

Make the World a Better Place: Design with Passion, Purpose, and Values

Chapter Summaries and Key Words

Book summary: We are all designers. If other species are evolutionarily tuned to blend in, run, or hunt, we are evolutionarily tuned to design. While other species adapt to their environment, we adapt our environment to us.

Yet, design has lost its moral compass.

While well-paying manufacturing jobs have disappeared, drug addiction and poverty have increased in the face of a global pandemic, racism is systemic, and our democracy is under threat, companies worth trillions of dollars are spending hundreds of millions of dollars and harnessing some of our brightest minds to design a virtual world, driverless cars, and a space tourist industry.

If everyone acts to maximize their self-interest, the world is worse off, not better. The world will improve if we all design with passion, purpose, and values to reduce harm, increase happiness, advance knowledge, promote equality, address injustice, and build supportive relationships and communities.

Book key words: Design a better world, make the world a better place, happiness, well-being, knowledge, agency, equality, justice, relationships, community

Chapter 1 Moral Imperative

Summary: We live in a designed world. But in many ways, designers and designs have failed us and their impacts have been disastrous. For all the wondrous inventions that have made the world better, many of our designs have created inequality and done great harm or benefit from it. For some people, our designs have created the best of times. But for many more, there is poverty, hunger, addiction, joblessness, homelessness, and hopelessness. And our planet is suffering from our actions. Our designs have gotten us into a mess and we must design our way out of it. We have a moral obligation to create designs that make the world a better place.

Key words: Moral dilemma, applied ethics, human suffering, moral imperative, designed world, moral obligation, inequality, design failure, bad design, Boeing 737 MAX 8

Chapter 2 What is Design?

Design is often associated with efficient appliances, exciting computer games, dramatic office buildings, luxury automobiles, and trendy dresses. Across these outward differences, design can be viewed as a set of purposes, processes, outcomes, and impacts that turn situations as they are into what we believe they should be. Looked at in this way, design is fundamental to the human experience. While other species are evolutionarily tuned to hunt, run or hid, humans are evolutionarily tuned to design. Thus, not only people with design in their title but lawyers, legislators, doctors, teachers, social workers, nutritionists, homemakers—all of us—are everyday designers and we all need to design a better world.

Key words: Everyday design, everyday designers, design definition, Herbert Simon, design process, good design, Chef Andrés, World Central Kitchen, tragedy of the commons, Elinore Ostrom

Chapter 3 Moral Foundations for Designing a Better World

Summary: What makes a design good is often thought of as qualities of the designed artifact: its functionality, its look and feel, its elegance. But if we are to design a better world, good designs need to be judged not just by their beauty but by their impact. Principles derived from our common humanity can be used to create designs with a positive impact on the world: do no harm, reduce harm, increase happiness and well-being, advance knowledge and agency, promote equality, address injustice, and build compassionate, supportive relationships and communities. These values contrast with those based on pure self-interest. A better world depends on the invisible hands of both self-interest and concern for others.

Key words: Moral obligation, good design, The Enlightenment, moral principles, well-being, equality, justice, self-interest, libertarianism, altruism

Chapter 4 Design within a System

Summary: If we are to improve the world, we must understand its complexities, especially when it comes to complex, adaptive human systems. Human systems are complex networks of relationships and interactions among people that are shaped by individual self-interest and different roles, institutions, and cultural norms in which actions, interactions, and reactions create stable patterns. These patterns are also shaped by concern for others. Human systems work when these interactions and relationships are reciprocal and trusting. Designs that honor this fact contribute to the common good and a better world.

Key words: Complex adaptive systems, systems thinking, self-interest, reciprocity, trust, strong reciprocity, invisible hand, community design, design for the common good, Imagine Plank Road

Chapter 5 Technology, Activity, and Culture

Summary: Technology both shapes and is shaped by our culture and everyday activities. What people do is enabled and constrained by the capabilities that various technologies afford. These affordances and the behaviors they afford propagate throughout society shaping the system and culture. But the culture and our everyday activities can also shape the affordances of technologies. Affordances of technologies, such as AI, social media, Web 3.0, the metaverse, and CRISPR, have moral implications that do not determine but shape people's behavior. To make the world a better place, we need to design technologies that afford behaviors that have morally positive impacts.

