1A
Runaway Train

You are the driver of a runaway train hurtling down the track at high speed. On the track ahead of you are five track maintenance workers who cannot escape and will definitely be killed when you collide with them. All of the train's controls have malfunctioned except for one lever which could divert your course onto a side-track thus saving the lives of the five workers. However, on this side-track you can see one solitary worker who also would not be able to escape in time and would definitely be killed when the train hits them.

QUESTION:
Should you divert the train to the side-track, killing the one person to save the five?
Is it right to kill one to save the lives of five?

1B
Bystander on the Bridge

You are standing on a railway bridge watching with horror as a runaway train thunders towards you. On the other side of the bridge you can see five track maintenance workers who will not be able to escape in time even were you able to warn them. There is no side-track for the train to divert onto, and therefore no escape for the five workers. They will definitely be killed when the train hits them. The only way that they could be saved would be if some external force such as a very heavy object was to obstruct and derail the train before it reached the workers. Looking around you, the only available object heavy enough to stop the train is an extremely large man who is leaning on the railing next to you. If you were to give him just a gentle push he would fall onto the track and his mass would be sufficient to derail the train and save the lives of the five. Unfortunately, he would of course be killed.

QUESTION:
Should you push the heavy man off the bridge, killing one person to save five?
Is it right to kill one to save the lives of five?

Trolley Problems

The Trolley Problem helps us to become aware of, challenge, and interrogate our ethical intuitions. It reminds us that we cannot always rely on rules to tell us what the right thing to do in any situation is. By drawing this to our attention, the trolley problem helps us to prepare ourselves to face new challenges by helping us to realise that there are limits to ethical theory. This understanding can help us to be better prepared to be unprepared.

We think we know right from wrong. It all seems very clear. Black and white. Simple. Until reality happens, and nothing is as simple as we would like it to be.
"Trolley problems" are philosophical thought experiments which play off two major approaches to ethics (deontology and consequentialism) against each other to expose some of the inconsistencies in our everyday ethical intuitions. The most famous version of the problem ask us to choose whether it would be right to divert a runaway tram car (train or 'trolley') onto a side-track to save the lives of five people at the cost of killing one person on the side-track. From a consequentialist perspective, all other things being equal, the right thing to do would appear to be to save the most lives. Five lives are better than one, and one death is preferable to five. The right thing to do is to follow the course of action which results in the best consequences. The means are justified by the ends. Consistently, the majority of people choose to sacrifice one to save five lives.
The trick up the sleeve of the trolley problem is to then present a second permutation of the first scenario. This second scenario offers a similar choice but one which intuitively feels very different to the first. While a majority of people normally would choose to pull a lever resulting in the death of one to save five lives, far fewer would choose to save five lives if the necessary action required was to become physically involved in the killing of one person. Deontological approaches to ethics hold that there are some principles, such as "do not kill" which apply universally in all situations. The consequences might be terrible, but terrible ends should not be used to justify terrible means.

Trolley Problems in Design Practice

How do we make complex decisions as part of the design process? Sometimes there are no ‘right’ answers or solutions to be found, only compromises to be negotiated. Can you think of an example in your area of design activity where you might have to make a decision between a range of bad options?

Use the space below to map out the some of the principles, duties, rules, obligations and consequences at play in your example scenario. Can you use the trolley problem as a thinking device to help you approach negotiating the ethics of this type of scenario in a new way?

Project:	Ethical: Challenges Issues Problems Opportunities
Responsibilities Consequences Obligations Principles Duties Rules	

In one instance we maintain that it is better for one to die that five might live, but in another case we hold the opposite.
The trolley problem challenges us to consider whether the means justify the ends, whether murder is always wrong, and what the difference is between killing, and letting die. It provokes and pushes us to examine our assumptions, to question what we see as black and white. It invites us to explore the possibility that in the world of ethics, everything might in fact be grey.

