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ARTICLE

'Equipping students with an ethical compass.' What does it mean, and what does it imply?

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ABSTRACT

The expression that professionals should be led by their moral or ethical compass is increasingly used by academics, policy makers, professionals, and educational institutes. Dutch universities of applied sciences (UAS), for example, explicitly aim to educate their students to become professionals equipped with a moral compass. This moral or ethical compass is a metaphor of which people intuitively grasp its meaning, but our literature review also shows that various interpretations are possible. We found three clusters of proposed ethical compasses expressing its a) content, b) form, or c) use, which we present in this article. Thereafter, we evaluate which compass can meaningfully assist (young) professionals and, therefore, should be part of the aims and content of education provided by UAS. Based on this evaluation, we describe the possibilities and boundaries of UAS' contribution to the development of their students' ethical compass.

1. Introduction

Professionals in every sector (e.g., economics, accountancy, industry, teaching, health care, scientific research) have always been expected to be publicly accountable for their work and take responsibility for maintaining and enhancing quality of life of those they serve by keeping high standards of work, improving and protecting professional practices, and applying a special body of knowledge to problems, which they acquire through an advanced academic degree course (Brint 1994; May 1996; Pritchard 2006). However, the interpretation of public accountability has gradually changed since the early 1980s, when the new public management paradigm impacted both businesses and nonprofit organizations, such as educational institutions (Hall, Gunter and Bragg 2012). The emphasis on competition, market growth, measured performance in management, and entrepreneurial leadership in the private and public sector, led to small and large

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malpractices that made the news headlines (e.g., fraud scientists like the vaccine researcher Dong-Pyou Han (Reardon 2015), dubious constructions of services and opaque legal arrangements, and the global financial crisis in 2008).

Discussions about the (public) accountability of professionals in recent years have become dominated by public mistrust of professionals' goodwill and sense of responsibility (Biesta 2012; Sullivan and Benner 2005). This has also led to increased control of professionals and the use of standardized work processes and external auditing (Solbrekke and Englund 2011). Yet control can be subverted and does not necessarily eliminate the social and organizational triggers to act against one's personal morality in favor of the profit or ranking of an institution. If increased control can only be part of the puzzle, the question is what else is needed for professionals to regain public trust.

One phrase that is increasingly used is that professionals, as well as managers, business leaders, and administrators, should be guided by an *ethical* or *moral* compass.[1] Using a metaphor like this is pervasive and helpful in everyday life: metaphors stimulate the poetic imagination, are couched in extraordinary language, and structure how we perceive, think, and make choices (Lakoff and Johnson 2008). The metaphorical ethical compass provides guidance by orienting an individual to the *ethical north* in professional work contexts, particularly in unknown situations or situations in which one is confronted with an ethical dilemma and does not know which way to turn.

The metaphor has also entered the circles those educating professionals. For instance, in the Netherlands, universities of applied sciences (UAS)[2] have assigned themselves the task of equipping students with a moral compass to guide students' thoughts and actions (The Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Science 2015, 5).[3] The development of an ethical compass among students at UAS seems important because they will be the next generation of professionals who can rewin the public trust, while adolescents (typically aged between 17 and 23 years old) are often considered vulnerable to influences that diminish their moral attitudes. For example, after merely a year of work experience, students tend to renegotiate and adapt their moral judgment and actions if this is expected from them in the organization they work for, for instance, increasing profits or pleasing clients (Fitzmaurice 2013; Solbrekke 2008).

To investigate what it might mean for UAS' aim to equip students with an ethical compass that they can use to navigate through the ethical dilemmas they will encounter in their work, we formulated three research questions: (1) What kind of ethical compasses are proposed in the academic literature? (2) Which compasses can meaningfully assist (young) professionals and, therefore, should be part of the aims and content of education in UAS? (3) How can UAS contribute to the development of an ethical compass for their students? We argue that the metaphor of the ethical compass may help UAS to obtain an initial idea about what is involved in contributing to students' moral development but that the

metaphor has its downsides, too, because there are many diverging interpretations of it. We conclude that the ethical compass as understood in terms of a moral identity or virtuous character is the most promising, but we make it clear that promoting students' development of an ethical compass is a complex task.