Key words: Activity theory, mediation, affordances, person-resource-activity model, embedded technology, moral impact of technology, artificial intelligence, social media, Web 3.0, CRISPR

Chapter 6 The Scientific Tradition

Summary: Design has a history that goes back to the origin of our species. This history has evolved into a variety of design traditions with characteristic purposes, process, outcomes, and impacts. One of these traditions is the Scientific Tradition. This tradition is characterized by the purpose of finding truths related to the natural and social world using a range of empirical methods to generating new knowledge that has implications for our lives in the world. These purposes, methods, outcomes, and impacts have systemic and moral implications which may, but not necessarily, make the world a better place.

Key words: Design traditions, Scientific Revolution, empiricism, proof, paradigm shift, experimental design, Mendelian genetics

Chapter 7 The Technical-Analytic Tradition

Summary: The Industrial Revolution was a turning point in human history, when machines were harnessed to do work, increasing the productivity of humans. It also spawned the Technical-Analytic Tradition of design that created machines and processes with the purpose of optimizing efficiency, productivity, and profits. The purposes, processes, and outcomes of this tradition also have given us a wide variety of consumer products, providing us with convenience and entertainment and generating great wealth. They have also created inequality and harm.

Key Words: Industrial Revolution, maximizing efficiency, optimization, operations research, mass production, consumer economy, transformative innovations, Design Methods

Chapter 8 The Human-Centered Tradition

Summary: The Human-Centered Tradition was spin off of the Technical-Analytic Tradition as designers realized that the highly rational approach to optimizing processes and mechanical systems didn't work well for human systems or human needs. The design process used in the Human-Centered Tradition is more flexible and results in outcomes that tend to be more responsive to human needs and purposes. But the tradition has been reintegrated into the Technical-Analytic Tradition to focus on designs that maximize efficiency and profit.

Key words: Design thinking, human-computer interaction, computer-supported collaborative work, user-centered, emergent design, Alight, IDEO

Chapter 9 The Aesthetic Tradition

Summary: Artistic expression has been with our species since the beginning and has evolved into the Aesthetic Tradition in which designers use a variety of artistic forms, from sculpture and music to film and theater, to serve a range of social and personal purposes. Artistic designs have expressed our deepest fears and our grandest aspirations and they have inspired us to great achievements. But artistic methods and aesthetic products have been known to promote rank greed and populist authoritarians as provide us with aspirational visions of the future.

Key words: Human expression, Arts and Crafts Movement, Aesthetic Movement, Art Nouveau, Art Deco, Bauhaus, Starry Night, Vincent Van Gogh

Chapter 10 The Community Organization and Social Movement Tradition

Summary: One would not normally think of community organization and social movements as a design tradition. But given our broad definition of design as a set of activities intended to take us from where we are to where we should be, the Labor Movement, Civil Rights Movement, and Women's Movement are not only part of a long design tradition, with characteristic purposes, processes, outcomes, and impacts, the Community Organization and Social Movement Tradition is the only tradition that seeks systemic cultural reform. However, like others, this tradition can just as easily lead to authoritarianism as a more equal, just society.

Key words: Systemic harm, systemic inequality, Labor Movement, Civil Rights Movement, Women's Movement, Environmental Movement, Gay Rights Movement, community organizing, collective action, direct action, Black Lives Matter

Chapter 11 Design with Passion and Purpose

Summary: All of our design traditions have improved the world but also led to great harm, inequality, and injustice. To improve the world, the creative passion of designers must be coupled to the purpose of making the world a better place and the values of harm reduction, increasing happiness and well-being, advancing knowledge and agency, promoting equality, addressing injustice, and building compassionate, supportive relationships and communities. A powerful way to do this is to couple moral reasoning and collective action through a design process of moral dialog among a community of co-creators, which requires new roles and skills of designers.