Further Reading

Foot, P. (1967). The Problem of Abortion and the Doctrine of the Double Effect. *The Oxford Review*, (5), 5–15.
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Podcast Episode: *Trolleyology.* The Philosopher’s Arms (BBC Radio 4), Series 4, Episode 2.

Key Ideas

Deontology
the idea that there are consistent ethical rules, duties and obligations which remain valid in all situations. We should act in accordance with these principles, even if the foreseeable consequences might be undesirable.

Consequentialism
the idea that we should choose our courses of action by considering which route will produce the best consequences. The right thing to do is the thing which promises the best outcome, even if this means that we might have to undertake activity which is ethically problematic to achieve these consequences. The ends justify the means.

Generalism
the idea that there are general ethical principles which can be applied in response to any encountered situation.

Particularism
the idea that every encountered situation is unique and therefore requires a unique ethical response.

2A
Transplant

You are a surgeon with five terminally ill patients each of whom could be saved by a transplant of a healthy organ from a deceased donor. A healthy man walks into your ward where the five ill patients lie. This man's internal organs could save the lives of the five ill patients.

QUESTION:
Should you kill the healthy man and distribute his organs to save the lives of five?
Is it right to kill one to save the lives of five?

2B
Spacesuits

A piece of space debris has collided with the International Space Station causing widespread damage. The six crew aboard have managed to retreat safely to a sealed compartment. Due to the damage caused by the collision, the only way to reach the Soyuz capsule to return safely to earth will be by exterior space-walk. The crew have access to their spacesuits, but unfortunately five out of six suits have been damaged. Only one crew member's suit remains viable. Components of this crew member's suit could be used to repair each of the five other crew members spacesuits, but this would leave the sixth crew member without a viable suit to escape. Oxygen levels will run out before a rescue mission from earth could reach the stranded crew. You are the mission controller on earth, and you must decide what to do.

QUESTION:
Should you instruct the crew to distribute the parts of the one viable spacesuit, sacrificing one crew member to save five?
Is it right to kill one to save the lives of five?

Trolley Problems

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Relevant Factors in Ethical Reasoning

By playing with variations of the Trolley problem thought experiment we can isolate different factors which might be relevant in various ways to our ethical reasoning and decision making processes. Use the space below to try to work out what the key relevant factors are each of the scenarios we've played with so far.

The Trolley Problem doesn't give us answers about the correct thing to do in a tricky situation. But it can help us understand our own ethical reasoning better. Gaining a better understanding of our own values, principles, and inconsistencies can be really helpful when we come to face real-world ethical challenges.

Factors which shape your decision in 1A Runaway Train	Factors which shape your decision in 2A Transplant
Factors which shape your decision in 1B Bystander on the Bridge	Factors which shape your decision in 2B Spacesuits

In one instance we maintain that it is better for one to die that five might live, but in another case we hold the opposite.
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Further Reading

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Podcast Episode: *Trolleyology*. The Philosopher's Arms (BBC Radio 4), Series 4, Episode 2.

Key Ideas

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Generalism
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Particularism
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3A
Aristotle on the Bridge

A life-sized solid bronze figurative statue of the philosopher Aristotle in a classical style is being installed in pride of place atop a picturesque railway bridge. An eagle-eyed bystander spots a runaway train and five track maintenance workers in danger on the tracks. They heroically push the unsecured statue off the bridge into the path of the oncoming train, derailing it and saving the worker's lives. Unfortunately, Aristotle has of course now been smashed, ground up, and generally disintegrated into small chunks of the raw bronze from which he was cast. The grateful employers of the saved track maintenance workers offer to restore the statue of Aristotle to its rightful place on the bridge at their own expense. They painstakingly collect and melt down every last crumb of the original bronze, re-casting it as a perfect cube, now securely bolted to the plinth overlooking the track.

QUESTION:
Has Aristotle been returned to his plinth? What (if anything) has not been returned to the plinth?

