

Ethics

17-313: Foundations of Software Engineering

<https://cmu-313.github.io>

Michael Hilton and Josh Sunshine

Spring 2026

Administrivia

P5 A1 due Wednesday, April 15

No class Thursday April 9, Carnival

Midterm 2 - Thursday April 16

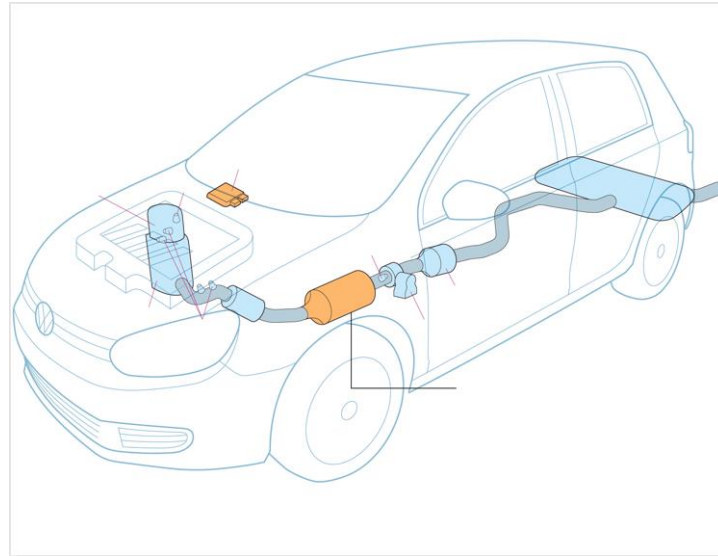
Review Session in recitation next Monday

Practice Exams posted soon

Ethics

Volkswagen Scandal

VW was caught cheating on emissions for Diesel engines



<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/business/international/vw-diesel-emissions-scandal-explained.html?mtrref=www.google.com&assetType=REGIWALL>

What is Human Flourishing?

According to Harvard's Human flourishing program: Human flourishing is composed of five central domains: **happiness and life satisfaction, mental and physical health, meaning and purpose, character and virtue, and close social relationships.**

Why Human Flourishing?

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights."
- Declaration of Independence: "We hold these truths to be self-evident..."
- Internal Compass
- Faith



Activity: (Un)Ethical situations

EA calls its loot boxes 'surprise mechanics,' says they're used ethically

80

'People like surprises,' executive tells UK Parliament

By [Ana Diaz](#) | [@AnaLikesPikachu](#) | Jun 21, 2019, 9:10am EDT

[f](#) [t](#) [SHARE](#)



Domino's Would Rather Go to the Supreme Court Than Make Its Website Accessible to the Blind

Rather than developing technology to support users with disabilities, the pizza chain is taking its fight to the top

by [Brenna Houck](#) | [@EaterDetroit](#) | Jul 25, 2019, 6:00pm EDT

[f](#) [t](#) [SHARE](#)



Some airlines may be using algorithms to split up families during flights

Your random airplane seat assignment might not be random at all.

By Aditi Shrikant | aditi@vox.com | Nov 27, 2018, 6:10pm EST

[f](#) [Twitter](#) [SHARE](#)



Passengers boarding a Boeing aircraft of the low cost airline carrier Ryanair in Thessaloniki Macedonia Airport, Greece. | Nicolas Economou/NurPhoto/Getty Images



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Lime halts scooter service in Switzerland after possible software glitch throws users off mid-ride



Ingrid Lunden @ingridlunden / 9:51 am EST • January 12, 2019

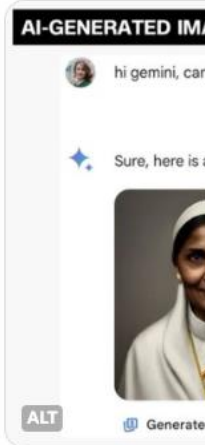
Comment





MMitchell
@mmitchell_ai

I really love the active
Google Gemini's text
representation. As of
world (>4 years! ha)



4:08 PM · Feb 25, 2024

36

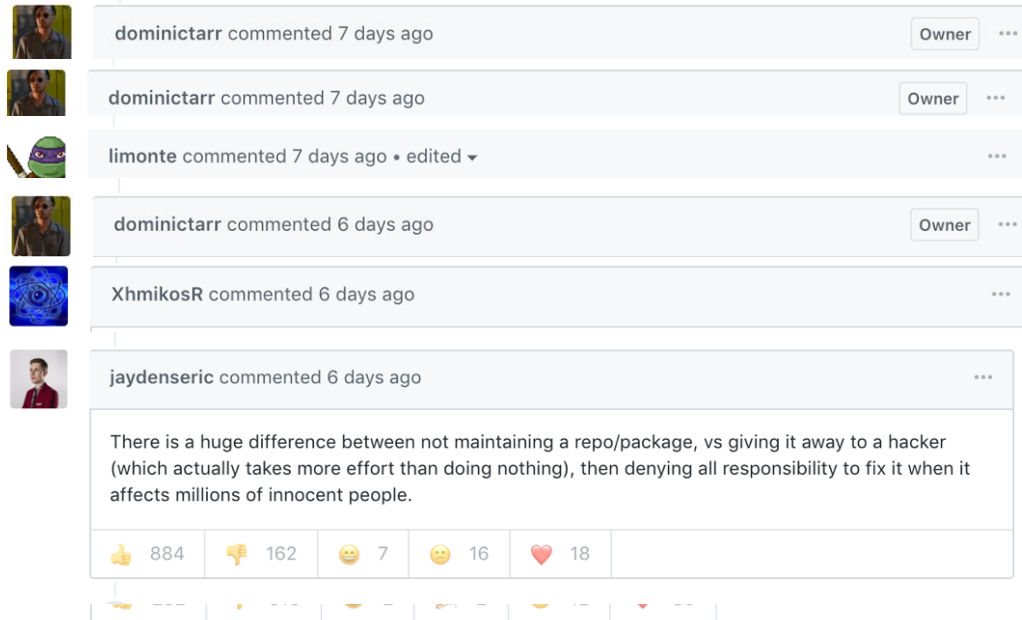
Foresight in AI Chart: Text-to-Image example

