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Ethical Issues in Network System Design

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Abstract

Today, most desktop computers and PCs are networked that is, they have the ability to link to other machines, usually to access data and other information held remotely. Such machines may sometimes be connected directly to each other, as part of an office or company computer system. More frequently, however, connected machines are at a considerable distance from each other, typically connected through links to global systems such as the Internet, or WorldWideWeb (WWW). The networked machine itself may be anything from a powerful company computer with direct Internet connections, to a small hobbyist machine, accessing a bulletin board through telephone and modem. It is important to remember that, whatever the type or the location of networked machines, their access to the network, and the network itself, was planned and constructed following deliberate design considerations. In this paper I discuss some ways in which the technical design of computer systems might appropriately be influenced by ethical issues, and examine pressures on computer scientists and others to technically control networkrelated actions perceived as 'unethical'. After examination of the current situation, I draw together the issues, and conclude by suggesting some ethically based recommendations for the future design of networked systems.

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