Computer Ethics: A Case-Based Approach teaches students to solve ethical dilemmas in the field of computing, taking a philosophical, rather than a legal, approach to the topic. It first examines the principles of Idealism, Realism, Pragmatism, Existentialism, and Philosophical Analysis, explaining how each might be adopted as a basis for solving computing dilemmas. The book then presents a worksheet of key questions to be used in solving dilemmas. Twenty-nine cases, drawn from the real-life experiences of computer professionals, are included in the book as a means of letting students experiment with solving ethical dilemmas and identify the philosophical underpinnings of the solutions.

Robert N. Barger is an associate professor in the Computer Applications Program at the University of Notre Dame and professor emeritus at Eastern Illinois University, where he received several awards for teaching excellence. He has spent the last thirty-six years teaching and writing on computer ethics and educational issues.
Computer Ethics

A Case-Based Approach

ROBERT N. BARGER
University of Notre Dame
This book is dedicated to my lovely wife, Jo, with love and gratitude.
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Preface

An Opening Orientation

The words “computer ethics” sometimes evoke the quip: “Computer ethics . . . isn’t that an oxymoron?” Indeed, the computer has received a great deal of bad press over the years because of its association with things like spam, fraud, and impersonalization, but the computer itself is not to blame for these things. Obviously, it is the people who misuse computers who are to blame. They are the unethical ones, not the computers. This book shows that there is indeed an ethics that governs the use of computers. It examines the basis for ethical decision-making and presents a methodology for reaching ethical decisions concerning computing matters. Finally, it concentrates on the theory and practice of computer ethics, using a case-based approach.

An Outline of This Book

Chapter 1 considers a brief history of computers and the Internet, the meaning of ethics, the distinction between law and ethics, the subjects of ethics, and whether computer ethics is a unique kind of ethics. This chapter, and the rest of the chapters in the book, ends with a chapter summary and a “your turn” section soliciting student response to material covered in the chapter.

Chapter 2 deals with the computer as a humanizing agent. This chapter shows that the computer is not – as it is sometimes accused of being – the antithesis of what it means to be human.
Chapter 3 gives a systems approach to ethics. Here you can study the philosophies of Idealism, Realism, Pragmatism, Existentialism, and Philosophical Analysis.

Chapter 4 provides the chance to identify your own philosophic worldview. First you can complete the Ross-Barger Philosophic Inventory. Then you will interpret its results and learn how the inventory was formulated and validated.

Chapter 5 pursues the question of whether a unifying ethical theory can be found for computer ethics. The efforts of James H. Moor in this regard are evaluated.

Chapter 6 provides a framework for making ethical decisions that you will use in solving computer ethics cases. The majority of these cases are be presented in the closing chapters of this book. Most of the cases used have arisen from the experience of computer professionals who have worked within this field for many years.

Chapter 7 goes beyond philosophy to consider psychological factors affecting computer ethics. Here we distinguish between philosophical ethical theories and moral development theories. Then we look at one of the leading theories of moral development made famous by Lawrence Kohlberg.

Chapter 8 gives a brief history of the professions. It then deals with the question of whether the field of computing can be considered a "true" profession.

As a follow-up to this chapter, Chapter 9 presents the codes of conduct used by leading professional associations. This chapter also considers the Ten Commandments of Computer Ethics, a code of ethics formulated by the Computer Ethics Institute, which is a project of the Brookings Institution in Washington, D.C.

Chapter 10 looks at the area of computer ethics as it affects international development. Documents from the World Summit on the Information Society are used for this purpose.

Chapter 11 considers roboethics. "Roboethics" is a name that has been proposed to refer to the area of ethics and robotics.

Chapter 12 covers topics in the area of computer theft and piracy.

Chapter 13 considers a number of cases concerning theft and piracy.

Chapter 14 considers topics in the area of computers and privacy.
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Chapter 15 presents cases about computers and privacy.
Chapter 16 deals with topics related to the category of computers and power.
Chapter 17 considers cases about computers and power.
Chapter 18 provides a number of miscellaneous cases.
Chapter 19 considers parasitic computing – a truly unique case in computer ethics.

An appendix is attached, which lists topics suitable for presentations, discussions, and papers. The last entry in the book is an index. The book will be updated periodically by the addition of further cases on the Cambridge University Press Web site. These can be found at the following URL: http://www.cambridge.org/9780521709149.
The first person to be thanked for his contributions to this book is John Halleck. He is a computer administrator and programmer at the University of Utah. He began participating in my computer ethics class at Eastern Illinois University twenty years ago by way of a listserv. He was appointed an adjunct faculty member at Eastern for his work with the class. I have spoken with him on the phone and exchanged hundreds of e-mail messages with him, but still look forward to the opportunity of meeting him in person some day. You will soon see that the vast majority of the cases used in this book have been authored by John. The second person to be thanked is Thomas Lapp, also a participant from the beginning in our computer ethics class at Eastern (where he, too, was named to the adjunct faculty). He is a computer engineer. The cases he has contributed to this book reflect his interesting experiences in the field of business and industry. Besides our online communication, I have been fortunate to meet him in person. Heather Bergmann, computer science editor for Cambridge University Press, and her assistants, Pooja Jain and David Jou, have been most helpful in getting this book to press. Heather’s gift for making the right suggestion at the right time is something at which I marvel. I am also grateful to Shana Meyer, project manager, and to Mary Kelly, copy editor, for their correction of my composition errors. Last, but certainly not least, I am more than grateful to my wife, Professor Jo Barger, for her encouragement and suggestions concerning this book.