Paul McGlothlin

Dr. Yu-Ju Lin

Applied Networking

2 December 2019

Ethics Paper

As humanity moves forward in the 21st century, many of our outdated laws and practices will need to be reviewed and changed based on our shifting and growing priorities, practices, and ethics. Not even 50 years ago, the idea of an entirely virtual economy was something out of science fiction. It is no surprise that law making jurisdiction has not been able to fully keep up with the advancing times, as law making and editing is a slow process, whereas technological advancement is a ramping, innately fast change. Due to the discrepancy between our written law and the practical application of many modern advancements, it is up to the individual user to withhold a standard of moral quality. This has caused many issues over the last several decades, with rampant piracy and misuse occurring because of those who see the lack of enforced rules as a playground. As we move forward, it is up to us, the pioneers of this wave of change, to set up an example of excellence and character so that our followers and customers will know how to be good, respectable citizens.

When most people think of piracy, they think of large-scale theft, shady business deals, and black hat hackers. Nowadays, the idea of casually stealing software is not particularly associated with piracy. Things like sharing the membership on a program, or having a friend copy a game onto a USB drive are not considered crimes by many. Even though many companies tried to fight against these practices through campaigns such as the Intellectual Property Office of Singapore’s “You wouldn’t steal a car” ad campaign, which was run in cinemas in the early 2000s, or through active deterrents such as anti-piracy code, the public conscious just hasn’t gotten the memo. This is also backed up by the fact that it is simply much harder to track lost sales because of these methods, even though estimates do exist. At the end of the day, these practices are still very wrong, and cost these companies untold amounts of money. Honest software use is something we should strive for, as it is effectively no different than robbing a store by hand, and that is something that everyone would recognize as a sin.

The argument of who owns what part of code, if any, is one that is complex and hard to pin down. Of the four parts of a code that can be owned, the “source code,” “object code,” “algorithm,” and the “look and feel” of the result, the source code is arguably the most important and easiest to understand ownership of. It is what the programmer actually writes, so having some degree of ownership of it simply makes sense. The other three aspects are much more questionable, however. Object code is harder to justify than source code, but still justifiable to a large extent, as it does directly depend on the source code. The look and feel and algorithm of code, however, are relatively hard to justify full ownership of. Look and feel is simply a poor thing to claim ownership of unless the program is designed in an extremely unique way, as the vast majority of user interfaces and such are extremely similar to each other. Algorithm is very questionable to have ownership due to the reasons stated in the article, that to own algorithms is almost like owning a part of mathematics, which is obviously unreasonable. Hopefully legislation will catch up to these issues and more, and we will have a more enforced set of rules to judge our actions on.

<https://youtu.be/K_vHwfDNGdg> Recording of Piracy TV AD