Eric Conner

CS181 Reaction Paper 1

March 31, 2011

I think each of these decisions comes down to a very subjective, specific situation. It doesn’t make much sense I think to speak broadly of resignation vs. change from the inside because the affects of each of these courses is very dependent on the situation at hand. Parnas had a very clear reason for resigning: the field and direction of computing was not up to the challenge laid out by SDI. Parnas didn’t have moral concerns with working on a defense system. He simply realized the impracticality of the task at hand and resigned his post. In this case resignation is the more powerful direction. One of the short papers talks about how the research chosen by a field shapes the political outcome. It is the technician who notes that a change could be made to produce a more powerful bomb who produces the strategic change and not the commander. I think this is true and, by resigning, Parnas was able to make a fundamental statement about software: it is limited by complexity and the ease by which it can be tested. Parnas was also confident that, while other scientists may have disagreed with his view, no scientist would be successful with SDI. This belief makes resignation all the more alluring, because he felt he could be sure of the final outcome.

Given this analysis, in his position, I suppose I would have made the same choice. Resignation would make a lasting statement. If, on the other hand, it was clearly possible to produce the required technology, resignation wouldn’t be such an alluring option. In this case, if I, the project manager, didn’t take charge than someone else would who may not have the same ethical considerations I did. In that case I would be much more inclined to stay on and try to influence the situation from the inside. Again, I can’t be sure that my ethical considerations are “better” than anyone else’s, but, because I have considered resigning, I can at least assume that I have some broad view of what is right given the technology being developed that another put in my place may not have.