Key words: Happiness, moral outrage, moral reasoning, moral dialog, Michael Sandel, collective action, participatory design, community design, collaborative design, Burning Man

Chapter 12 Reduce Harm and Increase Happiness

Summary: First among the moral principles advanced in this book is cause no harm. Associated principles are reduce harm and increase happiness and well-being. There is so much suffering in our world, much of it human caused, and perhaps the greatest contributions designs can make to improving the world is to reduce it. At the same time, philosophers consider happiness the greatest good and all of us seek to achieve it. Happiness is both momentary pleasure and long-term well-being. Designs that make the world a better place enable people to improve their own lives and increase their own happiness and support the happiness and well-being of others.

Key words: Cause no harm, harm reduction, increase happiness, well-being, flow, positive psychology, happy cultures, designing for happiness, Happy Cities

Chapter 13 Advance Knowledge, Reasoning, and Agency

Summary: Knowledge, reasoning, and agency are the tools with which people can use to make life better for themselves and others and designs can help them do that. But as important as is knowledge in the head, it is also important to know how to use knowledge embedded in the world, in books materials, and other people. Schools are the institutions designed for this purpose and teachers play an important role in advancing knowledge and agency. Knowledge building communities and communities of practice also play an important role.

Key words: Knowledge in the head, knowledge in the environment, zone of proximal development, bounded rationality, metacognition, self-regulated learning, knowledge building communities, communities of practice, collaborative learning, High Tech High

Chapter 14 Promote Equality and Address Injustice

Summary: Equality under the law was a founding principle in designing the newly formed United States, although the principle was flawed in its conception and application. Indeed, the inequality of certain groups was designed into our governmental and economic system, creating injustice and great harm. Too often, the products, services, and policies we design benefit from or even create inequalities. If our society is to be just, it will be because our designs—governmental and economic—make it so. This is a collective effort.

Key words: Equality by design, inequality by design, systemic inequality, tyranny of merit, just society, systemic injustice, theory of justice, reimagining public safety, moral dialog

Chapter 15 Build Supportive Relationships and Communities

Summary: From our earliest moments in life, relationships are important sources of happiness and well-being. These early experiences are the foundation of subsequent relational structures, such as families, friends, and communities. And these social structures that support the common good and shared happiness are how we have survived as a species. Sadly, recent years have seen a loss in relations and interpersonal and institutional trust and an increase in isolation and political division. Designs that can support and repair relationships, bridge differences, and build communities of collective action make the world a better place.

Key words: Caring for others, emotions and relationships, communities and collective action, social capital, loss of trust, Braver Angels, design to support relationships, design to support collective action

Chapter 16 The Economy, Government, and Design

Summary: Our designs are shaped by the economic and governmental reality in which we live. At the same time, our designs can reshape these contexts. Our experience has proven that neither the free market nor grand government plans are inherently good. Both have improved the world; but both have done great harm. Too often, the common good has been sacrificed to pure self-interest, with the corresponding loss of trust in both these institutions. Changes in business and government, particularly at the community level, can advance the common good, restore trust in these institutions, and make the world a better place.

Key words: Tragedy of the commons, self-interest, neoliberal economics, Keynesian economics, government as collective action, government structural limits, America compromised, stakeholder capitalism, invisible hand, concern for others

Chapter 17 Where to Go from Here?

Summary: We are at a crucial point in human history; we can keep going in the direction we are, at great peril to our society and planet, or we can design a better world. You can play an important role in making change. Designing with passion, purpose, and values can become your career, your hobby, or your business. It will take each and every one of us and a culture of everyday design to make the world a better place.

Key words: Improve the world, make the world better, better future, career choices, design as a career, retirement choices, free time choices, everyday design, design culture