3B
Theseus' Ship

Having returned to Athens after slaying the Minotaur, the ancient Greek hero Theseus docks his ship in the harbour, where it remains for several hundred years being carefully looked after by subsequent generations of Athenians. Whenever a plank begins to rot or wear out, it is removed and replaced with a new one by the dedicated volunteers of the 'Society for the Preservation of Theseus' Ship' (SPTS). Over time, the entire ship is replaced piece by piece until eventually none of the original material remains. Meanwhile another group, the 'Society for the Reconstruction of Theseus' Ship' (SRTS), painstakingly collect and rebuild all of the discarded original pieces of the ship at their museum on the other side of town. Now that the last piece of the original ship has finally been replaced, a dispute breaks out. The SPTS claim to be the true stewards of Theseus ship. After all, they've looked after it in Athens harbour ever since Theseus stepped off it hundreds of years ago. Yet the SRTS, having fully reconstructed the ship from its original pieces, now also claim to be in possession of the ship of Theseus.

QUESTION:
Which ship is the true ship of Theseus?

Theseus' Ship

At what point and through what process does a collection of raw material become a meaningful object in our perception? How far can one thing change before it becomes something else? When an object changes or is destroyed, what happens to the idea it represented? Do ideas exist independently of, or always in relation to objects? Is the designer's work of re-imagining and re-making the world around us primarily an intellectual or physical task? Is it possible to hold onto or 'own' the ideas with which we work?

Philosophers have argued for centuries about the relationship between 'stuff' and 'things'. The two puzzles presented here challenge designers to think more deeper about the fundamental nature of our activity. Common to all fields and types of design is the attempt to influence the way people perceive and experience meaning through their interactions with the world around them. When we design we take the existing materials of the world around us, reimagine them and reconfigure them into new orders and arrangements. There are significant philosophical and ethical issues raised by both dimensions of this process: the conceptual reimagining of ideas for how the world could be, and the physical reconfiguration of matter to change how the world actually is. Things are made of raw materials, but change and are changed over time. When we as designers purposefully change things in the world, what is it that we are actually doing? Are we just directing the rearrangement of raw materials? It feels obvious that when we give matter form we are doing something more, aiming to imbue raw material with meaning by triggering perceptual links to intellectual ideas and concepts in the mind of the beholder.
The cases of the statue vs its lump of raw material (most famously posed by Aristotle himself) and the ship which is gradually replaced (most famously recounted by Plutarch and later elaborated on by Thomas Hobbes) draw our attention towards the slippery philosophical challenges of material constitution and identity over time. While this may initially appear fairly abstract and unrelated

Theseus' Ship, GenAI, and Design Practice

Development of new technologies in the digital world only heighten our awareness of philosophical and ethical challenges which have always existed in relation to the way we think about the relationship between form and matter, ideas and implementation. The machine learning algorithms of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) harvest and synthesise the collective work of thousands of 'original' creators, and are then able to produce new output which builds on the learning dataset of work fed in.

Current and near future GenAI products do not understand ideas, they simply consume the raw material fed in, and output raw material configured in new forms derived from a synthesis of their dataset. Is this really any different to what we do as human designers? Thinking about the issues raised by Aristotle's Statue and Theseus' Ship, map out some of your thoughts and ideas about originality, intellectual property, plagiarism and creativity in the space below.

Originality

Intellectual Property

Plagiarism

Creativity

to design practice, following this path can lead to some deeply significant discussions for designers to consider.

Intellectual property is just one of these. The dominant economic model of contemporary design relies upon various conceptions of intellectual property. Designers are paid to develop and implement ideas. The commercial design industry is built upon foundational assumptions that ideas can be owned, sold, traded, licensed, stolen, plagiarised etc. Aristotle's Statue and Theseus' Ship challenge us to consider where the idea lives in relation to the 'real' stuff of the material world. When does a design become 'real'? Is it in the moment when a thought in the designer's mind becomes physically recorded in a sketch on paper? What (if any) is the difference in degrees of reality between a thought, sketch, prototype, and final design output?