Some (of many) example people and use contexts

		People			
		Users		Those affected	
		Intended <i>People who'd like to create art</i>	Unintended <i>Malicious ex-partner</i>	Intended <i>Art appreciators</i>	Unintended <i>Unconsented artists whose art is in training data</i>
Use Contexts	Intended <i>Historic bias depiction, Dream world depiction</i>	😊		😊	
	Unintended <i>Mis/disinformation (e.g., Deep Fakes)</i>		Revenge porn		Creative content that should be paid for is plagiarised
	Out of scope <i>Medical images, World as-it-is</i>	System won't work			

CC BY / Margaret Mitchell / m-mitchell.com

Open Source Maintainers



A screenshot of a GitHub comment thread. The comments are as follows:

- dominictarr commented 7 days ago (Owner)
- dominictarr commented 7 days ago (Owner)
- limonte commented 7 days ago • edited
- dominictarr commented 6 days ago (Owner)
- XhmikosR commented 6 days ago
- jaydenseric commented 6 days ago

The comment by jaydenseric contains the following text:

There is a huge difference between not maintaining a repo/package, vs giving it away to a hacker (which actually takes more effort than doing nothing), then denying all responsibility to fix it when it affects millions of innocent people.

Below the comment are reaction counts:

👍	884	👎	162	😬	7	😞	16	❤️	18	
---	-----	---	-----	---	---	---	----	----	----	--

Uber self-driving car involved in fatal crash couldn't detect jaywalkers

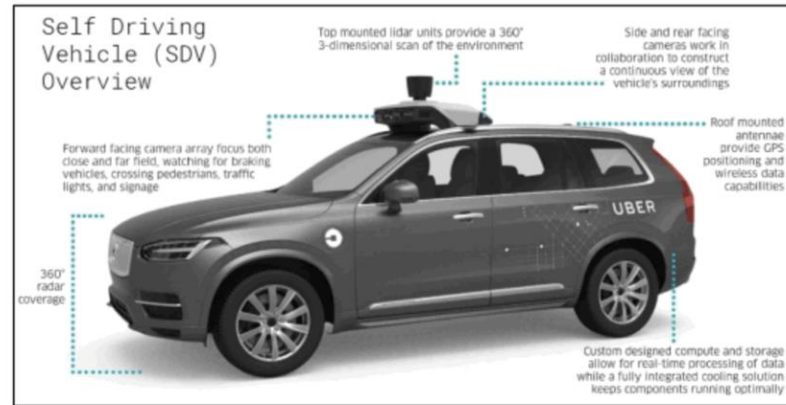
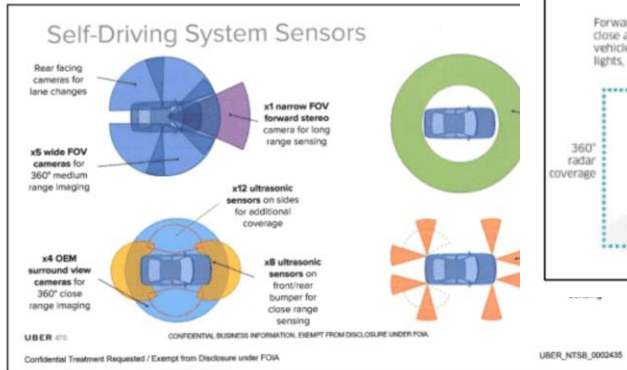
The system had several serious software flaws, the NTSB said.



Steve Dent, @stevetdent
11.06.19 in [Transportation](#)

25
Comments

1131
Shares



Jury finds Meta and Google negligent in social media harms trial

UPDATED MARCH 25, 2026 · 8:19 PM ET

HEARD ON ALL THINGS CONSIDERED

 Bobby Allyn



4-Minute Listen

+ PLAYLIST

TRANSCRIPT



Laura Marquez-Garrett (center), a plaintiffs' attorney for the Social Media Victims Law Center, gathers with family members of victims as they react to news that the jury has found Meta and Google liable in the social media addiction trial, outside the Los Angeles Superior Court on March 25, 2026.

Frederic J. Brown/AFP via Getty Images

Microsoft adds new Designer protections following Taylor Swift deepfake debacle

The loopholes that allowed the creation of images have been patched.



