

Ethics and Copyright

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Survey Of Scripting Languages

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1/23/2024

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In every field of work, there is a code of ethics, and some fields require a high level of personal and professional ethics. Computer Science is a field that requires a high level of ethics and knowing how to apply that code of ethics to every project or task that is completed, whether you are a Help Desk Technician 1 or even a data architect! Ethics is a part of our daily lives, and it is beyond important to know what this entails.

What is Ethics in Computer Science?

To answer this question, it is important to touch on what a copyright is, the legal definition of a copyright is “a type of intellectual property that protects original works of authorship as soon as an author fixes the work in a tangible form of expression.” This includes paintings, photographs, illustrations, musical compositions, sound recordings, books, poems, blog posts, movies, and even Computer Programs! A copyright in computer science is any form of software that has been shipped. The IEEE-CS code of ethics dictates that engineers will be fully responsible for their decisions in relation to safety, health, and welfare of the general public. ACM Code of Ethics is a set of principles and guidelines for ethical conduct of computing professionals. It expresses the conscience of the profession and translates broad ethical principles into concrete statements about professional practice. Both codes of ethics emphasize the responsibilities of computing professionals to uphold the public good, respect human rights, and avoid harm to others. They both require honesty, integrity, and fairness. Some of the differences between these codes of ethics are the ACM code of ethics has a more detailed and specific section on software engineering (ACM Ethics, 2018), and the IEEE code of ethics does not have a separate section on software engineering, but rather covers it under the general principles of engineering. The ACM code of ethics emphasizes the responsibility of computing professionals to

contribute to society and human well-being, while the IEEE mentions these values, but puts the technical aspect in focus, as well as obligations to avoid conflicts of interest and bribery (IEEE, 2020).

Licensing

There are many different types of licenses, including Public domain licenses, Lesser General Public Licenses, Permissive Licenses, and the strictest being a copyleft license (Software License Agreement: All you Need to Know, n.d.). If it was up to me and it was a personal project, I would use a public domain license because this is a license that allows users to alter the code and use the code in projects or applications. If I was making software for a company, I would use a copyleft license, so the code was more protected, and keeps the same identification.

Obligations

We have many obligations as programmers when we reuse code from the internet, whether we use it in class, at work, or making money for it. We need to take precautions to ensure that we are not infringing on the copyright of the person which created this code, whether this be crediting the original code writer, or reaching out if it is unclear. This matters because of not only the legal ramifications, but also the ethical concerns that this contains. Just simply copying code also brings moral concerns to the surface and can call into question whether one has a good moral standing. If a company reuses a program, and doesn't credit the original owner, or have explicit permissions, the company could held legally liable, and face harsh penalties. This also pertains to if a company uses a logo or software that is copyrighted to another, which could be a violation of US Law and regulations.

References

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