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Case Analysis on Professional Ethics

Modern technology is constantly evolving, and with that, the things it can do are continuously growing. In our current age, technology has evolved to the point that self-driving cars are a thing, and technology is a part of the justice system, amongst other critical infrastructures. Due to this rise in the capabilities of technology, the role of programmers that give the instructions these systems and software follow is on the rise, proportional to the technology they program. Since technology and algorithms have no way of knowing the ethical implications of what they are used for and what may come from their use, it is up to the developers'/programmers' ethical and moral compasses to decide if a program is ethical or not. As seen in Sourour's case, we find that just doing your job is not enough, and weighing your actions as a programmer may be as important as the ability to code. In this case analysis, I would argue that a contractarian approach shows us that the code was morally problematic because it acted as a persuasion and influencing tactic that pushed clients to get and use the drug from the pharmaceutical company despite its possible side effects, and Sourour should have tweaked the code or refused to do it because it was not

ethical to sell an ideal (or in this case, a drug) on a platform that was just supposed to provide general information.

As it is vitally important for developers to put their ethical and moral beliefs into practice as they code, a generally standardised code of ethics is just as important. While the social contract does permit us all to have a similar ethical stance in most situations, our innate diversity causes an occasional shift from the social norm. Here again, the need for a standardised code is seen; this need is met in the case of computing professionals by "the code." The code acts as an ethical guide for these professionals and aspiring professionals. The principle "contribute to society and to human well-being, acknowledging that all people are stakeholders in computing" is such a guide that is relevant in the case to be discussed. The principle states that a computing professional must always consider how their code and contribution affect the welfare of all people and society. It points out that their obligation is to the safety and benefit of society and the individuals in it. The principle goes so far as to say that professionals should take pro bono work and be primarily driven to take work that promotes environmental sustainability locally and globally. Closely tied to this principle in the general section is the principle in the professional section: "give comprehensive and thorough evaluations of computer systems and their impacts, including analysis of possible risk." This principle asks developers to think critically about what it is they develop and hope to launch, assessing it and pointing out the potentials (good and risky) to clients, employers, employees, and users. The principle states that risk assessments be made while coding and before deployment of a machine learning model or program, and if the risk is adverse or cannot be known, that deployment be halted. Like the earlier principle, the safety and well-being of individuals is the primary goal. These principles help shed some light on why Sourour should not have fulfilled the request presented to him by the pharmaceutical company. Keeping with these principles, thorough research into the drug (especially after

noting that the client's requirement was for the drug alone to be recommended at all times (Sourour, 2018)) would have pointed out some of the risk it presents. Knowing and understanding the potential risk the drug presents would have helped Sourour to decide if deploying the code was right or not. Of course, marketing strategies allow for a lot of loopholes in ethical codes and Sourour's situation was a difficult one, but understanding some of the risk would have given him the heads-up to tweak the code at the very least. In this case, we are saying a contractarian approach would have been a far better way to go about the job; social convention would say do no harm as far as you can help not to. It would say that since you now know that all roads lead to the drug, a deeper understanding of the drug, what it does and what potential risk it presents, becomes very important. In a contractarian setting, after learning that death (even as suicide) was a possibility of the drug, it would mean not deploying it or at the very least reporting it to the right authorities, like the manager in Sourour's firm.

Armstrong discusses professional confidentiality and how it can be navigated with regards to the client. She stated that confidentiality breach has a negative-positive scale on which the professional balances whether or not to honor confidentiality between them and the client. In such a situation, Armstrong argues that the potential for harm to society plays the biggest role in whether confidentiality is maintained or broken. Where there is a high probability of occurrence of an event with low harm potential, it is advised that maintaining confidentiality is permitted, but in a situation where the harm vector is higher even if the probability of occurrence is low, a professional is to break the confidentiality of the client for the greater good. This idea is better declared in the act of whistleblowing, as Armstrong argues whistleblowing can be internal or external but is only permissible if the danger of harm to the public is clear and great. Even with permissibility, there are guidelines that come into play to determine whether a professional can break confidentiality. These guidelines cover whether

the professional has definitive proof that they are right and the company rules are wrong, if they have first tried to blow the whistle internally to managers or all the way up to the board of directors, and also if in their attempt to whistleblow they have given the other party an opportunity to defend themselves and their actions. Of course, the final guide I pointed out comes with its challenges that Armstrong was sure to note, in that countries like the United States have been sure to enact rules that protect whistleblowers from the ire of companies or clients who think differently from them. Confidentiality is key in all areas of work; in the case of developers, a lack of professional confidentiality would mean a rival firm or a client's rival comes out with the algorithm or software first, among other things. But that does not mean that in the interest of protecting confidentiality, the professional is to condone or be part of unethical or morally ambiguous practices. In Sourour's case, just doing his job after realizing it went against the primary goal of the site, which was to provide general information, was not the best professional decision. Sourour knew that the nation's laws did not permit pushing a drug directly and understood that he was writing a site that was to give general information on symptoms the pharmaceutical company's drug can treat, so in realizing that the quiz was only going to point to the drug (whether it was a marketing strategy or not), he should at least have discussed it with his manager. Sourour could have been an internal whistleblower in the beginning after getting the quiz and specifications of what was required, speaking with his manager, client, or even the CEO of the firm. While he did not think he was doing anything illegal, if there was any doubt in the client's requirement, like his manager, he should have spoken up, and after he learned about the death, he should have spoken up louder. In a contractarian setting, he would have stuck with the do-no-harm policy considering the greater good and general public, even as he released or did not release the program.

The range of technology is growing in conjunction with the value and influence of programmers/developers. Since the algorithms and programs that run these technological advancements have no conscience, and by extension no moral or ethical compass, it is up to the moral and ethical compasses of the developers to hold technology within bounds. Sourour gives an interesting case of how the developer's compass is the final defense; most clients are only concerned with how much money they can make and worry very little about the effects of their products. The code of ethics for computing professionals gives a general guide on how these professionals should conduct themselves. In addition, Armstrong emphasizes the point of general public and societal good in doing your job. While Sourour did complete the work and regretted its effects, this paper argues that following the code of ethics for computer professionals while acting in a contractarian manner would have allowed Sourour to avoid his regret and guilt.