Written by **Sabrina Ortiz**, Editor

Jan. 30, 2024 at 11:52 a.m. PT



Deaths linked to ch

Article [Talk](#)

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

There have been multiple incidents of [suicide](#) or other fatal outcome. In s

Background [\[edit \]](#)

Chatbots converse in a seemingly helpful way, offering help dealing with interpersonal conversation.^[2] They have also often misled people, [conspiracy theorists](#),^[3] and

A 2025 [Stanford University](#) study^[5] and [psychosis](#) found that chatbots can escalate the mental health crisis.^[6]

Canada summons OpenAI senior staff over Tumbler Ridge shooting

24 February 2026

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Nadine Yousif

Senior Canada reporter



The shooting in Tumbler Ridge on 10 February is one of the deadliest in Canadian history.

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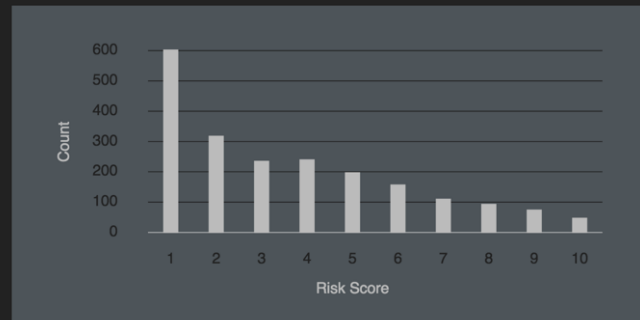
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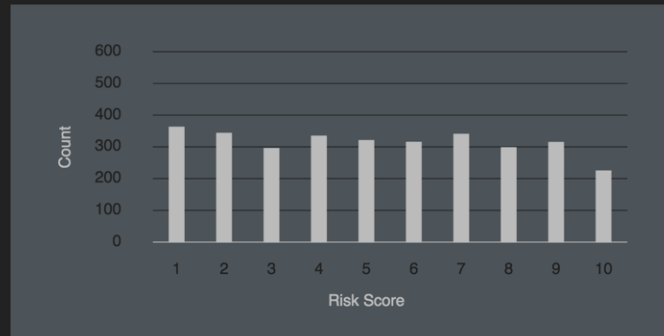
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White Defendants' Risk Scores



These charts show that scores for white defendants were skewed toward lower-risk categories. Scores for black defendants were not. (Source: ProPublica analysis of data from Broward County, Fla.)

Black Defendants' Risk Scores



Prediction Fails Differently for Black Defendants

	WHITE	AFRICAN AMERICAN
Labeled Higher Risk, But Didn't Re-Offend	23.5%	44.9%
Labeled Lower Risk, Yet Did Re-Offend	47.7%	28.0%

Algorithmic Bias

Algorithms affect:
Where we go to school
Access to money
Access to health care
Receiving parole
Possibility of Bail
Risk Scores



Therac-25

Bug (race-condition) in software lead to at least 6 deaths

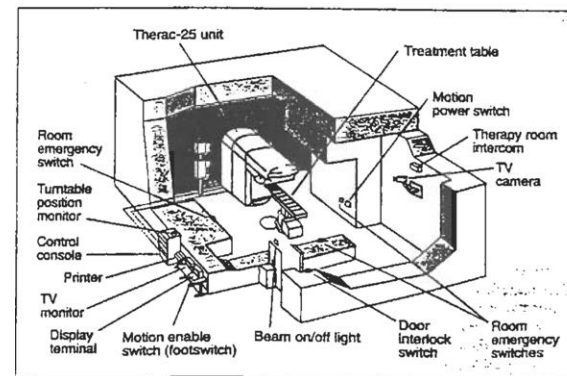
Traced to:

Lack of reporting bugs

Lack of proper due diligence

Engineers were overconfident, removed hardware locks

Race condition of 8 seconds could lead to problems



```
PATIENT NAME: John
TREATMENT MODE: FIX
BEAM TYPE: E ENERGY (kV): 10
UNIT RATE/MINUTE ACTUAL PRESCRIBED
MONITOR UNITS 200.000000 200.000000
TIME (HRS) 9.270000 9.270000
GAPPER POSITION (DEG) 0.000000 0.000000 VERIFIED
COLLIMATOR ROTATION (DEG) 389.200000 389.200000 VERIFIED
COLLIMATOR X (CM) 14.200000 14.200000 VERIFIED
COLLIMATOR Y (CM) 27.200000 27.200000 VERIFIED
BEAM NUMBER 1.000000 1.000000 VERIFIED
ACCESSORY NUMBER 0.000000 0.000000 VERIFIED
DATE: 2012-04-14 SYSTEM: BEAM READY OP. MODE: TREAT APP
TIME: 01:49:55 TREAT: TREAT PAUSE 3-RAT 170777
OPR ID: 033-cf3p REASON: OPERATOR COMMAND: █
```

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US edition

News

4,331 views | Oct 17, 2018, 06:13pm

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We Need To Work Harder To Make Software Engineering More Ethical



Jessica Baron Contributor

Consumer Tech

I write about the ethics of science and technology.

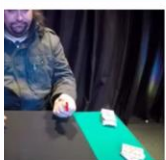


patch the software, but you can't patch a person if you, you know, damage someone's reputation." Sam Hodgson for The New York Times

n

it ethics

READ



to fool AI with magic

Code of Ethics



As an ACM member I will

Contribute to society and human well-being.

Avoid harm to others.

Be honest and trustworthy.

Be fair and take action not to discriminate.

Honor property rights including copyrights and patent.

Give proper credit for intellectual property.

Respect the privacy of others.

Honor confidentiality.

Code of Ethics

Research shows that the code of ethics does not appear to affect the decisions made by software developers.

