Module 5: Critical Thinking

Ethical Egoism

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**What makes ethics important for software developers?**

**Ethical Considerations that a Developer Might Face**

In order for a dating website to be successful, they must recruit and maintain a large user base. End users will use the dating sites in hopes of meeting someone, and not needing to use the dating website.

Developers need to be careful, and ethically consider how they use algorithms to help drive potential matches on dating apps. Tseng claims that “most recommendation algorithms utilize “collaborative filtering,” where majority opinion influences what a new user sees on their feed” and “because these algorithms are based on human opinion, they introduce bias” (Tseng, 2022, para. 2). If women “disliked” men who are bald when looking for matches, bald men would appear less likely for women who are looking for matches, and the same goes with different races. By using a collaborative filtering algorithm in dating apps, developers are introducing biases on who is more and less likely to be matched, which favors the majority, but can be detrimental to minority subsets of users.

**What can developers do to incorporate ethical considerations into their work?**

In order for developers to incorporate ethical considerations into their work, I would suggest considering ethical concerns throughout the development life cycle of a software product.

**What type of questions should developers be asking?**

I think that one of the most important questions that developers should be asking is how can the software that they are developing hurt someone. By doing so, this allows the developers to come up with sensible solutions to resolve any ethical concerns before their release. Ford identified that Tinder “introduced machine learning to detect abusive messages and language, and then ask the writer to reconsider the message before sending it” and “in 2020, Bumble introduced AI to blur specific images and require user consent to view them” (Ford, 2021, para. 12 ). Tinder released this new feature to “help curb abuse and harassment on the app before it happens.” (Javed, 2021, para. 1). Although it is a great feature that Tinder released, if they were considering the potential for their users to be abused and harassed on the application when they were developing the application, perhaps they would have come up with this solution a lot sooner.

By not only considering how a software solution will improve the lives of others, but it is also equally important to consider how the solution will negatively impact the lives of others. By doing so, developers can come up with safeguards to prevent negatively impacting lives from the beginning, rather than to implement safeguards after damage has already been done.

When developing these dating apps in the first place, if the ethical considerations of how the software could harm others were asked in the development process, then these features could have been introduced upon release of the software, rather than implementing them in a reactionary way.

**What can the software community do to support coping with ethical issues?**

**Should there be consequences of unethical software?**

It is difficult for law to keep up with technology. Andrea Matwyshyn claims that law is generally five years behind technology (Tanneeru ,2009, para. 9). This is because it is difficult to predict technology innovations, and the effects that they will have on society. That being said, I do not think there should be legal consequences of unethical software if there was no intent in the software harming someone else.

Acenda claims that dating applications can cause stress & anxiety, poor body image, and lower self-esteem (Acenda, 2021, para. 4-6). These are all profound negative effects of dating applications, and the creators of these dating applications did not have intent to cause harm to its users when launching their respective dating applications. Should there be consequences for the creators of dating applications on the fact that their dating websites contribute to damage to mental health? If there were consequences for any software solution that resulted in negative outcomes for individuals, I feel that it would stifle innovation, as nobody would want to take the risk of being charged for releasing unethical software.

To reduce the amount of unethical software from being released, software engineers should discuss the ethical considerations during the software development life cycle, and they should also take classes on ethics as well. Sezer pointed out that “a large body of research has shown that unethical behavior often stems from actions that actors do not recognize as unethical” (Sezer et al, 2015, para. 3). By having discussions on the impacts that our software will create, and learning about ethics as a software engineer, it will help prevent unethical software from being released.

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