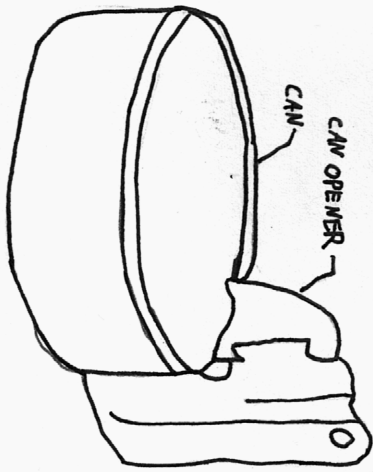


A mini-zine by
Leonard Richardson



Tool Safety

In 2000 I started work on Beautiful Soup, a Python library for getting information out of web pages.

[I pip install beautifulsoup4

Before Beautiful Soup, web browsers could parse bad

HTML:

```
[<a href="crummy.com">  
<b>link text <a></b>]
```

But it was really difficult to do it from within your own computer programs.

Beautiful Soup has been used in thousands of public Python projects.

[<https://searchcode.com/?q=beautifulsoup>

And probably at least as many private/individual projects.)

Most of these projects make peoples' lives better in small ways:

Get sports scores

Record Internet radio streams

Download astronomy data
"Unofficial APIs" for data export

When I work on a piece of software I ask myself:

[Could this be used to hurt someone?]

[Is there something better I could do with the same idea?]

That's what I mean by being thoughtful.

It's similar to the mindset you need to write secure code.

[Help people who want help.]

[Think through the consequences.]

Thanks for reading. I'd like to hear what you build with Beautiful Soup

You can email me at leonard@crummy.com

Beautiful Soup website: segfault.org

<http://crummy.com/software/beautifulsoup/>

Beautiful Soup/

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make things better.

You have power. Use it to

You use it.

is to be thoughtful about how

say thank you, the best way

the past 10+ years and want to

If you've used Beautiful Soup over

I wrote it to be a tool for good.

to make the world a better place.

But I didn't write Beautiful Soup

to make money. I wrote it to

Donate

Beautiful Soup.

I used to ask for donations

from people who used

Sometimes Beautiful Soup is used to do something really important, often as part of a piece of journalism.

[<http://tinyurl.com/YorkshireViktor>]

↳ my favorite example

But it's also been used as a tool for spamming, doxing, and other things I think are unethical.

And it's often used in ways that make rich people richer.

May be not unethical per se, but not the best use of the power we have as computer programmers.

thing.

because an engineer did a good job building the wrong thing.

of harm.

Mistakes can cause a lot of harm.

This stuff has consequences.

Radiation poisoning caused by a software bug

Bridges falling down

heavily on mistakes.

Ethics course. It focused

In college I took an Engineering

Beautiful Soup is just a tool.

It isn't good or bad on its own.

But I chose to make this tool

instead of a different tool.

I choose to work on it now

instead of doing other things.

I can't use "just a tool"

as an excuse.

If I'm going to feel pride

about the good people do

with my software,

I have to share some

responsibility for the bad.