Does ACM's Code of Ethics Change Ethical Decision Making in Software Development?

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ABSTRACT

Ethical decisions in software development can substantially impact end-users, organizations, and our environment, as is evidenced by recent ethics scandals in the news. Organizations, like the ACM, publish codes of ethics to guide software-related ethical decisions. In fact, the ACM has recently demonstrated renewed interest in its code of ethics and made updates for the first time since 1992. To better understand how the ACM code of ethics changes software-

The first example is the Uber versus Waymo dispute [26], in which a software engineer at Waymo took self-driving car code to his home. Shortly thereafter, the engineer left Waymo to work for a competing company with a self-driving car business, Uber. When Waymo realized that their own code had been taken by their former employee, Waymo sued Uber. Even though the code was not apparently used for Uber's competitive advantage, the two companies settled the lawsuit for \$245 million dollars.

Challenge:

How do we apply ethics to a field (Software Engineering) that is changes so often?

Remember the Dominos case? The ADA law was written before the first website (1990)

To handle this uncertainty about the future, let's focus on three questions we can ask to remind ourselves to focus on promoting human flourishing.

Three questions to promote human flourishing

1. Does my software respect the **humanity** of the **users**?
2. Does my software **amplify positive** behavior, or **negative** behavior for users and society at large?
3. Will my software's **quality** impact the **humanity** of others?

**1. Does my software
respect the humanity of
the users?**

Humane Design Guide

<http://humanetech.com>

Humane Design Guide (Alpha Version)

Use this worksheet to identify opportunities for Humane Technology.

Product or feature:

Value proposition:

Measure of success:

What are Human Sensitivities?

Human Sensitivities are instincts that are often vulnerable to new technologies.

Human Sensitivity	We are inhibited when	What inhibits	We are supported when	Opportunity to improve
Emotional What we feel in our body and in our physical health.	We are stressed, low on sleep, afraid or emotionally exhausted.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Artificial scarcity Urgency signalling Constant monitoring Optimizing for screentime 	Design engenders calm, balance, safety, pauses and supports circadian rhythms.	<input type="radio"/> High <input type="radio"/> Low
Attention How and where we focus our attention.	Attention is physiologically drawn, overwhelmed or fragmented.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Constant context switching Many undifferentiated choices Fearful information No stopping cues (e.g. infinite scroll) Unnecessary movement 	Enabled to bring more focus and mindfulness.	<input type="radio"/>
Sensemaking How we integrate what we sense with what we know.	Information is fear-based, out of context, confusing, or manipulative.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facts out of context Over-personalized filters Equating virality with credibility Deceptive authority (ads vs. content) 	Enabled to consider, learn, express and feel grounded.	<input type="radio"/>
Decisionmaking How we align our actions with our intentions.	Intentions and agency are not solicited nor supported.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Avatars to convey authority Stalking ads and messages Push content models Serving preference over intent 	Enabled to gain agency, purpose, and mobilization of intent.	<input type="radio"/>
Social Reasoning How we understand and navigate our personal relationships.	Status, relationships or self-image are manipulated.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quantified social status Viral sharing Implied obligation Enabling impersonation 	Enabled to connect more safely and authentically with others.	<input type="radio"/>
Group Dynamics How we navigate larger groups, status, and shared understanding.	Excluded, divided or mobilized through fear.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Suppressing views and nuance Enabling ad hominem or hate speech Enabling viral outrage Lack of agreed-upon norms 	Enabled to develop a sense of belonging and cooperation.	<input type="radio"/>

Center for Humane Technology | www.humanetech.com


Now rank the sensitivities 1-8 based on what you now see as the largest opportunities for Humane Design. Then use the second sheet to develop an action statement.

Humane Design Guide

<http://humanetech.com>

Provides a template for considering a piece of software, and asking questions to help us arrive at a “humane design”

Consider 6 human sensitivities: Emotional, Attention, Sense making, Decision making, Social Reasoning, and Group Dynamics

Human Sensitivity	We are inhibited when	What inhibits	We are supported when	Opportunity to improve
Attention How and where we focus our attention.	Attention is physiologically drawn, overwhelmed or fragmented.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Constant context switching• Many undifferentiated choices• Fearful information• No stopping cues (e.g. infinite scroll)• Unnecessary movement	Enabled to bring more focus and mindfulness.	

Identify Opportunities to improve

Humane Design Guide

<http://humanetech.com>

After analysis step, develop plan of action:

1. In what ways does your product/feature currently engage Human Sensitivities?
2. How might your product/feature support or elevate human sensitivities?
3. Action Statement

GenderMag

<https://gendermag.org>

Abby Jones¹



You can edit anything in blue print

- 28 years old
- Employed as an Accountant
- Lives in Cardiff, Wales

Abby has always liked music. When she is on her way to work in the morning, she listens to music that spans a wide variety of styles. But when she arrives at work, she turns it off, and begins her day by scanning all her emails first to get an overall picture before answering any of them. (This extra pass takes time but seems worth it.) Some nights she exercises or stretches, and sometimes she likes to play computer puzzle games like Sudoku

Background and skills

Abby works as an accountant. She is comfortable with the technologies she uses regularly, but she just moved to this employer 1 week ago, and **their software systems are new to her**.

Abby says she's a "numbers person," but she has never taken any computer programming or IT systems classes. She **likes Math** and knows how to think with numbers. She writes and edits spreadsheet formulas in her work.

