POSITIVE ETHICS IN DESIGN EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT
Technology has a strong impact on the way we live our lives, on our behaviour. Technology seems thereby to be a strong factor in the ethical aspects of our daily live. Being aware of these aspects is part of the responsibility of the designer. Experts in Ethics of Technology support designers in developing this awareness. However valuable this support is, designers may perceive this approach as restrictive rather than inspiring. Moreover, this approach may be perceived as insights enforced upon them rather than as felt from within. This paper explores how the development of ethical awareness in design education can be addressed from a positive perspective, exploring the personal frame of values as a possible starting point for ethical reflections on designing.

Keywords: Positive Ethics, personal values

1 INTRODUCTION

Reflections on the ethical dimension of product design can be considered at different levels of designing. First, one could consider universal ethical principles that should apply for all humans, as for example formulated in the declaration of human rights. Next, at a societal level, one could consider the effect of design and technology on the intended users, and consequently, on how one should design to optimize this effect, or at least, to minimise harm. Next, form the perspective of professional practice, designers could formulate code of conducts, as is now being developed by several design organisations. What these approaches have in common is a top down approach: ethical reflections and perspectives are developed by experts, hoping that designers will comply, and take the proposed perspectives as their perspectives. The value of experts reflecting on the ethical domain of designing, and proposing possible insights to take into account when designing, is evident and relevant, and should be supported and welcomed. However, it may also present two obstacles for a fruitful connection with the design world.

First, ethical reflection in design, considering values such as wellbeing, safety, autonomy, responsibility, and so on, is often a theoretical perspective: focussed on abstract users and abstract use situations [1] [2] [3]. Although illustrated with concrete examples, the theory remains theoretical, searching for a general position a designer should develop towards users. Moreover, ethical theories often focus on the user, and less on the designer being a person himself. One could argue that this position creates a distance between the designer as a person, with his own personal, ethical values, and the designer as a critical thinker on the effects of his design. This distance may be fruitful and enriching when the designer succeeds in bridging this gap. Yet it may also have a negative effect, leading to designers who do not feel committed as a person to the values they are trying to design for, their designs thereby becoming superficial or even inconsistent. A first concern is therefore that professional ethical insights not always take into account the designer as a person, with his own identity, values and concerns. When designing, one not only operates with a focus on the ethical aspects of the effect on the user. One also operates from one's personal framework of moral values in life. Yet, this personal framework is often implicit, one is not aware of it. It is shaped by factors such as culture, education and personal experiences. The design starting points it generates are then taken for granted, rather than critically reflected upon. Becoming aware of this framework, by making it explicit, allows designers on the one hand to critically reflect on it, possibly changing it or fine-tuning it, and on the other hand to be inspired by it. One's personal set of ethical values may prove to be a valuable guideline when designing. It is therefore important and valuable to make design students aware of the ethical values they take into account when designing, as well as the ones they live by.

A second concern is that given this top-down approach, ethics may be perceived as restrictive, as a cumbersome aspect one would rather not deal with, but has to. Much like sustainability issues were seen as cumbersome in the first days of sustainable design. For example, the Delft University of Technology is now working on an ethical code when it comes to involving users in design research, asking students to submit their research proposals to an ethical committee. A pitfall may be that by introducing this ethical code as a set of rules to comply to, students do not see ethics as a potential source of inspiration but as something one hopes to be able to avoid or 'get around'. Yet, also in the case of design students setting up their project, considering the ethical aspects may be seen as a great source of inspiration, as several initiatives in the domain of value-centred design has shown [4] [5].

The challenge in design education is to explore how ethics can be stimulated and supported from a positive and bottom up perspective, rather than from a top down and restrictive one [6]. Next, to stimulate students to perceive ethical reflection as one of their personal concerns, and to show them that their personal ethical values are an inspiring source of inspiration for their professional design practice.

The aim of this paper is to explore how creating awareness, and stimulating discovery of personal values, could be integrated in the development of professional ethics sensitivity in designing, by using the principles of positive ethics. First the paper will present the principles of positive ethics in the domain of psychology and discuss its relevance for designing. Next it will present the results of an assignment done with 45 master design students, who were asked to explore their personal values in daily life. The paper will conclude on how to develop further the notion of positive ethics in designing, focusing of the necessity of an overall vision and accompanying tools and methods.

2   PROFESSIONAL ETHICS: POSITIVE VERSUS REMEDIAL ETHICS

The search for a positive paradigm in ethics in professional practice, as opposed to a restrictive one, led to the insights developed in the domain of practical 'positive ethics' in psychology [7]. The starting point is that ethics should not be about 'avoiding doing the wrong thing' (referred to as remedial ethics), but about 'aspiring to doing the right thing', 'to do the best thing to do'.

