**Strict Kantianism and Software Engineering Ethics**  
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**Introduction**

Immanuel Kant’s ethical philosophy is rooted in a universal moral law and duty to make decisions proactively. It is the opposite of the common phrase of asking for forgiveness rather than permission. In software engineering, strict Kantianism says that one should choose ethical standards over financial or other pressures. This paper explores two examples of Kantian ethics and how they apply to software: data privacy and algorithmic transparency. It also addresses my view that ethics are more important than convenience or profit.

**Data Privacy and Consent**

Regarding data privacy, strict Kantianism says that users should be prompted for consent prior to giving up their data. That data is to be used only for the purposes that the user consented to. If this data is used for other purposes, then ethics are being ignored and other motives are at play. Companies may think analyzing the data in other ways will help improve services or the user but strict Kantianism says this should not be done. Anonymized data, which has proven to be not-so-anonymous, can often be tracked to the original user and puts their identity and privacy in jeopardy (Ihekweazu, Zhou, & Adelowo, 2024). Users must have control over their personal information and its intended uses in regards to strict Kantianism.

**Algorithmic Transparency and Accountability**

This is also the case in automated decisions. In hiring, if an AI tool screens applicants for job-worthiness, strict Kantianism demands that the decisions were made free from biases. Unfortunately, many algorithms do reinforce systemic inequalities, specifically in hiring processes as well (ISTES, 2023). Software engineers have a responsibility to create a system that creates fairness and accountability even if it means higher costs and longer iterations and implementations. AI black-box models that can’t show the determining factors of their decisions should not be used in situations when morals are extremely important. Responsible AI in relation to strict Kantianism should show transparent decision-making pathways.

**My Perspective**

I strongly agree with strict Kantianism in software ethics, especially regarding privacy and transparency. Users should always know exactly what data is being collected and have real control over its use. Many companies push ethical concerns aside in favor of business growth in the AI app and software gold rush (Ihekweazu, Zhou, & Adelowo, 2024). Techniques such as swapping, noising, hashing, and anonymization can reduce the risk of doxing and still maintain data utility (Klose et al., 2020). Unfortunately, these techniques aren’t perfect and still may lead to identifying information. The more companies try to act on behalf of their customers' privacy, the better. Software companies should take a moralistic approach, ensuring integrity even if it means sacrificing some profit.

I realize applying strict Kantianism in fast-moving fields like AI comes with difficulties. While full transparency is ideal, exposing too much proprietary information could lead to other ethical issues. Despite this, software development should always prioritize protecting users first, even when companies must make tough decisions that favor ethics over efficiency.

**Conclusion**

Strict Kantianism emphasizes a strong moral compass in software engineering. It prioritizes transparency, morals, and ultimately respect for users. Applying strict Kantianism ensures that software development is based on a responsibility to improve human well-being. I believe that software development rooted in strong ethical considerations far outweigh any profit that can be made in the short-term. The software industry can build trust and ultimately more profits over the long term by implementing stricter moral principles.

**References**

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