Using drama to introduce ethics to technology students and practitioners

Conference Item

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INTRODUCTION

The poster describes the use of Joe Penhall’s play Landscape with Weapon as a vehicle to introduce ethics to technology students and practitioners. The play explores the ethical dilemmas that arise in technology and how they can be addressed.

Although it is not always clearly recognised, this is the everyday, routine context in which ethical issues are resolved, and developers and users alike need to engage with them. This is the context in which the play developed and, on occasion, answered. Accordingly, such dialogues influence ad hoc and guide conduct. Rather than focusing on the formulation of an ethics code for a project, the purpose is to encourage developers to examine their own ethical positions through their reactions to the dialogue, rather than to conform to some prescription.

The play -Landscape with Weapon -can function as an allegory representing issues and questions of relevance to an audience of practitioners in a variety of areas of technology development.

Learning Outcomes

After studying this unit you should be able to:
- Discuss what ethics is and what constitutes an ethical issue.
- Identify and discuss ethical issues that arise in the media, in routine conversations, and in job-related daily morality.
- Discuss the role of emotions in ethical deliberations.
- Discuss the role of institutions in ethical deliberations.
- Identify and discuss ethical issues that arise in the media, in routine conversations, and in job-related daily morality.

Core resources

In addition to various extracts from the 2008 trial video discussions, the following resources are included in the unit:

Synopsis

The play revolves around the issues faced by Ned, an engineer who has created a novel technology, originally envisaged for surveillance but eventually construed as a weapon of mass destruction. The play begins with a powerful conversation between Ned and his brother Dan, a dentist, where Ned talks about how technology can come into conflict with personal morality, which we take to mean the morality that is applied outside of the technical task, the kind of every day morality that might be deployed in dealings with friends or family. As a developer and user of technology, they need to make ‘systems’ or ‘devices’ effective, the ‘best’ technology they can invent, without disregard for the rights. They will show no respect for the customer, who may or may not be represented in the play by the customer’s father, that they need to make ‘systems’ or ‘devices’ effective, the ‘best’ technology they can invent, without disregard for the rights. 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