The Byteman's Burden

Computer Ethics

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Computer Ethics

- Us and them
- Why all the fuss about it?
- What is covered by it?
- Who needs it?
- How is it taught?
- How is it learnt?
- Applying it
- What we really really want

Us and them & them

- For computer professionals there are 2 THEMs
  - THEM1
    - Unscrupulous people who might take advantage of us (even perhaps because of our own scruples)
  - THEM2
    - Holier-than-thou people who will delight in questioning our ethics when things go wrong
- Computer Ethics needs to address both

Why all the fuss?

- Early science fiction - Fears
- Privacy of data - Hacking
- Uncensored broadcasts - Usenet, BBS
- System sabotage - Worms, Viruses
- Intellectual property rights - Copyright
- Electronic theft - Fraud
- Offensive graphics - Backgrounds

What is covered by Computer Ethics?

- All of the above!
- Also
  - Public interest
  - Confidentiality
  - Sound design
  - Thorough testing
  - Fair trading
- MI - Moral Intelligence

Who is supposed to need instruction?

- Who says anybody does?
  - THEY do!
- Everybody who uses computers
- But especially
  - IT professionals
  - Computing students
  - Young people
- Mud sticks - The byteman's burden

How not to teach MI?

- Sermons
  - Amen to that!
- Deterrents
  - Economic penalties (fines, compensation)
  - Her Majesty's Pleasure
- The ancients
  - Moral philosophy

How MI is actually acquired

- By example
  - Good and bad examples
- Through feedback
  - Both positively and negatively
- Often very early in life
  - Can teenagers or adults acquire it at all?
- So there's no point in giving university students lectures on it

Applying MI in a new world

- Acquiring the basics
  - Learning the accepted norms of behaviour
- Extrapolating values
  - What current values imply for new situations
- Recognising grey areas
  - Forseeing problems before they arise
- Inventing new rules
  - Creating new norms for new occasions

What we really really want

- Respect for our WITES (THEM1)
  - Welfare
  - Ingenuity
  - Trust
  - Effort
  - Sensitivities
- Respect for our Judgement (THEM2)

So maybe we can provide guidance?

- Passing on the accepted norms
- Case studies
  - Trespasses against us
    - Deliverance from evil
  - Situations that might confront us
    - Hypothetical decision making
- Ethical systems
  - Justification

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