When a final designed output is duplicated through physical mass production or though digital duplication, does the idea now live equally in all instances of the concept? Or can we argue for some special authentic original status of the idea in the mind of the designer? When a team work together to develop an idea, how do we proportion and allocate ownership of the resulting concept? Does the designer have a right to feel a sense of injustice if an idea is taken, copied and developed by another without permission? When designers release our designs into the world, we relinquish control over them. People will use them in ways we did not intend, and will transform them into new things. Do these evolved designs still 'belong' to the designer?

Our two puzzles give us a starting point for asking questions which have the potential to deeply challenge standard conceptions of design. Do ideas exist independently of artefacts, and can an idea can really belong to anyone? Do we need to reevaluate our conceptions of intellectual property and plagiarism?

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Gallois, A. (2016) *Identity Over Time*. In Zalta E. (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Winter 2016 Edition)*.

Podcast Episode: *Theseus' Ship.* The Philosopher's arms. (BBC Radio 4), Series 2, Episode 1.

4A
The Drowning Child

You are walking through the park on your way to a job interview. As you pass a shallow pond, you notice a small child in the water. The child is crying out for help and appears to be in danger of drowning. There is nobody else around, and you are quite capable of wading out into the water to rescue the child. However, if you do wade into the pond to save the child you will ruin your clothes and quite possibly miss your job interview.

QUESTION:
Should you rescue the child even though your clothes will be ruined and you might miss your interview?
Is it worth a small personal sacrifice to save a life?

4B
The Starving Child

You are walking through the park on your way to a job interview. As you pass a shallow pond you are greeted by a friendly fundraiser who tells you of a famine in a far off country. This sincere and trustworthy individual informs you that many children are at risk of immanent death due to malnourishment, and that a small cash donation of €5 could be used by the charity they represent to feed one starving child until the famine is over. You have €5 in your pocket but you need this for your bus ticket to get to your interview on time.
You gave €25 to a fundraiser from a different charity yesterday, who promised you that this money would be used to save the lives of five children at risk of death from a deadly disease.

QUESTION:
Should you give €5 today to save a far off dying child even though this might cause you to be late for your job interview.
Is it worth a small personal sacrifice to save a life?

The Drowning Child

The case of the drowning child helps us to recognise and explore our own ethical inconsistencies and to challenge both our beliefs and our behaviours. If we would make small personal sacrifices to help someone in need right in front of us, why would we not always do the same for someone further away? Why are our actions not always consistent with our beliefs?

The case of the drowning child – posed by Australian philosopher Peter Singer – brings us face to face with inconsistencies in the ways we determine the boundaries of our own moral responsibilities. Why, if we say we would always jump into a pond to save a child drowning in front of us at the negligible cost of ruining our clothes, do we not always make small sacrifices to care for children dying of famine in far flung countries?
Almost everyone faced with the drowning child problem claims that they would of course save the child in the pond, and that a small sacrifice such as clothing is an insignificant factor in their decision. The vast majority of people also claim that distance is not a significant factor, so if we were able to sacrifice our clothing here to save a child drowning far away the same feeling of obligation to save the child should apply.
This thinking device probes into uncomfortable areas of our everyday behaviours. It asks us to question not just why we might choose to do the right thing, but also why we very often choose not to do other good things which we could, and perhaps should do. Are we responsible only for actions taken, or also for actions we are capable of taking but do not? The ancient Greek word akrasia describes the condition of acting against one's better judgement. Very often we know what the right thing to do is, and are capable of doing this, yet we still choose not to do so. The case of the drowning child invites us to explore our reasons and justifications for this everyday akrasia.
Should we feel guilty when we do not help someone who we could have helped? Where does this stop? Surely we cannot help everyone in need? Do we have greater responsibility for those near to us, or to those who are like us: family, neighbour, social class, ethnic group? Can we find an acceptable balance and come to terms with the realisations that we may not be able to help

The Drowning Child in Design Practice

What obligations and duties do we have as designers, and to whom do we owe these? Reflect upon who you may have obligations of care towards in your area of design practise. Where do these obligations start, and where do the boundaries and limitations of these duties lie?

