

Editorial

The current issue has a special section on Ethics edited by Caroline Whitbeck who is a leading expert in this field. She directs the online ethics center out of Case Western University in Cleveland. I am most grateful to her for choosing the international aspects of ethics as the theme for the papers for this issue. Efforts to present ethics principles to engineering students are commendable. It is not at all a unified approach we are getting from different corners of the world. The awareness of different concepts is becoming increasingly significant in the globalized world, and it is enlightening to have different viewpoints on ethics. In this issue in particular, the Asian approach to ethics is discussed by Hoole. He argues that there are differences in approach to 'Western' values, related to preferential treatments of religious and family attitudes.

Varying attitudes to ethics are however also visible in our very established cultural surroundings. As publishers we are experiencing an accelerating decline in the ethical behaviour of vendors, universities and even authors. Here are a few examples. The journal allows subscribers to access the online version of the papers by issuing IP access to subscribing libraries. Our web experts have recently been alerted by a significant number of hits on the journal website from several non subscribing institutions. We asked our web experts to check out the IP sources of these hits. It turned out that they were all from one source assigned to one university which allowed other universities to access our site by proxy servers. A further example are numerous orders placed and confirmed for the journal but never paid for. And, on a different sphere, a database company received free copies of the journal and sold the full text papers without agreement of the journal publishers. There are a number of other occurrences in similar vein. Clearly, as libraries have greater constraints on ordering journals, more enterprising sources are finding out how to get around ordering and paying for the journal. These examples are still isolated, but they are on the increase. One can even sense a 'legitimate' conception behind these actions which might be interpreted as ethically sound. Intellectual property should be free, and accessible to everyone. There is a movement for open access journals where all publications can be viewed by everyone without restrictions. The wish for open access is quite plausible in principle. However, someone needs to organize, referee, put it on the web, and if printed pay the copy editors, text editors printers and dispatching company. One can even describe the open access supporters as a protest movement, which sees the journal publishers as exploiters and claim the 'moral' right to free publications. This is like replacing one ethical code with another ethical code-but the bottom line remains the same. Someone has to take responsibility and do the work. Therefore the question remains-are my ethics also your ethics?

Michael Wald