2. Method and analysis of the literature search

To examine the question of how ethical compasses are defined in the literature, we performed a search for (peer-reviewed) articles, books, book chapters, and reports on Google Scholar. We included articles in which the terms moral compass or ethical compass are mentioned in the title – because this is an indication that the subject is central to the article – and those articles published between 2009 and 2018. A special issue of the *Journal of Business Ethics* that looked at approaches to a moral compass that could be used by global leaders caught our attention (Jones and Millar 2010). This issue showed that a number of different propositions and synonyms were circulating in the literature; therefore, the new search terms *global compass, internal compass, value compass*, and *leadership compass* were included as well. Because we were focusing on the *compass* metaphor, other terms such as *the ethical mind* (Gardner 2008, 21) were not considered.

After excluding overlapping sources, 143 articles remained for further examination and we first scanned them by reading the paragraphs in which the search terms were used. This showed that most of the articles touched on the compass metaphor or its features (e.g., *the true north, navigation, magnetizing*, and *wind directions*) only once or dealt with it superficially. These were discarded because they did not provide insight into the meaning, content, or function of an ethical compass. Only those articles were selected in which (a) the ethical compass (or its synonyms) was conceptualized, developed, or reflected upon and those in which (b) the compass metaphor was explicitly related to ethical themes (e.g., moral values, virtues, principles, and ethical decision-making). This resulted in the selection of 18 publications in which the notion of the ethical compass was sufficiently developed although some of these publications turned out to be rather imprecise in their description of the metaphor. To check whether or not we had overlooked other authoritative (the most cited) sources, we conducted a broader literature search without a time frame, which resulted in one new source (Wilcox and Ebbs 1992). To increase reliability, the research team, which consisted of a UAS senior lecturer and two philosophers of education, engaged in iterative dialogue on the analysis of the compass propositions. The results will be discussed in the next section.

3. Mapping the ethical compass

After the analysis of the 19 articles, we found it illuminating to divide the corpus into three main clusters: authors who make (A) a *normative* proposal (about the

content of the ethical compass), (B) a *conceptual* proposal (about the *form* of the ethical compass), and (C) a *practical* proposal (about the *use* of the ethical compass). The proposals that provide clarification of the *content* of the ethical compass suggest an ethical compass navigating (A1) a philosophical theory, (A2) a (single) value, or (A3) a (group of) virtue(s). The proposals that provide a clarification of the *form* of the ethical compass describe it as (B1) moral identity, and the proposals that suggest a practical *use* of the ethical compass present it as (C1) a tool or framework for managing moral challenges and problems or (C2) an environment that enhances a moral (corporate) identity. Below, these six categories will be described in more detail and illustrated with some examples. Table 1 provides an overview of the publications, which are ordered by cluster and categories.

A specific philosophy. In this category, we found four proposals (Costello and Donnellan 2008; Harris 2010; Marques 2017; Stephany 2012). One example is Marques (2017) moral compass, which employs Buddhism as a philosophical foundation to help leaders consider the ethical impacts of their decisions, as well as think, act, and reflect in ethically sound ways while relating to the contingencies in work and life. Marques' moral compass unfolds like a 'noble eightfold path' that encompasses eight interrelated practices and insights, such as contemplation, meditation, telling the truth, and careful evaluations of actions (2017, 5). The eight practices that form the moral compass together help leaders navigate their moral performance (Marques 2017). A contrasting perspective is offered by the global compass of Harris (2010), who aims at providing direction to senior managers and politicians by arguing that the ethical values and leadership ideas of the medieval statesman NiccolòMachiavelli can inspire organizations and leaders to achieve success. In the context of the twenty-first century, Harris suggests that this entails, for instance, supporting coalition building and maintaining dialogue with legislators.

A particular value or cluster of values. In the second category, we found one proposition. Pettit (2014) positions freedom at the *north* of his moral compass, characterizing it as a universal value and the basis for achieving social and democratic progress and international justice. He argues that freedom is the antipower in relationships of domination; therefore, it is a primary good on which equality is anchored.

A virtue or a group of virtues. The third category contains four proposals (Gierczyk, Fullard and Dobosz 2017; Lachman 2009; Nakken 2011; Visser and Van Zyl IV 2016). For example, Lachman (2009) places the virtue of moral courage, which is seen as a desirable quality of a person, at the *north* of a moral compass that encourages health care managers and professionals to address ethical dilemmas in the face of adversity. Visser and Van Zyl IV (2016) see a moral compass as a personal sense of right and wrong; they argue that the cardinal virtues (wisdom, fortitude, temperance, and justice) are the main points

Table 1. Summary of propositions.