Use the space below to create a map of your obligations as a designer. Which groups and individuals do you have responsibilities towards, and what are the nature of these responsibilities?
Can you identify moments of akrasia in your practice?

Care?
Duties
Obligations
Responsibilities

to which individuals and groups?

Akrasia?

everyone, but that we almost certainly can help more people than we currently do. How should we change our behaviours? Where should we position the boundaries and reasonable limitations on our obligations and duties to care for others?
In the design context, this thinking device challenges us to consider where the boundaries of design's responsibilities to care for others might lie, and to examine our inner motivations for why as designers we might act in ways which contravene our personal principles.

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Key Ideas

Akrasia
to act against one's better judgement. Knowing what the right thing to do is, yet still choosing not to do it.

Obligation
a strong sense not simply that a course of action is right, but that we should feel compelled to take this course of action, and should feel guilt if we fail to do so.

Encountering Others
ethics comes to life in the real world when we encounter others. For some philosophers of ethics (Emmanuel Levinas for example) the awareness that we share our world with other beings who are like us in some ways and differ from us in other ways, and who make demands of us simply by existing, is the ground-zero foundation of ethics. Is there a difference between the face to face encounter with others, and the vague awareness that others exist somewhere out there in the world?

5A
The Future Child

Mary and her partner Joseph have decided they would like to have a baby as soon as possible. Unfortunately, in a bizarre accident last week they were both exposed to a radiation leak. A letter arrives with the results of tests conducted following the radiation exposure explaining that if Mary becomes pregnant in the next six months there is an extremely high probability that the child will be born with polydactyly: they will have six fully functional fingers on each hand. This need not be a disability, but we can imagine the child experiencing difficulties throughout their life, ranging from cruel comments in the playground, to challenges in glove shopping. However, after this six month period the effects of the radiation will have passed and a child conceived will be born with no increased risk of abnormality.

QUESTION 1: Is it *wrong* for Mary and Joseph to choose to have a baby now, knowing that this child's life would be less perfect than the child conceived in six months time?
QUESTION2: Do Mary and Joseph *harm* their child by bringing it into existence now rather than in six months time?
(HINT: The child conceived this month is a different child to the one conceived in six months time.)

5B
Resource Depletion

The natural resources of the earth are finite: there is only so much oil, lithium, cobalt, etc. on the planet. Some resources can be recycled, but others cannot. Once these resources, such as oil, have been depleted, there will be no more.
There is a benefit for humanity in using these materials now. But depletion today means that future generations of humans will suffer the lack of these resources.
If humans today abstain from resource depletion, we will have to sacrifice our current levels of comfort and convenience. If we suffer this lack today, future humans will benefit from the availability of these resources.

QUESTION 1: Is it *wrong* for humans today to choose to deplete resources rather than consume them at sustainable levels?
QUESTION 2: Do humans today cause *harm* to future humans by depleting the earth's resources?
(HINT: Speculative generations of future humans conceived under different sets of circumstances will be different sets of humans. Compared to a generation with the benefit of sustained resources, the depletion generation may have a lower quality of life but they may still live happy and fulfilled lives. Can we say that our actions have harmed these individuals who have known no other reality?)

The Non-Identity Problem

Design is a future-oriented activity. How can we best care for/minimise harm to others in the future? The Non-Identity problem draws our attention to the complexity of attempts to make judgements about the future consequences of our actions today.