In her free time, she also **enjoys working with numbers and logic**. She especially likes working out puzzles and puzzle games, either on paper or on the computer.

Motivations and Attitudes

- **Motivations:** Abby uses technologies **to accomplish her tasks**. She learns new technologies if and when she needs to, but prefers to use methods she is **already familiar and comfortable with, to keep her focus** on the tasks she cares about.
- **Computer Self-Efficacy:** Abby has **low confidence about doing unfamiliar computing tasks**. If problems arise with her technology, she often **blames herself for these problems**. This affects whether and how she will persevere with a task if technology problems have arisen.
- **Attitude toward Risk:** Abby's life is a little complicated and she **rarely has spare time**. So she is **risk averse about using unfamiliar technologies that might need her to spend extra time** on them, even if the new features might be relevant. She instead performs tasks using familiar features, because they're more predictable about what she will get from them and how much time they will take.









How Abby Works with Information and Learns:

- **Information Processing Style:** Abby tends towards a **comprehensive information processing style** when she needs to more information. So, instead of acting upon the first option that seems promising, she **gathers information comprehensively to try to form a complete understanding of the problem before trying to solve it**. Thus, her style is "burst-y"; first she reads a lot, then she acts on it in a batch of activity.
- **Learning: by Process vs. by Tinkering:** When learning new technology, Abby leans toward **process-oriented learning**, e.g., tutorials, step-by-step processes, wizards, online how-to videos, etc. She **doesn't particularly like learning by tinkering with software** (i.e., just trying out new features or commands to see what they do), but when she does tinker, it has positive effects on her understanding of the software.

¹Abby represents users with motivations/attitudes and information/learning styles similar to hers. For data on females and males similar to and different from Abby, see <http://eusesconsortium.org/gender/gender.php>

GenderMag

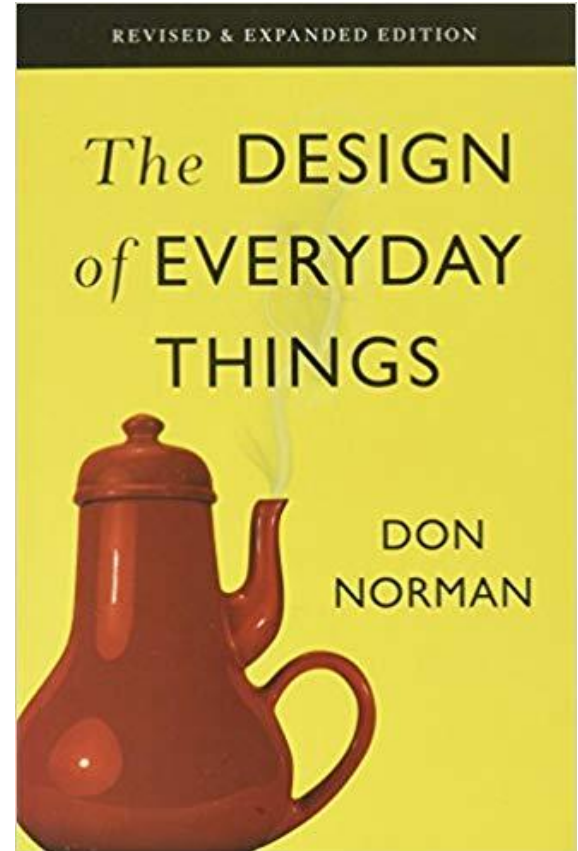
<https://gendermag.org>

<ul style="list-style-type: none">1. Pick a persona. eg: Abby 2. Pick a use case/scenario in your tool, eg:<ul style="list-style-type: none">– in Book Store Navigator app...– “Find science fiction books”	<ul style="list-style-type: none">3a-b. Pick a Subgoal for that scenario. eg: Subgoal #1: “See bookstore map”Q: Will Abby have formed this sub-goal...?<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Yes/no/maybe.Why? Consider Abby's Motivations...
<ul style="list-style-type: none">3c-d. Pick an Action for that subgoal. Action #1: “Tap ‘Browse Off’”:– Q1. Will Abby know what to do?<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Yes/no/maybe.Why? Consider Abby's, ... Tinkering→ First answer Q1. After answering it, then perform the action.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– 3e. Q2. If she performs the action, producing will Abby see progress toward the subgoal?<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Yes/no/maybe. Why? Consider Abby's Self-Efficacy & ...

User Centered Design

User-centered design tries to optimize the product around how **users can, want, or need to use the product**, rather than forcing the users to change their behavior to **accommodate the product**.

-Wikipedia



Agile



Manifesto for Agile Software Development

We are uncovering better ways of developing software by doing it and helping others do it.
Through this work we have come to value:

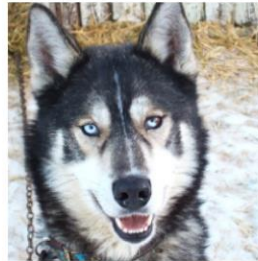
Individuals and interactions over processes and tools
Customer collaboration over contract negotiation
Responding to change over following a plan

That is, while there is value in the items on the right, we value the items on the left more.