Cluster (A) A normative proposal (the 'north' of the compass)	Cluster (B) A conceptual proposal (the form of the compass)	Cluster (C) A practical proposal (the use of the compass)
A1: A philosophical theory • Ethical compass │ Costello and Donnellan (2008) *Philosophy of Levinas* • Global compass │ Harris (2010) *Philosophy of Machiavelli* • Moral compass │ Marques (2017) *Philosophy of Buddha* • Moral compass │ Stephany (2012) *The ethics of care* [a] **A2: A (single) value** • Moral compass │ Pettit (2014) *Value freedom* **A3: A (group of) virtue(s)** • Moral compass │ Gierczyk, Fullard and Dobosz (2017) │ *e.g., wisdom, humility and integrity* • Moral compass │ Lachman (2009) *Moral courage* • Moral compass │ Nakken (2011) │ *41 spiritual principles (and their counterparts) e.g., compassion/ indifference, humility/arrogance, care/apathy* • Moral compass │ Visser and Van Zyl IV (2016) *Cardinal virtues*	**B1: Moral identity** • Moral compass │ Bell (2011) • Internal compass │ Daniels, Diddams and van Duzer (2011) • Moral compass │ Moore and Gino (2013) • Ethical compass │ Schultz (2011)	**C1: As a tool or framework** • Ethical compass │ Brunello (2014) *Tools for propagandists* • Moral compass │ Bowden and Green (2014) │ *Framework for solving wicked problems* • Global moral compass │ Thompson (2010) *Tool for decision-making by global leaders* **C2: As an environment** • Moral compass │ Donnellan (2013) *An ethical infrastructure for management decision making* • Moral compass │ Sullivan (2009) *Corporate governance as an anti-corruption tool* • Leadership compass │ Wilcox and Ebbs (1992) *A moral learning community for students*

[a]We have categorized Stephany's (2012) moral compass proposal in A1, however, she regards the ethics of care as a 'lived virtue', therefore she could also fit in A3 (3).

of the compass that help legal professionals, in addition to the (more objective) professional code, decide what is right and wrong.

A personal identity. Four proposals were found that interpret the ethical compass as an aspect of one's personal identity (Bell 2011; Daniels, Diddams and van Duzer 2011; Moore and Gino 2013; Schultz 2011). The authors agree that the ethical compass is mainly an *internal* compass, considering it to be a belief system 'reflected in one's sense of self' (Daniels, Diddams and van Duzer 2011, 1), an 'inner sense of right and wrong' (Moore and Gino 2013, 53), or internalized experience, knowledge, and awareness (Schultz 2011). This 'sense of moral self' serves as a standard for one to live up to, motivates one to engage in moral action, and ensures consistency between oneself and one's actions (Daniels, Diddams and van Duzer 2011, 2).

A tool or framework. Three authors propose a particular usage of the ethical compass as a tool or framework (Bowden and Green 2014; Brunello 2014; Thompson 2010). For example, Thompson (2010) developed a global moral compass that can assist global leaders to prevent value claims from becoming barriers to achieving a common moral ground in the globalized world. The global moral compass structures morality into two 'intersecting physical/metaphysical' and 'rational/intuitive' domains and four quadrants (Thompson 2010, 26). These represent: 'symbolic images and stories' (intuitive core values, which are seen as the 'north' of the compass), 'symbolic practices and cultivated dispositions' (habits aligned with values), 'reasoned principles and rules' (rational deliberation), and 'decisions and actions' (decisions that shape and reveal character) (Thompson 2010, 20). According to Thompson, business leaders can use this global moral compass as a tool to manage moral challenges, enhance moral competence, and create a 'shared wisdom' in organizations via an ongoing dialogue (2010, 19).

An environment. We found three sources in which the metaphor is explicitly related to the idea that an environment should act as an ethical compass to improve moral (corporate) identity development (Donnellan 2013; Sullivan 2009; Wilcox and Ebbs 1992). These authors claim that the institutional ethos functions as a compass that helps individuals achieve both personal growth and the common good and that setting ethical standards (e.g., a code of ethics adopted by a board of directors), shared values and culture (e.g., customs, practices and institutional contexts), and ethics training programs promote human dignity and sustain the positive behavior of board members, management teams, employees, and students.