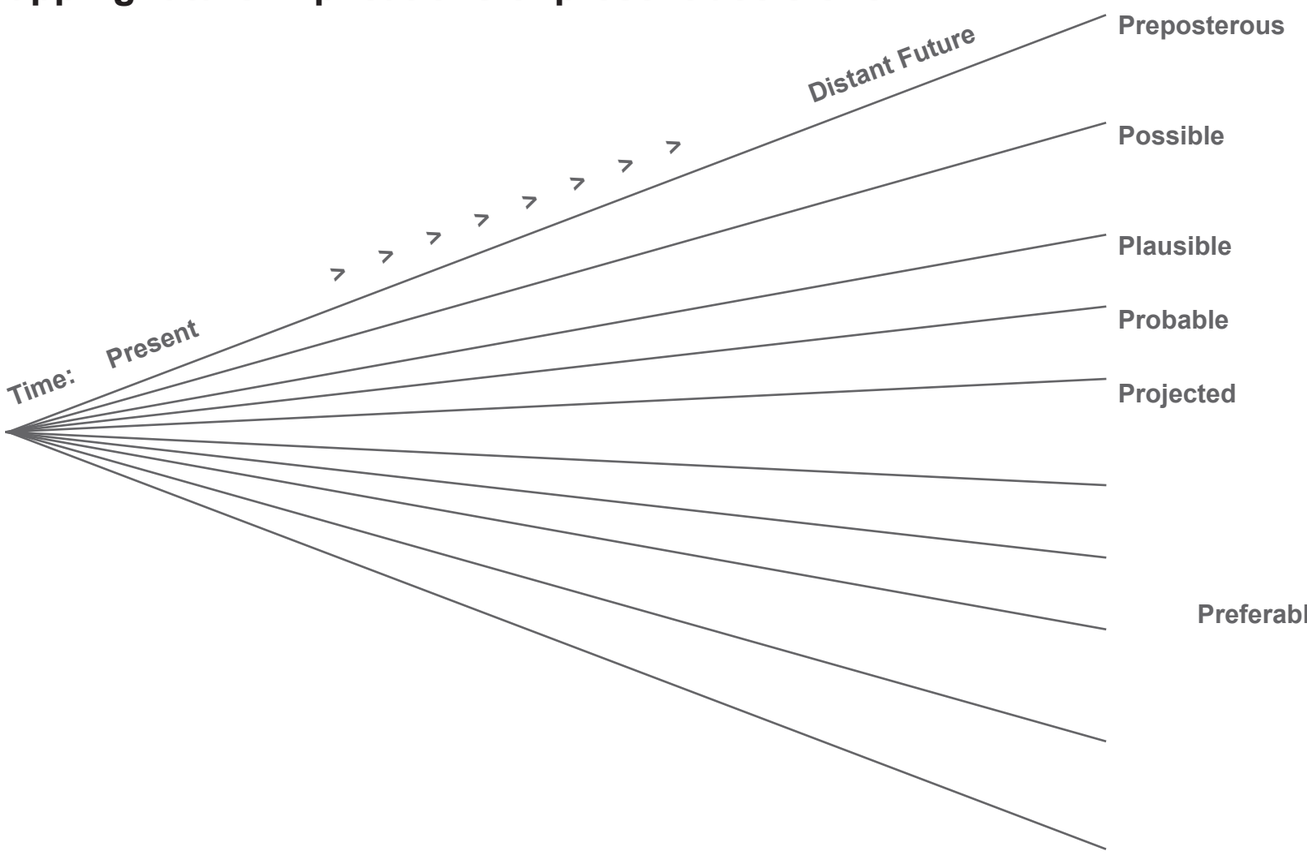
Philosopher Derek Parfit's Non-Identity problem forces us to think carefully about how we conceive of our responsibilities to future humans. Parfit starts with the case of a prospective mother faced with the choice either to conceive a child now, whose life will be negatively affected in a certain way, or to wait and conceive a child at a future date who would be born without this impairment. At first glance this seems like a relatively straightforward calculation. The situation of the baby conceived now would be inferior to that of the baby conceived later. From a consequentialist perspective the optimal outcome can be achieved by waiting. However, the scenario becomes much more complex when we realise that we are talking about two entirely different children, neither of whom yet exists. To choose one is to deny the other existence. It is difficult to argue that the mother would be harming the child conceived now by giving it life, even if this life is slightly impaired. Surely a good, though perhaps imperfect, life is better than no life at all?
To fully illustrate the counter-intuitive insights afforded by this thinking device, Parfit develops the scenario to consider the implications of contemporary global resource use on future populations. Parfit's thought experiment problematically and provocatively demonstrates an argument that no specific person is actually harmed when we make decisions today which negatively impact the imagined lives of potential future populations. A major policy shift, for example the decision to rapidly increase use of fossil fuels, would change working patterns, relationships, children conceived. Within a few generations the future population will be a completely alternative set of humans. These new future humans' living conditions may be worse than they might have otherwise been due to environmental damage and resource scarcity but it can be argued that these specific humans have not themselves technically been harmed. Surely a good, though perhaps imperfect, life is better than no life at all?