2.1 The principles of positive Ethics

Table 1 gives an overview of the differences between remedial and positive ethics, and the impact on professional behaviour. Although these differences are developed for the moral domains of psychologists, these differences could be developed for design practice as well. For example, the concern for 'informed consent', relevant for designers involving potential users in their design research, is inspired by 'avoiding legal problems' from a remedial ethics perspective. From a positive ethics perspective, it would be inspired by 'striving to ensure an optimal participation of the user, whilst protecting his/her integrity'. In this paper, only the principle of positive ethics is presented, A next step would be to create an overview of the moral domains of the design profession.

Table 1. Remedial Ethics versus Positive Ethics. (KnappS.J. & VandeCreek, L.D.[1])

Moral Domain	Remedial Ethics	Positive Ethics
Nondiscrimination	Avoiding discrimination	Promoting understanding and appreciation of traditionally disenfranchised groups.
Competence	Acquiring and maintaining minimal formal qualifications.	Striving for highest standards of self-competence, including, self-awareness and self-care.
Boundaries	Avoiding boundary violations especially sexual exploitations.	Striving to enhance the quality of all professional relationships.
Informed Consent	Fulfilling legal responsibilities such as ensuring that patients sign an informed consent form.	Striving to maximize patient participation in development of the goals of the evaluation or therapy.
Confidentiality	Avoiding prohibited disclosures	Striving to enhance trust.

2.2 Personal versus Professional ethics: the Acculturation model

One could state that remedial ethics are based on the ethical professional codes that are developed for ones profession. Ethics is reduced to applying and complying to predefined ethical principles and codes of conduct. In positive ethics, in addition to the basic starting points offered by remedial ethics, one develops a professional ethics that reflects ones professional aspirations. Because of this aspirational dimension, professional ethics have a personal 'touch'. Positive ethics asks professionals to be aware of their own, personal ethics, the personal values one lives by. It is important that these personal ethics are made explicit, and that a professional is able to see the link as well as the boundaries between the two. Table 2 gives an overview of the possible consequences badly integrated personal and professional ethics. Again, although the table gives an overview for psychologists, it may be translated as relevant for the design domain. For example, a designer that has high standards in designing, but lacks a personal ethic, may become dogmatic, and vice versa, a designer lacking professional ethics and relying only on personal ethics, may lose sight of his social responsibilities and become over-empathic with a specific group of users at the cost of other people exposed to the product.

Table 2. Personal ethics in relation to Professional Ethics, viewed as an acculturation model. (KnappS.J. & VandeCreek, L.D.[1])

	Professional ethics: High	Professional ethics: Low
Personal ethics: High	**Integrated** Professionally informed; guided by personal compassion; highly effective psychologist.	**Separated** Personal compassion not restrained by professional ethics; may get over involved.
Personal ethics: Low	**Assimilated** Adopted professional standards, but lacks compassion; may become rigid and legalistic.	**Marginalized** Low professional and personal standards; risks becoming exploitative.

To conclude, the presented two insights, first the aspiration to 'do good the good thing' rather than to avoid 'doing the bad thing', and second the need for a personal ethics, offer a promising starting points for the explorations of the potential of positive ethics for designers, to be developed in the future.

3 POSITIVE ETHICS AND PERSONAL VALUES IN DESIGN EDUCATION

3.1 Opportunities in design education
In the Master Design for Interaction, the course Reflection on Designing confronts students with the question 'who are you as a designer? '. With aspects such as what they stand for, what inspires them, what methods they use and so on. Early editions of this course showed that students find it easier to reflect on 'design in general' than on themselves as designers, but once they feel connected to the goal of the course, tapping into their personal design stand points is experienced as inspiring and empowering. Moreover, students wonder why these questions are not addressed right at the start of the curriculum, rather than almost at the end, before graduating. This fits the Positive Ethics perspective: it is not a code of conduct, to be learned as a separate aspect of design 'to apply', but an integrated aspect of designing. Much like attention for ergonomics, for aesthetics, for sustainability is, thus as an integrated skills of designing, to be developed *in* designing. However, we have to start somewhere, and the course reflections on designing seem the right platform to explore positive ethics. In this context, the following paragraph will describe a specific exercise to explore the students' personal values they live by, and the relevance for their designing.

3.2 First explorations of Personal Values
Finding one's personal frame of values is not an easy task. Autobiographical reflection is considered a fruitful source and starting point. This includes reflecting on memories of experiences in designing, but also on behaviour and experiences from one's personal life, from childhood until the present day.

