

## CS2190: Ethics Case Studies

Adopted from Michael Quinn's *Ethics for the Information Age*, 2/e. (Addison-Wesley, 2006)

**Class activity:** The instructor will explain about reading one or more of the cases below and discussing them with fellow students. Discuss whether the actions described are moral or professional, and be prepared to explain your reasoning for making these judgments. If you believe something should have been done differently, or some action should be taken in response to what is described in the scenario, be prepared to explain that.

---

### Case 1: Access to User Files, Child Pornography

Morgan McSorley, a system administrator for a large corporation, is installing a new software package on the PC used by employee Kelly Smith. The company has not authorized Morgan to read other people's files (email, web-logs, files in the user's home folders). However, in the course of installing the software, Morgan accidentally comes across directories with files that have suspicious sounding names. Morgan opens a few of the files and finds they contain child pornography. Morgan knows this is in violation of company policy, and believes also that possessing such images is against the law. What should Morgan do?

### Case 2: Anti-Worm

A new worm is spreading across the Internet, affecting PCs by exploiting a security hole in a commonly used operating system. Chris Smart creates an anti-worm that exploits the same security hole on these machines in order to execute and spread, but this anti-worm will download a patch into the PC to protect the machine from the original worm. Chris releases his anti-worm, taking precautions that it cannot be traced back to its creator. It spreads quickly across the Internet, and like all such programs consumes great amounts of bandwidth and installs itself on millions of PCs. In the end, system administrators perceive it to be just another worm, and they fight it in the same way they protect systems from other instances of malware.

### Case 3: Software Recommendation

Alex Jones calls the Department of Computer Science at Enormous State University seeking advice on how to improve the security of Jones' business' local area network. Alex ends up speaking to Prof. Lee Smith, an expert in the field. Prof. Smith answers several of Alex's questions about network security, and then Alex asks for a recommendation for a software package to fight security problems. Prof. Smith tells Alex about a program called NetCheks and that it received the top-rating from a respected magazine that reviewed such packages. Prof. Smith does not mention that the magazine gave another product a "best buy" rating that had fewer features but a much lower price. Prof. Smith also fails to mention that NetCheks is the product of a spin-off company started by Smith's former grad student at E.S.U., and that Smith owns a 3% stake in the company.

---

**Out-of-class activity:** Read one or more the professional codes of ethics and practice for computing professionals. Find clauses or statements that relate to the case you have been asked to examine, and be prepared to submit a list of those with a brief discussion of how they apply to the case.

- The ACM Code of Ethics: <http://www.acm.org/constitution/code.html>
- The ACM/IEEE Software Engineering Code of Ethics and Professional Practice: <http://www.acm.org/serving/se/code.htm>

#### Case 4: Privacy

Circus Maximus, an innovative Internet entrepreneur, starts various online social services, such as a social networking site, a dating site, an online store, etc. All are well received and used by many people. However, unknown to most users of those sites, data about each user is tracked and stored in a database. This includes their purchasing habits, their favorite things and/or activities, and their preferences in the opposite sex among many other things. Also unknown to the users, Maximus makes a good profit selling all this data to third parties such as marketing firms, merchandisers, and even the government. In reality, how all of the data may be used is disclosed, but in very vague legal terms and buried somewhere in each site's privacy statements/policies. This disclosure contains a statement that says any information entered into those sites becomes the property of the website.

#### Case 5: Job Offer

One year ago, Macrosoft Enterprises approached Ingenious Solutions about a joint venture for development of a new software platform. Ajil Koder, a software engineer working for Ingenious Solutions, was assigned to spearhead the venture, which included talking to and collaborating with Macrosoft employees. However, a month ago talks broke down and Ingenious abandoned the venture, and Macrosoft decided to pursue the project on its own. Now, Macrosoft has offered Ajil a job with a very sizeable salary raise to work on the project. Prior to joining Ingenious, Ajil signed an agreement stating that in no way would he use or disclose Ingenious's confidential information after he leaves the company. He mentions this to Macrosoft, and Macrosoft agrees to compensate for the damages should Ingenious file a lawsuit against him. Ajil is tempted by this offer. He has been working with Ingenious for five years, but feels he never receives a decent raise. What should he do?

---

**Out-of-class activity:** Read one or more the professional codes of ethics and practice for computing professionals. Find clauses or statements that relate to the case you have been asked to examine, and be prepared to submit a list of those with a brief discussion of how they apply to the case.

- The ACM Code of Ethics: <http://www.acm.org/constitution/code.html>
- The ACM/IEEE Software Engineering Code of Ethics and Professional Practice: <http://www.acm.org/serving/se/code.htm>