The Non-Identity Problem in Design Practice

Herbert Simon famously described the activity of design as the ‘devising of courses of action aimed at changing existing situations into preferred ones.’ But in this process of devising courses towards preferable futures, how are we to determine which futures are to be preferred? Design activity is filled with moments where we are faced with and must choose between a range of paths leading towards divergent potential futures. Think of an example in your work of one such choice between potential future trajectories. Use the space below to map out the range of future potentialities arising from this scenario and some of their possible consequences. Can you use the Non-Identity problem as a thinking device to help you explore the implications of your choices in this context?

Project:

Mapping future implications of present decisions



The Non-Identity problem raises difficult questions and does not provide simple answers. Can a course of action still be said to be wrong, even if it is not wrong in relation to anyone in particular? What do we do when our intuitions are strongly opposed to logical reasoning?

What it does offer is a critique of the use of simplistic consequentialist reasoning in our attempts to consider the implications of activity which aims to influence the future. Trying to calculate total or average levels of happiness in a hypothetical future population may be a fools errand. For designers, whose work is to bring the future into being, how are we to proceed?

In the design context, the Non-Identity Problem challenges us to consider the nature of design’s responsibility towards future humans: whether this is a responsibility to not-harm, or to care, and what the difference and implications of this might be.

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Key Ideas

Potentiality

the act of designing is the act of bringing new possibilities into being by conceiving of novel configurations of existing elements within given contexts. In this sense, the fundamental act of design is the extension of potentiality. At the same time, design constantly involves the conscious act of choosing not to bring other potentialities into actuality. The experience of designing is the experience of encountering the possibility of some-thing both being and not being. When we design, we are constantly faced with choices to either attempt to bring this or that thing into being, or to suppress, inhibit or deny its being.

6A
Absolute Power

The world in which we live is a designed world. We design our world and our world designs us as the environment, culture and social structures we have created shape and influence us in return. This designed world is far from perfect. Injustice, corruption, violence, hunger and illness abound. While some live lives of privilege, leisure, luxury and excess, many others toil and suffer, lacking basic essential resources and goods. You have been given absolute power to create a fresh start, resetting and redesigning the ordering principles of the society in which you live. Your power will only last for five minutes after which the universe will reset according to your plan and you will return to your normal self. Where do you start? As Supreme-Emperor-Designer what principles would you establish to set your society running in the best possible way? Would you tip the scales to give some groups advantages, or try to create a balance to give everyone equal opportunities?

QUESTION:
As Supreme-Emperor-Designer, what three simple rules would you decree to establish your ideal balance of powers, opportunities, rights, and responsibilities in your perfect fresh-start society?

6B
The Veil of Ignorance

Imagine now that as part of the deal in which you become absolute ruler for five minutes, you have to step behind a special curtain called “the veil of ignorance”. As soon as you step behind the curtain your memory will be temporarily wiped so that you cannot remember your own identity. You don’t know if you are rich or poor, where you live, what your ethnicity, gender, heritage or beliefs are. You don’t know what height or age you are, or if you have a disability. You have absolute power to recreate society as you wish, but you don’t know which position within society you will find yourself in once you emerge from behind the veil.

QUESTION:
Under these circumstances would you:
OPTION A: Blindly guess who you think you might possibly be, and try to create the best possible world for that type of person.
OPTION B: Design a perfect utopia for as many people as possible. Quite a lot of people will have to suffer intolerable poverty to maintain this luxury for the fortunate few. Blindly hope you’re one of the lucky ones.
OPTION C: Design a society with the best possible worst-case scenario for everyone. Even if you end up being the worst off, your conditions of existence will be acceptable.

