
BOOK REVIEWS

COMPUTER ETHICS: A CASE-BASED APPROACH. R. N. Barger. *New York: Cambridge University Press, 245 pp. ISBN 978-0-521-88251.*

The author does not state the intended audience for *Computer Ethics*. However, after reading it, I suspect that Barger's primary concern was producing a textbook, though Barger does not write within a textbook mode (ethics and computer science textbooks have a reputation of being extremely dry). At the end of each chapter Barger offers a section titled "Your Turn." Here the author asks a series of questions that review the material in the chapter. Some of the questions are not merely "review questions" but are rather thought provoking.

In the classical tradition of ethical theory textbooks, Barger moves from broad historical concepts, to traditional theory, to the application of theory in general, to the application of ethical theory to computer science and case illustrations with analysis. The book is very orderly, so a student or practitioner who lacks familiarity with the subject matter will be able to comprehend Barger's mission.

Readers of this journal will probably be most interested in Chapter 4, "A Philosophic Inventory." Barger provides citations that assess the reliability and validity of this instrument. It reminds me of the Myers-Briggs, but for philosophical perspectives rather than personality types. In the book the author outlines the major tenets of idealism, realism, pragmatism, and existentialism. He sums up his discourse by inviting the reader to assess what philosophical perspective dominates the reader's philosophy of life. Most philosophy or computer science texts do not offer a reader an exercise that is both entertaining and intellectually stimulating. The test was fun to complete. In addition, the exercise was provocative. I found myself analyzing my own decision-making processes and understanding why I make the decisions that I do.

Since 1996, I have read and published in the area of computer ethics. The running theme in the literature—including Barger's work—involves the question "Do human service workers require additional or more extensive ethical codes for the employment of computer technology?" In my earlier work, I thought the answer was yes. As I have gained more experience and wisdom, I am no longer sure. Barger does a good job of clarifying this issue. The application of computer technology within the human

services arena appears to confound ethical principles. In the end, Barger points out, they do not. An advance in computer technology offers a person the ability to commit an unethical act with much greater speed, which in turn enables the perpetrator greater time to escape identification and depart. Barger demonstrates that even educated people have trouble making the connection between ethical standards and computer technology. This is the major strength of Barger's work. He offers a rare clarity that I cannot find elsewhere.

It is rare for a profession's code of ethics to fail to include a statement like the following:

Professionals can represent themselves as competent only within the boundaries of their education, training, license, certification, consultation received, supervised experience, or other relevant professional experience.

The problem with computer technology is simply that there is no standard for assessing computer competency in human services. To make matters worse, such a standard would be nearly impossible to measure—what was cutting-edge knowledge three months ago is seen as ancient history today. Ever-changing technology may be the greatest weakness of Barger's work. The case illustrations he offers may not be relevant within 12 months. Yet, rapidly changing technology must give the human professional an ethical pause. We need self-examination, and Barger guides us in this effort.

Barger's *Computer Ethics* is a wonderfully written book with great insights. I strongly recommend that academic libraries adopt the book. It should be required reading for computer science majors and for social science computer courses. In addition, *Computer Ethics* can find an audience in many public libraries.

Stephen M. Marson, PhD
Professor and Senior Editor
The Journal of Social Work Values and Ethics
Department of Social Work
University of North Carolina
Pembroke, NC 28358-1015
steve.marson@uncp.edu

ONLINE SOCIAL SUPPORT: THE INTERPLAY OF SOCIAL NETWORKS AND COMPUTER-MEDIATED COMMUNICATION. A. Bambina. Youngstown, NY: Cambria Press, 2007, 268 pp. ISBN: 978-1-934043-25-7.

Despite the rapid emergence of computer-mediated communications (CMC) over the past 10 to 15 years, there has been a dearth of scholarly