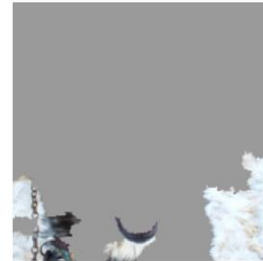
Kent Beck	James Grenning	Robert C. Martin
Mike Beedle	Jim Highsmith	Steve Mellor
Arie van Bennekum	Andrew Hunt	Ken Schwaber
Alistair Cockburn	Ron Jeffries	Jeff Sutherland
Ward Cunningham	Jon Kern	Dave Thomas
Martin Fowler	Brian Marick	

2. Does my software amplify positive or negative behavior for users and society at large?

Dog vs Wolf



(a) Husky classified as wolf



(b) Explanation

Figure 11: Raw data and explanation of a bad model's prediction in the "Husky vs Wolf" task.

	Before	After
Trusted the bad model	10 out of 27	3 out of 27
Snow as a potential feature	12 out of 27	25 out of 27

Local Interpretable Model-Agnostic Explanations (LIME)

<https://github.com/marcotcr/lime>

Prediction probabilities



atheism



christian

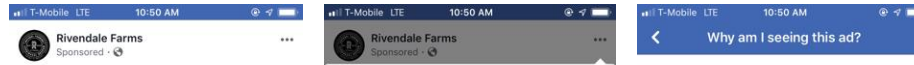
Text with highlighted words

From: johnchad@triton.unm.edu (jchadwic)
Subject: Another request for Darwin Fish
Organization: University of New Mexico, Albuquerque
Lines: 11
NNTP-Posting-Host: triton.unm.edu

Hello Gang,

There have been some notes recently asking where to obtain the DARWIN fish.
This is the same question I have and I have not seen an answer on the net. If anyone has a contact please post on the net or email me.

Explain “why” to customers



There may be other reasons you're seeing this ad, including that Rivendale Farms wants to reach **people ages 22 to 64 who live or were recently near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania**. This is information based on your Facebook profile and where you've connected to the internet.





@dovneon

What Instagram removing likes may mean for influencers and our self-esteem

SCIENCE & TECH - FEATURE

The decision could have a positive impact on the way people use the platform, but harm those trying to use it professionally

Anil Dash on how to prevent abuse

http://anildash.com/2011/07/20/if_your_websites_full_of_assholes_its_your_fault-2/

You should have real humans dedicated to monitoring and responding to your community.

You should have community policies about what is and isn't acceptable behavior.

Your site should have accountable identities.

You should have the technology to easily identify and stop bad behaviors.

You should make a budget that supports having a good community, or you should find another line of work.



tests **passing** codecov **97%** pypi **v0.2.2** conda-forge **v0.2.2**

[Read more about deon on the project homepage](#)

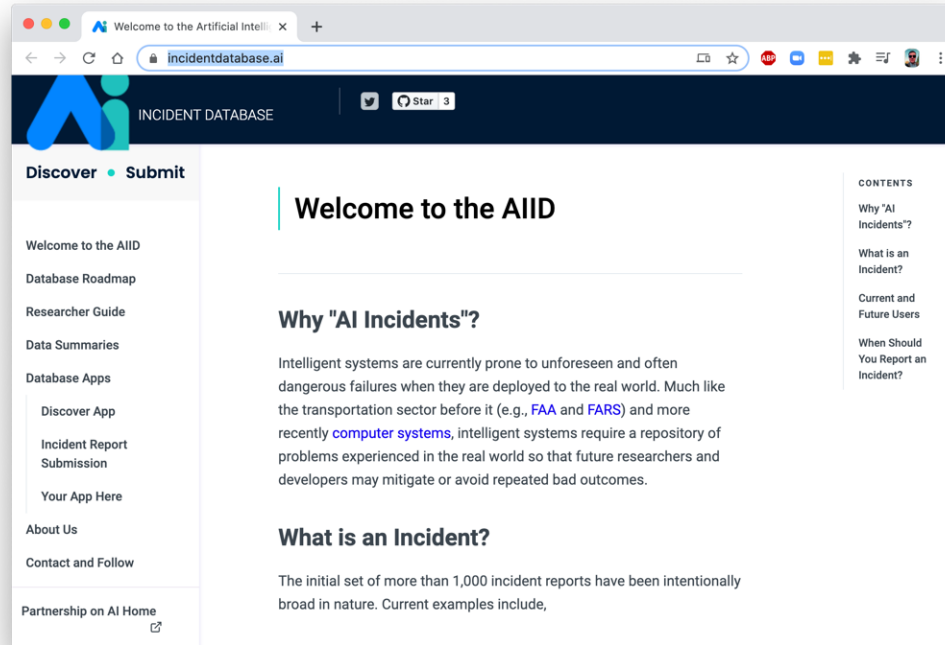
An ethics checklist for data scientists

`deon` is a command line tool that allows you to easily add an ethics checklist to your data science projects. We support creating a new, standalone checklist file or appending a checklist to an existing analysis in [many common formats](#).

δέον • (déon) [n.] (*Ancient Greek*) [wiktionary](#)

Duty; that which is binding, needful, right, proper.

