force). Therefore, even after securing a license, it is my independent obligation to determine beforehand if the code I am writing is a wise idea and would further the public’s welfare. This confirms what the bible tells us we should do, “So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them” (*English Standard Version*, Matt. 7.12). This means you should not neglect to give credit to the author of any open-source code you use online. All these principles take effect regardless of how you use the code.

Although the ACM and IEEE code of ethics state a common purpose, both are fallible, manmade documents that fall short of the impossible standard of perfection and the practical standard of readability. As mentioned above with the Golden Rule, the Bible offers much more concise and purposeful standards than the ACM or IEEE. If asking whether you should ever snatch some code without giving author credit, the bible solidly answers that question with less than 5 words; “You shall not steal” (Exod. 20.15). The Bible digs deeper into morals than the ethic codes. Let’s say you find some code online that will help you finish on of your open-book assignments. The Bible says “‘All things are lawful’, but not all things build up” (1 Cor. 10.23). So even in instances where things might be completely ethical, even then the Bible contains clear advice for us. Thinking about how this applies, having that code will make the assignment quicker, but it will not help you retain the information for later as doing it the hard way would. The Bible has been and remains the best code of ethics, even for computer professionals.

Works Cited

ACM Code 2018 Task Force. “The Code Affirms an Obligation of Computing Professionals to Use Their Skills for the Benefit of Society.” *Code of Ethics*, 2018, https://www.acm.org/code-of-ethics.

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