

Object-Oriented Programming, and Computer Ethics

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Abstract

What James Moor famously described as “policy vacuums” due to the ICT revolution have challenged our traditional ethical theories, and strained our conceptual resources. However, supplying philosophers with ethical challenges is not the only way in which computer science can be of assistance to the development of ethical theories. In this paper I will argue that terminology based on Object-Oriented Programming (OOP) can be of help when approaching ethical challenges – especially challenges within the field of Computer Ethics. This claim will be exemplified by trying to reinterpret the Kantian conception of indirect moral duty in OOP terms, in order to underline the importance of assessing the properties and functions of the objects we are acting towards. This focus on the properties of the objects we are acting through or towards, rather than the agent or action itself, is a furthering and defense of some central insights in the Information Ethics of Luciano Floridi, and the Disclosive Computer Ethics of Philip Brey. I will defend the thesis that choosing an informational level of abstraction framed in OOP terms, is important in order to avoid oversimplified assessments of Human-Computer Interaction. The central insight borrowed from Object-Oriented Programming is the way of dealing with problems by asking in what ways an information object can react to, modify and redirect messages received from a different Information Object.