Proposed Question

The summer camp you have attended since you were very young has just added a computer activity. You've been hired to be the camp's first "computer counselor." It's 1983. The computers are Apple IIe's. The web hasn't been invented yet. The machines have no Internet access. There is no LAN--software has to be loaded onto each machine individually from floppy disks.

You arrive two days before the campers, and between endless counselor training meetings you have a few hours to set up the computer lab. You discover that all the software you have is on floppies with hand-written labels, no documentation. Suspicious, you approach the director of the camp, Lou: was the software purchased or just copied? Lou says it was just copied. You politely tell him that you need legal copies, and a license for each machine. He refuses, and tells you that you're being "uptight."

Campers arrive tomorrow. There's really nothing you can do with an Apple IIe without software. You don't have a development environment. You don't have money to buy software yourself. And you can't seek donations--the camp caters to well-off kids, not the underprivileged.

Proposed Answer

To go with the flow and install the software and pretend I didn't see anything or take a stand and refuse to so something illegal. Those are really the two distinct questions I would be facing in this ethical dilemma. What I have been asked to do can be considered software piracy and violates all copyright infringement laws. Is software piracy ethical? In the paragraphs that follow I will analyze this act through ethical theories like Kantianism, Act Utilitarianism, Rule Utilitarianism, Social Contract Theory and Value Ethics.

According to Kantianism, an action is considered ethical when it is considered to be a universal moral law. So let's consider a universal rule like "The use of pirated software is legal and can be used freely." This statement would imply that everyone uses pirated software and thus no one pays for software. This would lead to a lack of profit for software companies. This would result in software companies ceasing the development of new software and consequently lack of software to pirate. This is clearly a contradiction to the previously stated law that the use of pirated software was legal. Furthermore, Kantianism also states that it is wrong to treat other people as a means to an end. If I were to agree to the act of using pirated software, I would be using the software company as a means to an end as the company would receive no reward for developing the software. Therefore, according to Kantianism, it is not ethical to use pirated software. Judging for a Kantian standpoint, quitting my job would be my best option.

Act utilitarianism theory states that an action is only ethical if and only if it produces as much happiness as any other act a person could perform at the same time. In this case, the only one who would profit from my using the software would be the camp Lou, the camp director, as he saved some money. The campers may be happy too, as long as they do not know how they received their software. On the other hand, the company that made the software would

experience a loss of profit which would in turn adversely affect the employees of the company. Looking at it from another perspective, even Lou would not benefit from this act as much as he would not be able to direct inquires to the software company in case of problems with the software. The course of action that would make the most people happy would be to buy new software, since this is not possible either convincing Lou to buy the software or use camp activities to generate revenue to buy software would be my best course of action.

Rule utilitarianism theory says an action is right if it conforms to a rule that leads to the greatest good. If everyone were to use pirated software, it would most likely cause the software companies to go bankrupt as there is no profit to all their investments in making these products. That would ultimately result in all the people working at these companies to be out of job and become unemployed, which would affect the employees themselves as well as their family. Furthermore, the economy will also be negatively affected by the bankruptcy of those companies. On the other hand, people would be able to save some money by using the pirated copy of the software instead of buying it legally. However, the negative consequences of software piracy far outweigh its few benefits. Therefore, software piracy is also considered unethical by utilitarianism theory. The best course of action from a rule utilitarian stand point would be one which lead to the good of the world and that would be refusing to install the software and explaining to the campers the consequences of using pirated software.

According to the social contract theory, an action is ethical when it is made into a set of rules that rational people will agree to accept for the benefit of the community. If everyone were to be like Lou and use pirated software, all the software companies would most likely go bankrupt, causing all their employees to lose their jobs and become unemployed. That would cause the unemployment rate to go up, affecting the community negatively. Therefore, the act of copying software and using it is unethical according to social contract theory. Again, the solution from a social contract theory perspective would be to not install the software and find an alternative, more socially acceptable solution.

Virtue ethics is about determining what kind of people we should be. In virtue ethics, actions are considered good and acceptable if they are supporting good character traits (virtues) and wrong if they support bad character traits (vices). Good character traits could be honesty, responsibility and loyalty. Vices could be the opposite, dishonesty, irresponsibility and disloyalty. Virtue ethics mean that we should try to better our character and the character of others