After considering personal creative experiences and personal memories, the design students were asked to create their personal framework of values, and next, to indicate how they see these values related to their design work. For this paper, the values they described were clustered as shown in table 1, to get an overview of what kind of values students would put forward.

The personal values the students reported (table 1) reveal values that one does not think of when focusing solely on the profession of designing, or more specifically, on the people who will be using or exposed to the designed products or services. For example, next to expected values such as altruism, social responsibility, and justice, students report the value of being loyal, honest, optimistic, curious and adventurous. These values introduce refreshing nuances of the afore-mentioned social ethical values.

Moreover, it shows that values are not only related towards 'the other', towards feeling responsible for the other, taking care of the other, but also towards the self, being aware of personal needs and taking care of the self. For example, students report the value of 'enjoying life', of being meaningful, of family and friends. Some descriptions of these values seemed like a personal manifesto, as values never to renounce, whatever one is doing.

After the course, discussions with students revealed that exploring these personal values proved to be an enriching experience and inspiring on different levels: first, as a way to enhance self-awareness and self-care when designing; second, as a source of inspiration to elaborate on one's design identity which is useful when creating one's portfolio or designers' profile. Finally, it is a source of inspiration when actually designing, and engaged in a specific project, not only for the design process per se, but also in the process of design research when communicating with potential end-users – knowing one contributes to the self-confidence to engage in a dialogue with others and, thereby, deepening the users insights.
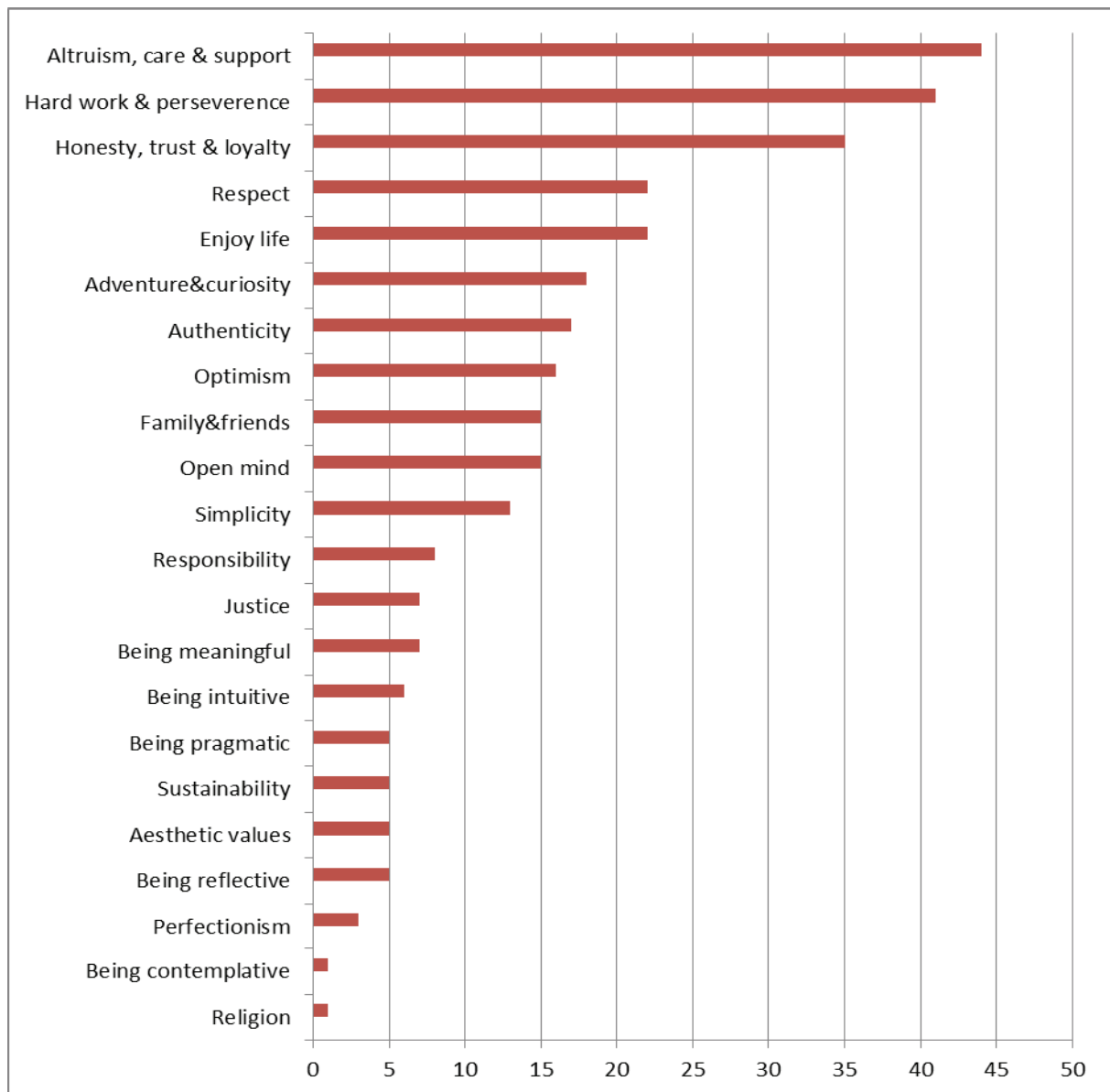
Figure 1. Personal Values Reported by Design master student (n=45)

