Contributing to the Good Life of Others

- Ethics not just about avoiding harms – it is as much about doing good
- To live a “good life” is to make a positive contribution to the world through your existence
- And to be able to say at the end of your life that you made the world at least somewhat better than it would have been without your in it
- Of course, we spend much of our life “working”, where we devote a large proportion of our intellectual and creative energies
- Some examples:
  - Excellent doctors contribute health and vitality to their patients and medical knowledge to their interns and colleagues
  - Excellent professors cultivate knowledge, insight, skill and confidence in their students and contribute the benefits of their research to the wider community
  - Excellent lawyers contribute balance, fairness and intellectual vigor to a larger system of justice

Exercise Set 2: 1–2
Obligations of Software Engineers to the Public Good

Why do software engineers have ethical obligations to the public at all?

• One answer: Soft. eng. are human, and all humans have ethical obligations to each other
  – Yes, and ...

• Further answer: Software engineers are professionals
  – you are part of a profession (not just a job, but a vocation)
  – it is your vocation, implying:
    * you are specially drawn to it
    * you are committed to it
    * you would like your life to be identified by it
    * you are well suited, trained, or qualified for it
  – you are invested and committed to the field
    * partly why professionals expected to undertake advanced education and training in their field (besides just gaining expertise)
    * after you graduate and enter the line of work, taken as evidence you have a sincere interest in this kind of work (e.g., you don’t become a doctor just to get a job)
    * you understand and value the contribution that this work makes to the world
    * you want your own personal good and sense of self to be intertwined and identified with the good of chosen profession
    * people frequently change jobs, but less frequently change professions!
  – perception of a professional is more than just skill
    * professionals secure (protect) a vital public good
    * e.g., without doctors public health would suffer and a good life is virtually impossible without some measure of good health
    * without judges and lawyers, public would have no formal access to justice
    * without scientists, the public would be deprived of reliable and carefully tested knowledge
  – Delivering something vital to the good life, needed not just by a few but by all
    * and so receives public support, respect, and trust
    * and thus the power of influence over how people live
    * (Uncle Ben from Spiderman): “With great power comes great responsibility”
  – Thus, software engineers have special ethical obligations to the public they serve

Exercise 3
Habits of Mind and Action: How Software Engineers Can Live up to Obligations

Exercise 3, 4, 5

Five Ethically Constructive Habits of Mind and Action:

1. **Self-Reflection/Examination:**
   
   (a) Spend time on a regular basic thinking about the person you want to become
   
   (b) Identify character traits and habits you would like to change or improve
   
   (c) Reflect on how others would view your actions, choices, and character
   
   (d) Ask yourself how fully you are living up to the values you profess to yourself and others

2. **Looking for Moral Exemplars:**
   
   (a) Instead of ignoring the need for our own ethical improvement by noting failures in others
   
   (b) Get into a habit of looking for and noticing the exemplar actions of others

3. **Exercise our Moral Imagination:**
   
   (a) We know our personal and professional choices almost always have consequences for the lives of others (good or bad)
   
   (b) Rarely do we try to really imagine what it will be like for them (pain it will cause or benefit it will bring)
   
   (c) Even harder when considering stakeholders who live outside our personal circles or our daily view
   
   (d) Expand your understanding (e.g., news, books, films, ...) about the human condition to help better envision lives of others, even those in very different circumstances from our own
   
   (e) Make a habit of envisioning the likely impact of our actions on other stakeholders

4. **Acknowledge your own Moral Strength:**
   
   (a) It feels good to act do the right thing, along with rewards from others (respect, trust, friendship, ...)
   
   (b) But sometimes the doing the right thing will not be the easy thing
   
   (c) Which is when our moral will to live well gives out
   
   (d) A common reason is we fail to act because we think we are too weak to do so (i.e., you tell yourself you can’t to save yourself from trying)
   
   (e) We all have moral strength that we shouldn’t discount

5. **Seek the Company of other Moral Persons:**
   
   (a) Gravitate toward / seek out friends of similar moral character
(b) Can increase our pleasure and self-esteem when we do well alongside them
(c) Can call us out when we act inconsistently with our own personal and professional moral ideals and values
(d) Can help us reason through difficult moral choices

Exercise 6 and 7

Next Time: Software Engineering Code of Ethics

Start with Exercise 8