In conclusion, we have noted that there is no consensus about what the ethical compass means and, importantly, what its *north* is. Furthermore, some compasses refer to a *north* but also to other dimensions (Thompson 2010) and wind directions (Bell 2011; Brunello 2014; Visser and Van Zyl IV 2016) to guide professionals and business leaders in their work. Thus, the compass proposals form a rather kaleidoscopic image. In the next section, we discuss which of these

compass(es) are valuable for (young) professionals given that Dutch UAS aim at equipping students with a moral compass.

4. Evaluation of the proposed ethical compasses

Having described three clusters of compasses, the following question arises: Which of the proposed ethical compass(es) can meaningfully assist (young) professionals and, therefore, be part of the aims and content of the education provided by UAS? To answer this question, we propose three criteria deduced from the characteristics of an *ethical professional* that are often found in the literature because the presumption is that the ethical compass guides professionals to act as an ethical professional would. First, ethical professionals are characterized as being intrinsically motivated to contribute to the well-being of the people they work for (Kultgen 1988; Oakley and Cocking 2001; Pritchard 2006): they want to do good by doing good work. Second, various scholars emphasize the importance of professionals being able to act independently of those who have power over them, not choosing the path of least resistance when confronted with conflicts or ethical dilemmas (Gardner, Csikszentmihalyi and Damon 2001). Third, it is suggested that ethical professionals abide by professional codes and that they aspire to realize the moral ideals of their profession (Freidson 2001; Kole and De Ruyter 2009; Kultgen 1988). In line with these characteristics, we expect that an ethical compass (a) provides the *intrinsic motivation* of professionals *to act morally*; (b) particularly in situations in which they are *confronted with ethical dilemmas*; and (c) according to *moral standards* and, specifically, *the moral standards* of their profession.

We now apply these three criteria to the compasses described in Section 3. First, most compasses from the first cluster implicitly refer to the role of motivation in their proposals. An exception is Stephany (2012), who presents a moral compass based on the ethics of care as a way to guide nurses in their lives and work. She regards caring to be a multifaceted process 'to act justly' and also describes it as a 'lived virtue,' thereby combining the notions derived from the ethics of care, deontology, and virtue ethics (Stephany 2012, 3). In Stephany's view, care is a virtue that implies nurses are motivated to act in caring ways and that they must integrate this ethics into their everyday lives. Other compasses that use virtues are based on the idea that virtues (e.g., honesty, courage, and trustworthiness) are constitutive of one's character. A virtuous person not only feels, knows, expects, and perceive in a particular way, but he or she also acts virtuously. Therefore, proposing that virtues should form the ethical compass implies that the motivation to act ethically is an inherent part of the compass (Gierczyk, Fullard and Dobosz 2017; Lachman 2009; Nakken 2011; Visser and Van Zyl IV 2016).

The proposition that motivation to act is an inherent part of the ethical compass can also be found in the proposals in the second cluster. These authors

conceptualize the compass as an internal system of beliefs related to a sense of self or as an inner voice that intrinsically motivates one to moral action (Bell 2011; Daniels, Diddams and van Duzer 2011; Moore and Gino 2013; Schultz 2011). Bell (2011, 130) states that this 'personal philosophy' can guide professionals in complex and fluid everyday practices, as a result of which congruence arises between personal desires and moral goals. These authors (as the ones who propose that virtues make up the ethical compass) draw attention to the fact that moral judgment is not automatically translated into (moral) action. Therefore, they suggest that one's compass should become part of one's identity, hence helping bridge the gap between beliefs and action.[4]

The authors who regard the ethical compass as a tool or framework (Bowden and Green 2014; Brunello 2014; Thompson 2010) perceive it as an external source. For example, Thompson (2010) suggests that her global moral compass tool can be used as a 'managerial response' to help leaders stay true to their values. Similarly, in addition to their moral compass framework, Bowden and Green (2014, 367) introduce new professional roles, such as 'moral advocates' (professionals who encourage the development of a moral compass among all stakeholders) and 'moral mediators' (professionals who explore the various action scenarios and their implications) to motivate individuals to employ the moral compass.

