

Ethics as presented by Bernard Moret

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Computer Science Colloquia Spring 2004

February 29, 2004

Abstract

Ethics issues are present in all venues of life. The university and research venues have some interesting issues to deal with that industry does not necessarily have to deal with. Professor Moret outlined some of these issues.

Dr. Moret outlined some of the major issues concerning ethics within the university setting. Most of the items covered were fairly common sense issues not worthy of mention here. The main idea was that ethics allow us to work together with a common set of rules that govern our actions. Although a multitude of reasons can be given for why to behave ethically, when you cut through it all it can be boiled down to an issue of maintaining and guaranteeing quality and hence value.

The argument for not cheating is that a cheater decreases the value of everyone else's degrees. Likewise, falsifying data in an experiment will decrease the value of all subsequent results. I agree with these statements whole heartily.

If we now consider another statement that Dr. Moret made during the lecture, "Patents are counter productive", this seems to fly in the face of much of the argument presented. Part of the responsibility of a practitioner of computer science is that you work to promote the good of society at large as well as your own industry. Dr. Moret presented the patents as preventing the free flow of

information, and hence hurting both the society and our industry. I could not disagree more. For industry to invest time and money into research of new algorithms, techniques, or other innovations there MUST be incentive. In most cases this is monetary return. To ensure incentive the companies MUST be able to capitalize on their technology. While patents may not be the best or most effective solution, to wholly rule patents out as a solution or part of a solution is counterproductive.

Government agencies have already decided that in order to promote the continued research and development of medicines that the company that researches the drug does hold a patent for a certain amount of time, after which the drug becomes available to the public for production of "generic" medications. Excellent examples are Prozac, Methamazole, and dozens of other medications. This ensures that the company who did the research does get to capitalize on the research, but prevents the company from having a strangle hold on the drug for the rest of time. Why shouldn't intellectual property be handled the same way?

Government agencies have also promoted the various farm aid programs in which they pay farmers NOT to grow corn or other products to ensure that the value of the product stays up. Doing so has set a precedence of governmental involvement to ensure the steady flow of product, in this case food. Why then shouldn't the government also be involved in granting patents or other intellectual property titles? Any form of intellectual property title will do nothing but help to ensure that the ideas you have worked hard to formulate will have some value. It is then up to you what you do with the ideas. If you want to give it back to society - then do so.

In conclusion, I agree with 99% of what Dr. Moret presented, but do disagree with his stance on intellectual property.

References

- [1] B.Moret (2004).Graduate Student Ethics: What and Why?,
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<http://www.cs.unm.edu/~moret/ethics.ps>