

# IMPERATIVE OF TEACHING PROFESSIONAL ETHICS

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**Abstract—** Professional ethics, and statements of such affect, serve several purposes in shaping the professional (Giddens, 1991). A code of ethics can provide a framework of conduct which is culturally favoured in an organisation, that is, the code either reflects that which is already occurring, or provide a tool for reprimand and regulation (Lichtenberg, 2002). A code of ethics, or statement of values, in the workplace, can also serve to empower the emerging professional to aspire towards a goal of conduct. However, a code is meaningless if it is not reinforced by the social and cultural dynamics of the workplace. Therefore, in addition to being able to recite a professional code, an emerging professional needs to be able to negotiate the workplace environment with ethical and moral courage to see its realisation. There are few things wholly evil or wholly good. Almost everything...is an inseparable compound of the two, so that our best judgment of the preponderance between them is continually demanded.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Today computers play an essential role in industry, commerce, government, research, education, medicine, communication systems, entertainment and many other areas of our society. Professionals who contribute to the design, development, analysis, specification, certification, maintenance and evaluation of the many different applications of computer systems have a significant impact on society, making thereby beneficial contributions to society, but also, possibly, some less positive.

To ensure that their efforts will be used for the general good, Computing professionals must commit themselves to making Computing a beneficial and respected profession, promoting an ethical approach to their professional practice.

## Ethics

Ethics in business  
moral principles  
rules and regulation  
of right conduct rec  
values that guide t

## WHAT IS COMPUTER ETHICS

There are few things wholly evil or wholly good. Almost everything...is an inseparable compound of the two, so that our best judgment of the preponderance between them is continually demanded." Abraham Lincoln Computer ethics might be defined as the analysis of the nature and social impact of computer technology and the corresponding formulation and justification of policies

This sense of the word "ethics" is linked directly to the original sense of the Greek word ethos, which meant "customs", as did mores the Latin root of "morals".

Ethical problems arise most often when there are differences of judgment or expectations about what constitutes the true state of affairs or a proper course of action. The engineer may be faced with contrary opinions from within the firm, from the client, from other firms within the industry, or from government.



When faced with a moral/ethical dilemma, a professional must be able to make rational and well-motivated decisions. Courses in Ethics can help professionals by offering tools and methods helpful in such situations.

## II. DEBATE IN COMPUTER ETHICS

The basic principles of ethics are constant, no matter in which area they might be applied. The principles of medical ethics, legal ethics, and computer ethics are not different from one another. However, new circumstances related to the computer do raise new questions about how these principles are to be applied, introducing the concept of policy vacuums

designated thus by Moor, see Moor 1985, Johnson 2003, Tavani 2002 and references therein, and Barger, 2001. A general comment can be made regarding the uniqueness debate. Similarity is always relative. Two things that are similar are always similar in certain respects. Uniqueness is a matter of focus and context. Looking at the set of all possible ethical problems, different patterns can be recognized permitting their grouping into medical ethics, political ethics, environmental ethics, business ethics etc..

One can ask the following question in order to elucidate the uniqueness issue: Why not car ethics? Even though the automobile is almost as ubiquitous as a computer, the ethical questions (safety and environmental impact) related to cars are conceptually relatively simple and already taken into consideration by other ethical disciplines. The complexity of ethical issues related to computers, together with their prominent cultural role and the fact that an understanding of the technical details of the problems involved is often necessary to be able to see its ethical implications clearly provides a foundation for Computer Ethics as a specific applied ethics discipline.

Speed. An example in which speed can have ethical consequences is when, after reading some posting or e-mail, a person responds with an e-mail in which she/he uses an immoderate tone, a tone which would not have been used if she/he had taken the time to write a traditional letter or had contacted the recipient in person or by phone. Speed and the simplicity of handling large amounts of data are connected with some other ethical problems such as privacy and security.

Identity. It is possible with a computer to steal another person's identity, forge a message, or send a message anonymously. Present day vague identities make possible "spam", for example. There is an ongoing ethical debate about the pros and contras of anonymity, and under which condition it can be an acceptable way of communication.

Internationality. Computer communication does not stop at national boundaries. What is considered legal in one country might be forbidden in another country.

Copying. Images, text and sound can be copied with a computer in a few seconds by a few clicks and can easily be used without attribution to the author or out of context. This causes the ongoing discussion about intellectual property.

### III. ETHICS AND PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

How can we work to ensure that computing technology advances human values? It is necessary to integrate computing technology and human values in such a way that the technology advances and protects human values, in preference to harming them.

Professional societies in science and engineering publish their ethical codes or guidelines. See Websites which present a sampling of ethical codes from societies of professional engineers and scientists. Some differ widely in their content, because of their origins and their specific purposes, but the

topics covered by others and the general ethical standards they articulate are similar.