Second, we expect that an ethical compass is particularly important in critical situations when individuals might be tempted to stray from the ethical route. Most authors do not explicitly mention this aspect, but some do (Lachman 2009; Moore and Gino 2013; Thompson 2010). For example, Thompson (2010) justifies her global moral compass by pointing out that in a globalized world, business leaders are faced with complex ethical dilemmas. However, both the authors who see an ethical compass as a personal identity and those who think it should navigate on a (group of) virtue(s) do so mainly implicitly. The latter assumes that virtuous professionals know through experience and wisdom how to act and feel good in every situation, even when others display immoral behavior at work (Gierczyk, Fullard and Dobosz 2017; Lachman 2009; Nakken 2011; Visser and Van Zyl IV 2016). Whether a person's virtuous character is sufficiently strong enough to be immune from social forces is, however, questioned by Moore and Gino (2013). Drawing on sociological and psychological research, they describe the various ways in which a person's moral compass can come under pressure. This can lead to 'moral neglect' through, for instance, the social norms of an organization or the organizational goals, 'moral justification' of morally wrong acts through being loyal to colleagues or an organization, and 'moral inaction' through social conformity, bureaucracy or anonymity (Moore and Gino 2013, 56); they suggest various strategies by which professionals can regain control over their ethical compass.

Finally, we assume that the ethical compass should meet moral standards, particularly the moral standards of the profession (ideals and norms). The

compasses described propose a variety of moral standards. For a number of compasses, the moral standards consist of virtues such as courage, wisdom, justice, and moderation (Lachman 2009; Visser and Van Zyl IV 2016). Others propose that professionals ought to act honestly and truthfully (Brunello 2014) or humanely (Costello and Donnellan 2008). Thompson (2010) anchors moral standards in wisdom traditions that orient one's conscience 'toward understanding and practice of the Good and Right' (20). This is in contrast to Harris (2010), who formulates the moral standards for today in line with Machiavelli's philosophy that 'men should always act in a way appropriate to the times' (133). Although many authors mention moral standards, some also explicitly refer to professional moral standards and codes of conduct (Donnellan 2013; Sullivan 2009; Wilcox and Ebbs 1992). About one in four publications in which the notion of the ethical compass was developed refer to specific professional moral standards, such as midwives (Bell 2011), propagandists (Brunello 2014), administrators (Schultz 2011), health care professionals (Lachman 2009; Stephany 2012) and lawyers (Visser and Van Zyl IV 2016). Other compass proposals do not include specific professional moral standards and are particularly designed for business leaders (Harris 2010; Marques 2017; Thompson 2010) or various professional contexts (Bowden and Green 2014).

Thus, we can conclude that regarding the three criteria, all proposals described in Section 3 are intended to motivate professionals to act morally and guide them toward adhering to professional standards, be it that some standards are general in character. The majority of the proposed compasses, however, do not explicitly address the function that the compass should help professionals with when it comes to acting on their moral judgments when faced with ethical dilemmas at work. Here, ethical compasses understood in terms of a moral identity or virtuous character are the most promising (see, e.g., Bell 2011).

5. Developing students' ethical compasses: a complex task

Dutch UAS have set themselves a complex task in aiming for their students to develop an ethical compass, for we have seen that there are various ethical compasses. Moreover, assisting students to use an ethical compass in situations in which ethical dilemmas may lead them to take a nonmoral path is not an easy feat. Indeed, we think that Moore and Gino (2013) are right to suggest that 'unethical behavior stems more often from a misdirected moral compass than a missing one' (55). Because unethical behavior happens everywhere, we assume that in a higher education context, universities' task is not so much to equip students with an ethical compass (that they currently lack) but rather to stimulate students to use their ethical compass (which they already have) in challenging situations and calibrate their compass while taking professional standards into account. This section will not describe practical ideas about

how UAS can foster that their students will develop their ethical compass, be it that we give several examples of good practices, but aims to show the complexity of equipping students with an ethical compass by addressing two central issues.

The first is that assisting in the development of the ethical compass as a moral professional identity requires a holistic approach. The second is that this holistic approach requires UAS to navigate between the Scylla to further the relativistic views of their students and the Charybdis of promoting a controversial moral identity.

In our view, the development of an ethical compass, here understood as moral identity or character, means that UAS adopt a holistic approach in two senses. First, the approach needs to encompass the whole student (Miller 2010). When professionals develop moral character, they do not only know what is right, but they also embody values in their action, have formed intelligent habits over time, and develop 'skills of discernment and practical judgment' in challenging situations (Blond, Antonacopoulou and Pabst 2015, 18). Neo-Aristotelian philosophers of education have explicated and justified a number of methods with which teachers may stimulate students' character development, such as role modeling, habituation, art, and dialogue (Nussbaum 1998; Sanderse 2012; Moberg 2008; Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues 2020). At the same time, educationalists have developed a large variety of practical ways to implement and evaluate character education, mostly in primary and secondary schools, but in higher education contexts as well (Brant et al. 2020; Arthur et al. 2009).

