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Reflection on Ethical Perspectives on Cybersecurity

Throughout this course, I have explored a range of ethical issues within cybersecurity and digital technology. Engaging with different theories and real-world cases has changed how I understand responsibility, power, and morality in the digital age. Three topics that especially deepened my thinking were (1) data privacy and utilitarianism, (2) professional ethics and deontology, and (3) information warfare through the lens of Confucianism. Each offered a new way to think about the moral choices people and institutions face in a digitally connected world.

1. Data Privacy and Utilitarianism

At the beginning of the course, I thought of data privacy mostly as a legal or technical issue. I believed companies should follow privacy laws, but I did not think much beyond compliance. My analysis of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) helped me see that data privacy is also a deeply moral concern. Using the utilitarian framework, I examined how protecting users' personal data can lead to greater overall well-being, trust, and safety. I came to understand that good privacy policies are not just about protecting individuals from harm, but also about creating social conditions where people feel secure using technology.

This shift in thinking helped me realize that ethical reasoning can support and even go beyond legal requirements. A utilitarian perspective encourages asking, "What rules or systems

would produce the best outcomes for the most people?” This moves the discussion from simply following rules to actively designing technology in ways that benefit users and society.

Takeaway:

My future self should remember that data practices affect real people in complex ways, and ethical choices about privacy should aim to maximize trust, transparency, and long-term well-being for everyone.

2. Professional Responsibility and Deontology

One of the most impactful cases we studied was Bill Sourour’s essay, “*The Code I’m Still Ashamed Of.*” This story, and my analysis of it using deontology, challenged my previous ideas about professional responsibility. Initially, I believed that following orders or completing assignments as a developer was enough to meet ethical standards. But deontology reminded me that some actions are wrong in themselves, regardless of consequences or authority.

Sourour’s situation revealed how developers can cause serious harm if they ignore their moral duties. He built software that appeared neutral but was designed to manipulate users into choosing a dangerous drug. A young girl who encountered the quiz later died by suicide. Deontological ethics helped me see that Sourour had a duty to act honestly and respectfully, even if he was following instructions. That duty did not disappear just because he was an employee.

This deepened my sense of what it means to be a professional. It is not just about writing good code or delivering projects. It is about using my skills in a way that respects human dignity and avoids deception or manipulation.

Takeaway:

Always ask whether an action respects the rights and dignity of others—especially when the pressure is to follow orders. Right and wrong do not depend on permission from a boss.

3. Information Warfare and Confucianism

The concept of information warfare was one I had only a vague sense of before this course. I assumed it meant hacking or propaganda by governments. After analyzing the 2016 Facebook case and reading Alexis Madrigal's work, I realized that information warfare can happen indirectly, through algorithms, emotional manipulation, and the misuse of digital platforms.

Studying this case through Confucianism gave me a new lens for thinking about responsibility. While other ethical theories often focus on rules or outcomes, Confucianism emphasizes harmony, moral example, and social roles. This helped me see that Facebook's failure was not just technical or accidental—it was a failure of moral leadership. The company allowed its platform to spread misinformation and division because it focused on engagement and profit instead of the public good. Confucianism encouraged me to see institutions like Facebook as having a role similar to that of leaders in society. They must act in ways that foster community well-being and shared understanding.

This framework added nuance to my thinking by emphasizing the ethical responsibility to maintain social harmony, even when there are no laws requiring it. It showed me that digital platforms shape not just individual behavior, but the fabric of public life.

Takeaway:

Technology companies and professionals must be moral leaders, not just innovators. In an interconnected world, the pursuit of harmony and ethical responsibility must guide our decisions.

Conclusion

This course has shown me that ethics in technology is not abstract—it is personal, professional, and societal. I have learned to think more critically about how my work and the tools I use affect others. Whether it is data privacy, software development, or the flow of information, the ethical frameworks we studied have helped me see beyond the surface of problems. They have encouraged me to ask deeper questions about what kind of world we are building, and what role I want to play in it.