AI Incident Database



**3. Will my software's
quality impact the
humanity of others?**

Quality has long been considered

Quality attributes [\[edit \]](#)

Notable quality attributes include:

- [accessibility](#)
- [accountability](#)
- [accuracy](#)
- [adaptability](#)
- [administrability](#)
- [affordability](#)
- [agility](#) [Toll] (see Common Subsets below)
- [auditability](#)
- [autonomy](#) [Eri]
- [availability](#)
- [compatibility](#)
- [composability](#) [Eri]
- [configurability](#)
- [correctness](#)
- [credibility](#)
- [customizability](#)
- [debugability](#)
- [degradability](#)
- [determinability](#)
- [demonstrability](#)
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- [effectiveness](#)
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- [evolvability](#)
- [extensibility](#)
- [failure transparency](#)
- [fault-tolerance](#)
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- [flexibility](#)
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- [installability](#)
- [integrity](#)
- [interchangeability](#)
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- [relevance](#)
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- [repeatability](#)
- [reproducibility](#)
- [resilience](#)
- [responsiveness](#)
- [reusability](#) [Eri]
- [robustness](#)
- [safety](#)
- [scalability](#)
- [seamlessness](#)
- [self-sustainability](#)
- [serviceability](#) (a.k.a. supportability)
- [securability](#)
- [simplicity](#)
- [stability](#)
- [standards compliance](#)
- [survivability](#)
- [sustainability](#)
- [tailorability](#)
- [testability](#)
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Engineering ethics.

Ethics applies and is formalized in many professional fields: medical, legal, business, and engineering.

The first codes of engineering ethics were formally adopted by American engineering societies in 1912-1914. In 1946 the National Society of Professional Engineers (NSPE) adopted their first formal Canons of Ethics.

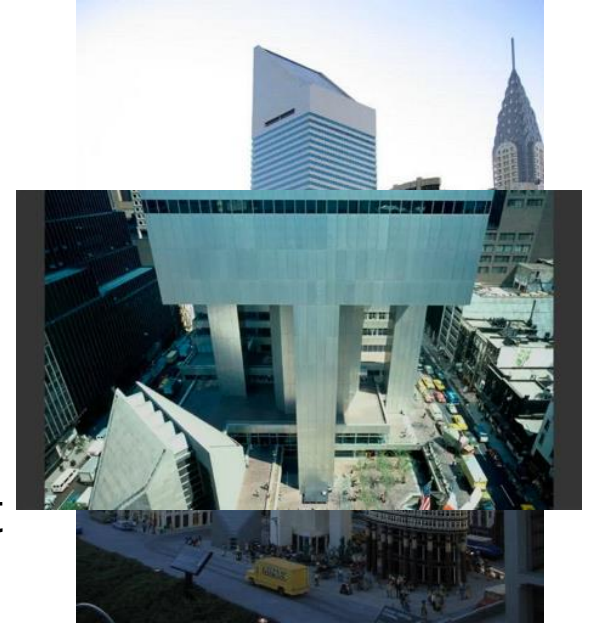
“hold paramount safety, health and welfare of the public”

Citigroup Center, Designed by Structural engineer William LeMessurier

Followed calculations required by building codes

Civil Engineering student Diane Hartley realized there was a problem

Tests showed that winds needed to bring it down would happen every 55 years



Professional Ethics

Professional ethics encompass the personal, and corporate standards of behavior expected by professionals.

First three “professions”

- Divinity,
- Law
- Medicine

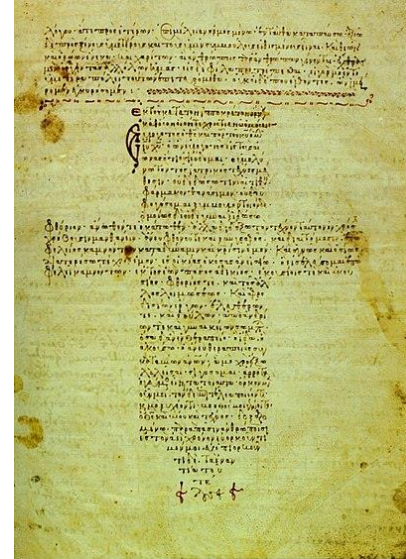


Medicine - Intrinsic

Hippocratic Oath

~450BC

“Do no Harm”



