Hackers for Hire

Below, you’ll find instructions for your first writing assignment. You should write an essay between 3,000 and 5,000 characters long. Your submission should be **anonymous** (i.e. don’t put your name or netid anywhere in the essay.) The thesis of your response should make the case for who you believe should be held morally accountable for the abuses of this software. You will use one of the ethical theories learned in class (character, consequence, or virtue based ethics) to support your position.

In your assignment text file (W1/submission.txt), you will find an assigned ethical theory to make an argument from. You must appeal to this ethical theory and **only** this ethical theory in your essay. Remember to focus on your theory’s notion of intrinsic good.

Within your essay, you also should address the questions below and use the references given. Again, your response should be one coherent essay, **not** a series of disconnected answers to the prompt questions. If you would like to cite any external sources in your essay, you may use any citation style you prefer (a simple numbered list of URLs at the bottom is fine.) Your essay should be a text only file. You should copy the text of your essay into the submission.txt file in your W1 svn directory and commit the changes. Instructions for using svn are available [here](#).

Remember that the deadline for writing assignments is Friday at 11:59pm (September 15th in this case.)

Your imagined audience for this essay is a fellow CS student who is not in this class. Assume they have vaguely heard class terms before but aren’t intimately familiar with them, nor are they familiar with the particular situation you are writing about.

Your response should:

- be between **3,000 and 5,000 characters long**
- conform to the writing rubric
- be driven by a clear thesis
- address the questions below while remaining one coherent essay, **not** a series of disconnected answers
- use the resources provided (and any research you care to do on your own) to support your argument

Background

Finfisher is a software exploit tool for remote computer monitoring created by a UK-based tech company called Gamma Group. An advanced spyware tool, FinFisher can read encrypted files, intercept emails and eavesdrop on voice over IP calls, and its use has been implicated in human rights violations in countries around the globe, including Egypt, Bahrain, and Ethiopia. Hacking Team and NSO Group are similar companies that produce similarly controversial tools that have allegedly been deployed in Mexico, targeting journalists, students, and even the Mexican president.

Questions

- What ethical concerns do surveillance tools like FinFisher present? Are any of them novel?
- In class, we discuss James Moor’s notions of **policy vacuums** (when no explicit policies are in place to cope with a new technology) and **conceptual muddles** (when a new technology blurs the lines between what were traditionally distinct ideas.) What policy vacuums and conceptual muddles are involved in this technology? Can you think of a way to resolve them?
- Did the developers **intend** for the software to be used this way?
- Did you find Muench’s responses to Gallagher’s inquiries satisfactory? Why or why not?
- As computer professionals, how should we respond to this situation? Do you think the actions of companies like Gamma Group, Hacking Team, and NSO Group reflect negatively on our industry?

Resources

The links below (and the first three in particular) will give you basic facts about this software, the impact this technology has on its victims, and a response from the companies to their critics. Resources from the list should be cited in-text (“According to the New York Times…”) but do not need additional citation. Any outside research should be linked at the end of the essay.

- Wikipedia, “FinFisher”
- Ryan J Gallagher, “Spy Trojan Seller on Ethics, Authoritarians, & ‘Bad Guys’ vs. ‘Good Guys’”
- The Verge, “A SPY IN THE MACHINE”
- New details leak about Gamma Group’s PRISM-like spy gadgets made for police
- ZDNet, “Top gov’t spyware company hacked; Gamma’s FinFisher leaked”
- ZDNet, “WikiLeaks names NSW Police as FinFisher malware customer”
- BBC News, “UK firm’s surveillance kit ‘used to crush Uganda opposition’”
- Motherboard, “Hacking and Spying on Its Citizens Is a ‘Human Rights Crisis’”
- Vice, “Mexico Is Hacking Team’s Biggest Paying Client - By Far”
- Motherboard, “Mexican Governor Spied on President with Hacking Team Spyware, Lawsuit Alleges”