Codes of Ethics express the consensus of the profession on ethical issues. At the same time they are a means of educating the general public about the ethical norms and values of the profession. An essential characteristic of a profession is therefore the need for its members to conform to its Code of Ethics.

Professional codes of ethics should be understood as conventions between professionals.

"Codes of ethics are created in response to actual or anticipated ethical conflicts. Considered in a vacuum, many codes of ethics would be difficult to comprehend or interpret. It is only in the context of real life and real ethical ambiguity that the codes take on any meaning.

Codes of ethics and case studies need each other. Without guiding principles, case studies are difficult to evaluate and analyze; without context, codes of ethics are incomprehensible. The best way to use these codes is to apply them to a variety of situations and study the results. It is from the back and forth evaluation of the codes and the cases that thoughtful moral judgements can best arise.", see Websites [9]

### IV. WHY STUDY PROFESSIONAL ETHICS?

"Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?" "That's depends a good deal on where you want to get to."... What is the point in studying engineering ethics? What can be gained from taking an ethics course? A professional ethics course is not about preaching virtue so that immoral and amoral students will adopt a certain established set of beliefs.

Rather, it means to increase the ability of concerned engineers, managers and citizens, to first recognize and then responsibly confront moral issues raised by technological activity. The goal is to foster moral autonomy, i.e. the skill and habit of thinking rationally about ethical issues, as well as to improve the ability to think critically about moral matters. For the role of computer ethics in the Computer Science Curriculum see Bynum T. W., 2004 and Moor J. H., 1985. So: why learn Ethics? Here are some reasons:

To deal with the true nature of computing as a service to other human beings.

To convey a sense of professional responsibility not covered in other courses To sensitize students to computer ethics issues To provide tools and methods for analysing cases

### V. ROLE OF PROFESSIONAL ETHICS EDUCATION IN FORMING THE EMERGING PROFESSIONAL

Students emerging into professional fields need to understand and navigate the increasingly important ethical aspects of being a professional, transforming the workplace and themselves. The student entering a workplace is limited in their professional knowledge and still forming their identity within the profession. A primary goal of a cooperative

education program, and likewise professional ethics education, is the evolution within the student of a sense of self and the development of an identity within their chosen profession and/or workplace. Much literature has been spent arguing about what constitutes a professional this paper regards the first element as having However, it is the second proposition that is of interest. University students, as emerging professionals, are challenged to act with a sense of ethical and proper conduct simply because of their professional obligation to society, regardless of the place of ethics within the formal and informal codes of a profession. This implies that mere conformity to codes or common practice within the community of practice is not an acceptable position for an 'ideal professional' An ideal professional must have the capacity to critically assess a situation and decide on a path of conduct, which, above all else, supports their professional obligation of service. Professionalism is a dedication to doing what one does out of a commitment to it and with the determination to do it to the best of one's ability The argument, therefore, extends from defining the professional to a definition of professionalism and its implied ethical obligations. Students need to develop as critical moral agents (actively making choices whilst critically evaluating their moral implications) whilst developing their understandings of professionalism and professional obligations.

#### VI. PROFESSIONAL ETHICS COURSE EVALUATION

Our first year experiences have been very positive. Students have participated actively in discussions, case studies and research on chosen topics. They have shown interest even in general ethical concerns in other fields such as medical ethics or arms control. Even predominantly technically-minded students were able to assimilate and use philosophical concepts introduced by the introductory theoretical part of the course. The examination forms for the course were the writing of a research paper on an ethical topic of interest and an oral presentation of a chosen topic (such as intellectual property, environmental ethics, privacy etc.) followed by an

#### VII. CONCLUSION

The growing importance of computers in modern society makes Computer Ethics essential both when it comes to the issues related to the profession such as safety, security, privacy, environmental impact, quality, and similar and also in the everyday use of computers which gives rise to numerous ethical dilemmas.

The aim of ethics courses in science and engineering is to increase the ability of future professionals to recognize and solve ethical problems, to accept different ethical perspectives and ethical pluralism. It develops the skill and habit of thinking rationally about ethical issues and in that way prepares students for the challenges of their profession. Experiences from the Professional Ethics in Science and

Engineering Course at Mälardalen University are very encouraging.

Our conclusion is that it is both necessary and possible to make Computer Ethics an integral part of computing curricula, which is the natural way to ensure its integration in the culture of the profession.

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- 1) <http://www.computer.org/education/cc2001/index.htm> Computing Curricula 2001
- 2) <http://www.ele.uri.edu/People/Faculty/daly/criteria.2000.html> Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET) Engineering Criteria 2000 Third Edition
- 3) <http://www.scu.edu/ethics/practicing/decision/framework.html>, A framework for Ethical Decision Making