4   CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

We started out this journey to explore how to create awareness for ethics in de sign education in a positive way: as inspiring and to aspire for, rather than as restricting and to be bothered by. Two directions seem fruitful: to be inspired by the thoughts of Positive Ethics developed in psychology, and to develop education for students to be able to develop their personal frame of values in life.

The next step would be to be more systematic in these explorations, to develop tools and methods to strengthen the exploration of personal values and their benefits to the designer and his design process [8] [9], whilst keeping this an mind, that is, without trying to categorize it a priori and thereby making it limitative. This can be considered as the need for the development of a new vision on ethics in design education.

4.1   The need for tools to create insights in personal ethical awareness

The assignment to explore one's personal values is based on explorations of autobiographical experiences. It is not about making up one's mind about what *could* be a personal value, but about what *proved* to be a personal value. This approach seems to work well, and should be starting point for further development of the assignments. However, the current assignments did not support the students to make the connection with the values one has when exerting the *profession* of designing.

Also, the students report that the link to the professional practice is difficult to make. It is therefore recommended to develop additional assignments, tools and methods focused on the integration of personal values into the professional domain. This will be the challenge for the next edition of the course 'Reflection on Designing'. For example, by developing an overview of the moral domains of the practice of designing, much like the moral domains of psychology presented in table 1.

4.2 The need for a vision on ethics in design education: positive ethics in designing

In congruence with the need for additional tools and methods to develop awareness for personal and professional values in designing, there is a need for a positive vision on ethics in designing, a vision that supports students and inspires them, rather than intimidating them or restricting them. Positive ethics seems to offer an inspirational stance for such a vision. To develop this vision, the first step is to create a supportive basis, this development should therefore happen in dialogue with the different stakeholders: the students, the educators, and the experts in the field of professional ethics. Figure 2 shows an overview of the different layers to consider when developing such a vision.
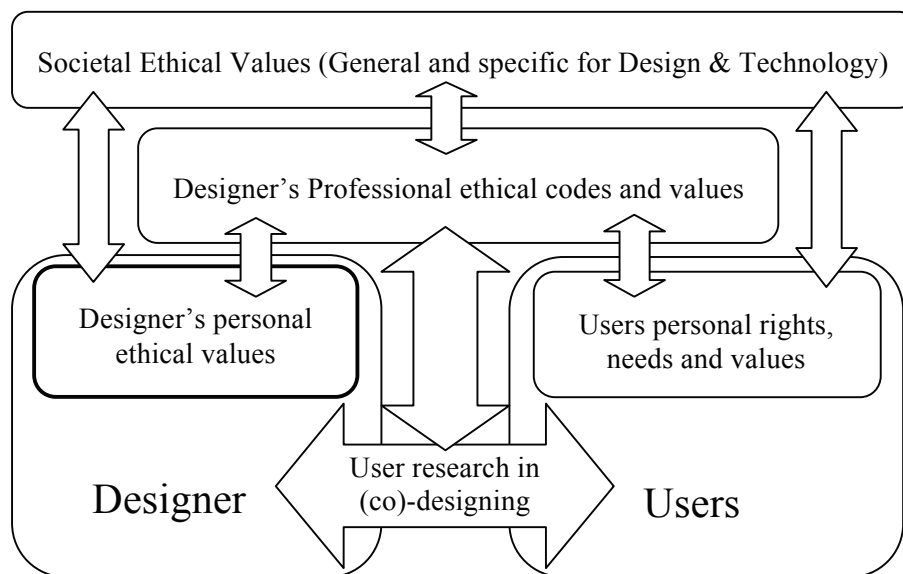

Figure 2. The position of personal ethical values of designers in relation to professional and societal values, as well as to the values of the people one is designing for

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