Second, although separate ethics courses are necessary to elucidate and emphasize the importance of professional codes and the ethical aspects of one's profession, the education of an ethical compass cannot merely be an add-on to the curriculum. It requires an approach that is integrated into various courses, along with teachers who exemplify what it means to have an ethical compass and ethical ethos. Ethics courses could be dedicated to learning and reflecting on professional codes and exploring ethical dilemmas in which professionals need their ethical compass. In these, but also in other courses and supervision, students should be stimulated to discuss the ethical and legal issues of their future professional practice, discovering the ambiguities and gray zones and boundaries that should never be crossed, thereby, enabling them to see and cope with the complexity of ethical considerations (Bercovitch and Long 2009; De Ruyter and Schinkel 2017; Gill 2012). Furthermore, stimulating dialogue about moral emotions and the influence of empathy, shame, and guilt on decisions have been suggested as enhancing following one's ethical compass (Myyry 2003; Myyry, Juujärvi and Pesso 2013). Various methods for reflecting on ethical dilemmas and interventions on developing moral reasoning have been developed, ranging from discussing vignettes in groups to individual meetings with mentors to reflect on dilemmas that students have experienced themselves (Cummings, Harlow and Maddux 2007; Foley et al.

2012). Because developing a moral identity cannot be a theoretical enterprise, UAS need to ensure that students can explore their ethical compass in *the world* or in real-life situations, such as internships, real-work projects, practicums and simulations (Bruno and Dell'Aversana 2018; Jackson 2017; Trede 2012). Because internships form a large part of the UAS curricula, in theory, students have ample opportunities to calibrate their ethical compass. However, their moral identity development may easily be snowed under by learning the technical skills of the profession. Therefore, it is particularly important that the supervisors or mentors of the students ask their students to reflect on the possible ethical dilemmas they have encountered (Sanderse and Cooke 2019; Foley et al. 2012; Hunink et al. 2009).

Finally, the UAS themselves (echoing the ethical compass proposed by Donnellan 2013; Sullivan 2009; Wilcox and Ebbs 1992) should be modeling what it means to have and use an ethical compass, which implies being moral learning communities in which teachers and the leadership of the UAS exemplify what it means to be a professional with an ethical compass. Donnellan (2013) suggests conducting an annual ethics audit to assist organizations in assessing the ethical culture and the way organizations 'live out the expectations of its mission, vision and value statements' (25). If done internally, rather than by an external inspectorate, which could affirm the sense of public mistrust and, therefore, increase the apprehension of the teachers and leaders to be open, the UAS could learn a lot; self-inspection gives the teachers and leadership good insights into which values people have and how they (want to) exemplify them. It may, of course, also lead to situations where teachers or leaders fail to live up to the mission or who have an ethical compass that clashes with the one expected. This again asks for an ethical compass to make decisions, showing the importance of having such a compass and the complexity of the task that UAS set themselves.

The second central point we want to address is one in which UAS may not have realized when they have defined their aim, namely the complexity of wanting to avoid enhancing ethical relativism on the one hand and promoting a particular moral identity on the other hand. Section 3 shows that there are various types of ethical compasses and that authors who propose a particular *north* of the compass have different ideas of what that *north* should be. Presenting this diversity would ideally stimulate dialogue and critical thinking about the professional standards and help in critically reflecting on the plurality of values, virtues, norms, ideas, and ideals represented in ethical compasses and professional practices. However, if universities communicate this diversity to students and have them randomly pick the interpretation they like, this could feed into a subjectivist, relativistic meta-ethical position of students that Ebels-Duggan (2015) typifies as 'an overconfident lack of conviction' (86). A relativistic position is, however, precisely what the UAS seem to want to prevent by equipping their students with an ethical compass, which denotes not merely

a certain consistent track of a single professional, but that of a moral representative of a profession (which is not to say that there is no plurality of good ways of acting).