Law -Extrinsic

Bar regulates behavior

Oath to follow rules

Malpractice



Legal Malpractice

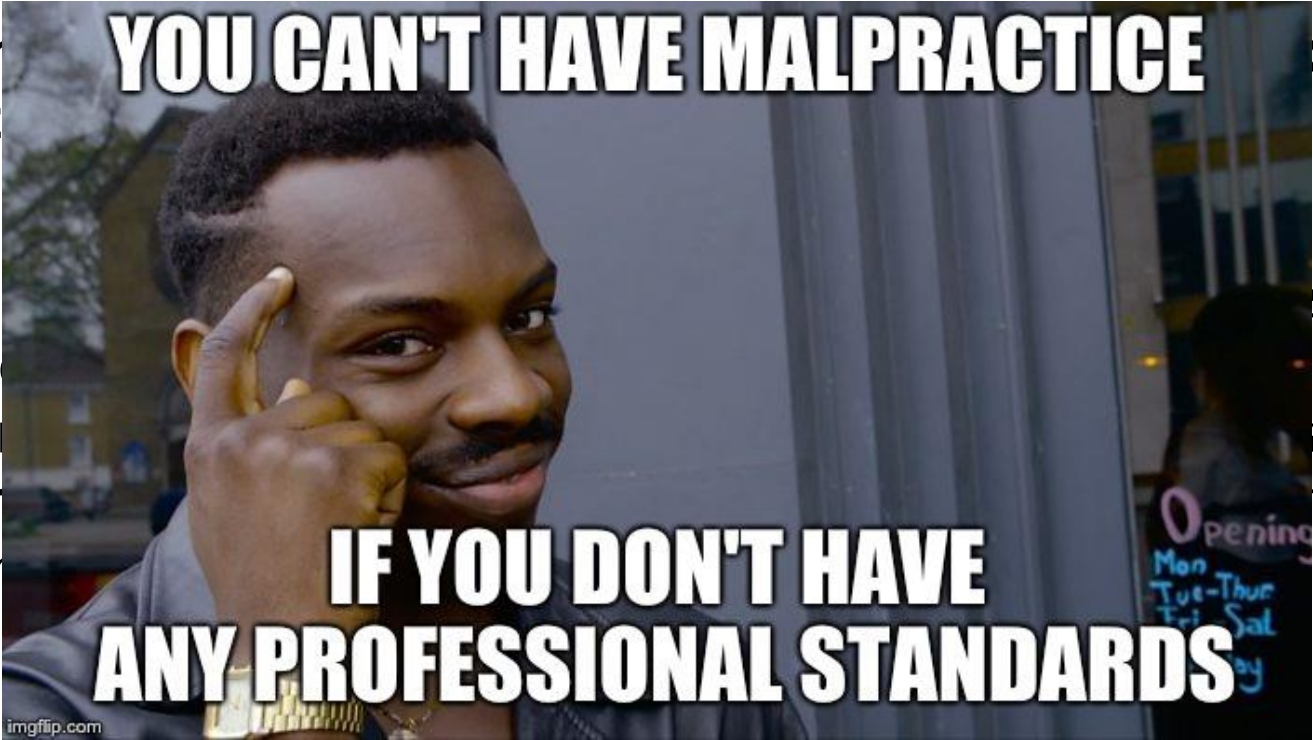
Not every mistake is legal malpractice. For malpractice to exist:

Attorney must handle a case inappropriately
due to negligence or with intent to harm
And cause damages to a client

Malpractice vs. Negligence

Negligence
prudent

Malpractice
negligence
lawyer or
set by the
causing harm



ply
Professional
doctor,
standards
ntly

DISCUSSION: What should we do going forward?

Bioengineering Ethics:

- Respect for Autonomy
- Beneficence
- Nonmaleficence
- Justice

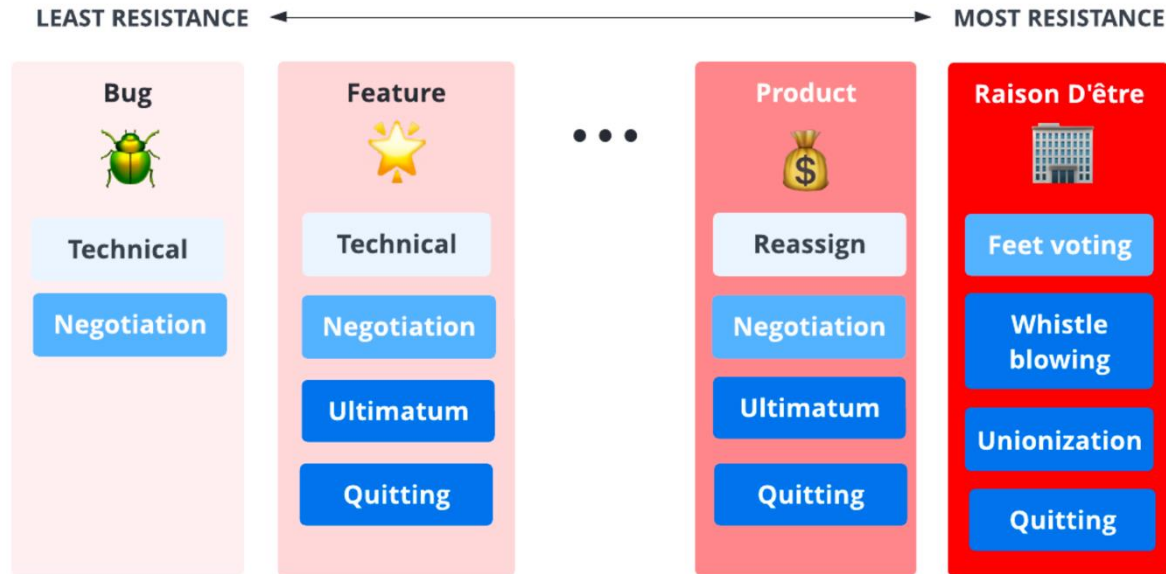
Professional Engineers

What {is / could be} the role of **professional engineers** in software?



By ----PCStuff 03:47, 31 July 2006 (UTC), CC BY-SA 2.5,
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=10340855>

Different scope of concerns addressed differently



Will software quality impact human flourishing?

Most traditional emphasis of “engineering ethics”

What can we learn from other professions?

Should software have “Professional Engineers”?

How do we define “safety critical systems”?

How much testing is enough? How can we convince others to do that much testing?

These questions are the **start** of the **conversation**, but as technology evolves, we must be **vigilant** to ensure we are promoting human flourishing

Interested in more?

17-200 Ethics and
Policy in computing

Three questions to promote human flourishing

1. Does my software respect the **humanity** of the **users**?
2. Does my software **amplify positive** behavior, or **negative** behavior for users and society at large?
3. Will my software's **quality** impact the **humanity** of others?