

Ethics Paper

Meagan Porter

CSCI 201 – Survey of Scripting Languages

Michael O'Neill

## Ethics

In the world of computer science, as in most areas of professional and creative production, there are certain laws and agreements needed to have work safely published. A programmer working personally in open source or professionally for a company will need to understand what these permissions are in order to protect themselves and their work. Copyright laws were created to do just that. Basic copyright laws were created in 1790, but their purpose still apply to works created using technologies today that did not exist then. “Copyright is a legal term describing ownership of control of the rights to the use and distribution of certain works of creative expression, including books, video, movies, music and computer programs.” (Rouse) Generally, these laws apply only for a specific amount of time, once they expire on a piece of work it becomes open to public domain. These restrictions are also bound by certain territories. For instance, laws governing the right to copy in the United States, do not apply outside of this country. These permissions were not only created to protect material from being stolen or copied, but also to allow a certain amount of use by the public, which allows for “derivative work”. In short, people are given the right to use another person’s work as a starting point, or foundation for their own, as long as they include the proper licensing and permissions.

This type of work falls under the Fair Use protection. In general, “..a fair use is any copying of copyrighted material done for a limited and “transformative” purpose, such as to comment upon, criticize, or parody a copyrighted work.”( Stim). As a programmer, a lot of code necessary for simply or complex tasks has already been created on open source platforms. This does not mean that the code can simply be copied by another person and used without consideration. It is imperative that any use of another person’s code be documented and in accordance with their specific copyright agreement.

Personally, I believe the MIT license agreement to be a very simply and agreeable code for any opensource projects that I have created through school or on my own. The license is short and to the point, while also protecting the creator of the work from any damage or liability caused by the use or distribution of the work. This allows another programmer to copy completely or modify parts of the code to use in their own program without repercussion, as long as they include the license in any redistribution of the original code. I think for open source projects this is the best agreement to bind to your code. If there is another reason you would not want the code being used or modified, it would require a much more complex agreement that states what restrictions the creator wants applied to their work.

When working as a programmer in the field or for personal use, understanding the legal system as it applies to your use of open source code is important. Knowing the laws for copyright and fair use keep you protected from fraud as well as your own work from being used for something you did not intend. As a Christian programmer, knowing and obeying the copyright laws is the right moral ground to take in all aspects of coding. It is not only enough to understand what it means to steal someone's code, but also to make a commitment not to even when it seems like a simpler path. It may make a project easier to just copy and paste, especially if the code is open source and easily accessible with a low risk of reprimand, however; "Jesus made it clear in application to His commandments that getting caught is not the measure He is looking for in establishing guilt (Matthew 5:28)."( Bennett) In Exodus 20:15 we are given God's commandment to not steal. Understanding copyright laws is the best way to know when you are or are not stealing someone else's work. Using your best judgment and knowledge of fair use laws will keep your integrity as a Christian in programming and help motivate you to always be aware of licensing agreements applied to any code you come upon in the field.

## Work Cited

Bennett, M. (2012, October 26). Copyright: Understanding It From a Christian Perspective. Retrieved September 29, 2020, from <https://members.cogwa.org/godly-women-blog/copyright-understanding-it-from-a-christian-perspective/>

Payne, J. (1985). The Holy Bible containing the Old Testament and the New. London: Printed by Ioh. Field.

Rouse, M. (2017, May 17). What is copyright? - Definition from WhatIs.com. Retrieved September 29, 2020, from <https://searchsecurity.techtarget.com/definition/copyright>

Stim, R., & Law, R. (2017, April 11). What Is Fair Use? Retrieved September 29, 2020, from <https://fairuse.stanford.edu/overview/fair-use/what-is-fair-use/>