Yet stimulating students to develop an ethical compass may also lead UAS to actively promote *the* compass that they believe to be best (for a particular professional); they might try to ensure that students leave the UAS with the ethical compass that will lead their students in the right direction. This could infringe on the students' autonomy and freedom to develop their own moral identity. UAS might argue that they focus on the professional ethical compass of their students and, therefore, do not intend to form the complete moral identity of their students. In other words, they could argue that they do not promote a particular *personal* moral identity and, therefore, do not surpass the boundaries of their educational prerogative to educate future moral professionals. However, it is impossible to separate the ethical compass that students develop in the UAS (completely) from their personal moral identity because the social context and moral atmosphere of a university of applied sciences are an expression of a view of the good life, which also influences the ethical compass of their students (De Ruyter and Schinkel 2017). This does not mean that UAS should not stimulate the further development of students' ethical compass, but it does imply that they also foster critical thinking that enables students to reflect on the ethical compass promoted by UAS.

Conclusion

There are many studies about whether higher education should stimulate students' moral development, how this can be done, along with how these attempts turn out in practice. However, how they can stimulate the ethical compass of their students is a new theme, also because the ethical compass has only relatively recently become a popular metaphor. An overview of interpretations what the metaphor stands for has not yet been made. Therefore, in the current article, we have examined the question as to how ethical compasses are defined in the literature and categorized the various proposals and propositions to understand the implications for educational professionals (and academics), particularly for UAS.

Our study has led to several relevant theoretical outcomes. First, we have compiled an overview of the major positions of the ethical compass found in the literature, which we could distinguish into three categories: the *content, form*, and *use* of the metaphorical ethical compass. Second, we have noted that there is no consensus regarding what the *ethical compass* means, should do, or what its *north* is. Third, we have introduced the criteria to evaluate which compass can meaningfully assist (young) professionals and, therefore, should be part of the aims and content of education in UAS. These are the motivations to act morally, especially when confronted with ethical dilemmas, according to one's professional moral standards. Although we think that these criteria should further be refined and elaborated, they have enabled us to distinguish between the compasses that

match the UAS context more or less. We have concluded that the majority of proposals partially meet these criteria. One of the issues that most proposals of ethical compasses do not address is the gap between moral judgment and action. The compasses that reflect one's sense of self (a moral identity or a virtuous character) are the most promising way in which to do this. Finally, we have described the challenges that UAS may encounter when promoting an ethical compass. We have argued that this includes the whole school's curricula in which students' moral identities are fostered; here, ethics is integrated in various courses and moral teachers are an example of what it means to have an ethical compass.

The value of the metaphor of the ethical compass is that it helps professionals understand and experience the complex moral domain in terms of another, more familiar domain: navigation. So the notion of the ethical compass helps them 'to quickly master a new and unfamiliar domain' (Maxwell 2015, 90). However, using metaphors can also have its downsides. For example, we have seen that the metaphor comprises diverging interpretations and that the way in which UAS can promote an ethical compass entails a variety of educational elements. We do not know whether UAS have realized the complexity of the task they have set themselves. Indeed, further research is needed to provide insights into how UAS turn the metaphor into a lived practice.

Notes

1. The terms 'moral' and 'ethical' are complex and controversial notions that have been subject to philosophical debate since time immemorial. The current article does not necessary enter into this debate, but we have to be clear on the concepts used. We will use the term 'ethical compass' throughout the paper, which has, in our view, both a deontological and aretaic dimension. The deontological aspect of the ethical compass has to do with the question what professionals ought or must not do, answering this question by explaining and justifying which choices are morally required, forbidden, or permitted by focussing on rules and duties. The aretaic dimension of the ethical compass, in contrast, comprises the kind of life professionals aspire to be, drawing on notions such as virtues and ideals (Alexander 2016). In describing the ethical compass propositions, we follow the authors' terms for the ethical/moral compass.
2. Dutch UAS initiate students into a profession via four-year bachelor programmes. In 2018–2019, these institutes encompassed 453,354 students who were being educated in 36 institutions by 31,027 lecturers/researchers.
3. Although we take the Dutch situation as a starting point, we expect this review of the international literature on the ethical compass to be valuable to any academic who is involved in professional academic courses.
4. In the early 1980s, the concept of 'moral identity' emerged in the field of moral psychology and proved to be a crucial element of our understanding of the gap between moral judgment and action. Blasi (1980) argues that congruence arises between moral judgment and moral action only when the self is at stake in moral action; in other words, this only occurs when one's moral understanding and concerns become part of one's sense of identity (see also Lapsley and Narvaez 2013).

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