Steven Yeung

CSCI 301

Dr. Sessions

19 February 2020

Ethics in Copyright

When it comes personal code and programs, people usually put copyrights on their work

to prevent third parties from accessing it freely. According to Christensson, copyright is type of

intellectual property that provides certain rights to an author (Christensson). In computer

science, programs are like works of literature. The programmer is the author; the program is the

literary work. With copyright, the author's work is protected under law. The United States

views copyright as a protection grant to those with original works. Having a copyright on a

program follows the code of ethics very carefully as it avoids harm and prevents misuse.

Copyrighting a program or other works can prevent harm from being done. With a

copyright, the owner can put restrictions on how their program is used. With certain restrictions,

the program creator can determine who can use their content and how it can be used. According

to the ACM Code of Ethics 1.2, it states, "Avoiding harm begins with careful consideration of

potential impacts on all those affected by decisions" (ACM 1.2). Similarly, the IEEE code of

ethics states, "to avoid injuring others, their property, reputation, or employment by false or

malicious action" (IEEE 9). With a copyright license, the content creator can consider all the

possibilities that could happen when he/she allows permission to use the content. With that

consideration, harm towards others and themselves can be greatly reduced. With avoiding harm,

must come protection. There are different levels of protection a creator can put on his/her

program. Peter Wayner in his "12 ethical dilemmas gnawing at developers today" states that

more protection is always better, there is no amount of protection on code/projects (Wayner 4).

By having a copyright, it creates a foundation of protection for the content creator. The creator

can add more protection to his/her content alongside with the copyright on it. With protection

like the copyright, the program creator can have a better case with the US legal system because

copyright defined in the United States is granting protection to any original work. These are not

limited to books, websites, and computer programs. Avoiding harm is not the only attribute to

the definition of copyright.

Preventing misuse is also a part of a definition of copyright. Misuse can be defined as

wrongfully using a program and/or stealing it and passing it on as an original. By having a

copyright, misuse can be prevented by a large margin because the owner of the program can

control who can have access to it. The owner can decide on who to give the program to. This in

turn can help another person. This aligns with the bible. In Ephesians 4:8, it says, "He who has

been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands,

that he may have something to share with those in need" (NIV). Without a copyright, a third

party can take the program and use it to however he/she wants. With a copyright, a programmer

can lend help to anyone who needs it, or he/she can deny use with a copyright. According with

the ACM code of ethics, it states that it is up to the computing professional (programmer) to take

the appropriate action against intentional misuse (ACM 2.9). With a copyright, the programmer

can control all access within his/her program. The programmer can keep it to him/herself or

allow usage for others.

Copyright is defined as intellectual rights to protection to an original work. In the United

States, a copyright grants absolute protection on original works. They do not only include works

of literature and movies. They also include computer programs. Having a copyright follows

codes of ethics because it prevents two major factors. Avoiding harm and preventing misuse are very well-known issues regarding the definition of copyright.

Works Cited

"IEEE Code of Ethics," *IEEE*, www.ieee.org/about/corporate/governance/p7-8.html.

Christensson, Per. "Copyright Definition." *TechTerms*. Sharpened Productions, 08 September

2009. Web. 19 February 2020. <https://techterms.com/definition/copyright>.

"The Code Affirms an Obligation of Computing Professionals to Use Their Skills for the Benefit

of Society." Code of Ethics, 2018, www.acm.org/code-of-ethics.

The Holy Bible, New International Version. Large Print Edition: Hymnody and Bible House,

1984. Print.

Wayner, Peter. "12 Ethical Dilemmas Gnawing at Developers Today." InfoWorld, InfoWorld, 21

Apr. 2014, www.infoworld.com/article/2607452/12-ethical-dilemmas-gnawing-at-

developers-today.html.