

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Not to be confused with [Cyberethics](#) or [Information ethics](#).

Computer ethics is a part of [practical philosophy](#) concerned with how computing professionals should make decisions regarding professional and social conduct.^[1] Margaret Anne Pierce, a professor in the Department of Mathematics and Computers at Georgia Southern University has categorized the ethical decisions related to computer technology and usage into three primary influences:^[2]

1. The individual's own personal [\[ethical\] code](#).
2. Any informal code of ethical conduct that exists in the work place.
3. Exposure to formal codes of ethics.

Foundation

Computer ethics was first coined by Walter Maner,^[1] a professor at [Bowling Green State University](#). Maner noticed ethical concerns that were brought up during his Medical Ethics course at [Old Dominion University](#) became more complex and difficult when the use of technology and computers became involved.^[3] The conceptual foundations of computer ethics are investigated by [information ethics](#), a branch of philosophical [ethics](#) promoted, among others, by [Luciano Floridi](#).^[4]

History

The concept of computer ethics originated in the 1940s with MIT professor [Norbert Wiener](#), the American mathematician and philosopher. While working on anti-aircraft artillery during [World War II](#), Wiener and his fellow engineers developed a system of communication between the part of a cannon that tracked a warplane, the part that performed calculations to estimate a trajectory, and the part responsible for firing.^[1] Wiener termed the science of such information feedback systems, "[cybernetics](#)," and he discussed this new field with its related ethical concerns in his 1948 book, *Cybernetics*.^{[1][5]} In 1950, Wiener's second book, *The Human Use of Human Beings*, delved deeper into the ethical issues surrounding information technology and laid out the basic foundations of computer ethics.^[5]

A bit later during the same year, the world's first [computer crime](#) was committed. A programmer was able to use a bit of computer code to stop his banking account from being flagged as overdrawn. However, there were no laws in place at that time to stop him, and as a result he was not charged.^{[6][unreliable source?]} To make sure another person did not follow suit, an ethics code for computers was needed.

In 1973, the [Association for Computing Machinery](#) (ACM) adopted its first code of ethics.^[1] [SRI International](#)'s [Donn Parker](#),^[7] an author on computer crimes, led the committee that developed the code.^[1]

In 1976, medical teacher and researcher Walter Maner noticed that ethical decisions are much harder to make when computers are added. He noticed a need for a different branch of ethics for when it came to dealing with computers. The term "computer ethics" was thus invented.^{[1][5]} In 1976 [Joseph Weizenbaum](#) made his second significant addition to the field of computer ethics. He published a book titled *Computer Power and Human Reason*,^[8] which talked about how [artificial intelligence](#) is