The Original Position

How could we design the fairest possible world for everyone living in it, considering that each individual has unique and differing needs, that there are finite limits to the resources we must all share, and that we hold a vast range of divergent and conflicting beliefs, principles and perspectives about what a good society would be?

American political philosopher John Rawls’ proposed the idea of the “original position”, inviting us to imagine a procedure for producing a truly ‘just’ society (fair for all) that could be accepted by all, rather than having to be enforced by power. The original position is a hypothetical point of view from which any rational person would come to the same conclusions about the basic organising principles of society. Rawls suggests that this position of consensus could be reached if we were able to step outside of our own biases and self-interests, as if stepping behind a “veil of ignorance”. Behind the veil, we are asked to consider how best to ensure justice throughout society by distributing a fair balance of basic social goods such as rights, liberties, duties, powers, opportunities, income and wealth. Having no knowledge of our own identities and personal desires, this deliberation must be shaped only by the ability to think rationally, knowledge of the various competing conceptions of justice within ethical theory, and a basic knowledge of general facts about the physical world and human psychology and behaviour.
Perhaps the biggest challenge of creating a just society is the challenge of diversity. Humans have many common needs and desires, but also an incredible range of specific niche and individual requirements, some of which directly conflict with the needs and desires of others. How do we prioritise whose needs to fulfil? The trick of the veil of ignorance, is that though it denies us knowledge of our own position in society it still leverages the motivation of our personal self-interest, only now in relation to all possible positions. We know that we will exist somewhere in society, but we do not know who we will be and where we will find ourselves when we emerge from behind the veil. Under such conditions it is rational to act in the self-interest of all parties. Therefore, Rawls maintains that it would make sense to distribute social goods in such a way that they produce the best possible

The Original Position in Design Practice

How do we design for others, when we know that each individual has unique and differing needs, and that sometimes these demands clash with each other? One person's specific requirement might hamper the needs or desires of others.
When designing, how do we know what the 'right' thing to do is, when there are so many diverse and conflicting ideas and perspectives about the nature of 'good' design?

Can you think of an example in your area of design activity where the demands of one set of humans (or animals/nature/environment) conflict with another? Can you use the original position as a thinking device to help you approach resolution of such a scenario in a new way? In the space below, map out the principles of design justice you might propose from the original position and consider these in relation to your example.

Design Justice for the best possible world...

outcomes for the worst off in society. If the worst possible position in society is as good as it can be (considering the limitations of natural resources) then we have protected our own self-interest, and the self-interest of all other members of the society. To choose to privilege certain groups over others in the hopes of being one of the lucky ones would be a very risky strategy. While the gamble may or may not pay off for you individually (would you take this risk?), Rawls argues that such a choice would lead to an unsustainable outcome. Any society which begins with a structural injustice affecting a whole sector of its population will be unstable in the long-term. These unjust structures will inevitably require enforcement by persuasion and power rather continuing to be accepted through rational consensus.
While Rawls' conception of the original position is specifically intended to address the overtly political question of the organisation of societies, it is an interesting experiment to apply this thinking device to the activity of design. Just as in the political realm, designers are often faced with difficult balancing acts, having to decide whose needs and desires to prioritise.
What would it mean to practice design with justice for all? What might this look like and how could this be achieved?

Further Reading

Rawls, J. (1971). *A Theory of Justice.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Bianchin, M., & Heylighen, A. (2017). Just design. *Design Studies*, 54, 1–22.
Freeman, S. (2019) *Original Position.* In Zalta E. (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Summer 2019 Edition)*.

Key Ideas

Pluralism
the recognition that there are diverse and conflicting perspectives on complex ethical issues, and that there is value and validity in this diversity. Different people can rationally examine the same situation and come to very different conclusions. A pluralist perspective holds that this diversity is not a problem to be resolved. Recognising difference can spur us on to reach deeper understanding.