Preface

Designing Games for Ethics: Models, Techniques, and Frameworks is the second book in a two-volume series addressing an emerging field of study: ethics and games. It’s only been nine months since finishing the first book in this two-part series, Ethics and Game Design: Teaching Values through Play, yet so much has changed. And as I give birth to the second book, I note that the questions we raised in the first volume have become even more urgent and timely: How do we better design and use games to foster ethical thinking and discourse? What are the theories and methodologies that will help us understand, model, and assess ethical thinking in and around games? What do games tell us about our ethics? What are the ethics surrounding the creation, deployment and use of games? How are cultural values and beliefs represented in games? How do we use games in classrooms and informal educational settings to support moral development? This publication is the first academic collection to address these questions.

Ethics is a system of choices and moral judgments that are thought to achieve the life of a good human being (Sicart, 2005), as well as an individual behavior; the process of making choices according to one’s own conception of how to be a “good” person. Games, while highly varied in form and function, are rule-based systems with “variable and quantifiable outcomes; where different outcomes are assigned different values; where the players exert effort in order to influence the outcome … and the consequences of the activity are optional and negotiable” (Juul, 2005). When we put the two together—ethics and games—the result is more than the sum of the parts. While there are many ways to explore the intersection of games and ethics, this book covers three key areas of the field: (1) how we can design and use games to better support ethical thinking, reasoning, empathy, and citizenship; (2) what are the ethics of creating games, including their production, development, and distribution; (3) how are values reflected and propagated through play, for example, through the cultural practices related to gaming, discourses surrounding gaming, or through interacting with individual games as texts, media or artifacts.

Ethical reasoning, reflection, and discourse have always been an essential component of nurturing a healthy, diverse citizenship. In fact, these skills are necessary for navigating our globally interconnected, rapidly evolving world. We need to be able to analyze, empathize, make decisions about values, identify biases, and reflect on one’s beliefs, and assess other’s perspectives as an engaged, informed citizenship within a diverse democracy such as our own. And, as new forms of cultural expression emerge and access expands to new participatory (and global) cultures, both young people and adults need to be adept at negotiating ethical dilemmas in ever-changing environments and communities. More and more young people are becoming media producers, as well as consumers, yet they may not understand how to manage and negotiate ethical dilemmas, or how to behave in participatory communities (Jenkins, 2006). With these cultural changes occurring, educators are struggling with how to teach these essential skills to their students and integrate them into curricula (Schrier and Kinzer, 2009).
Yet, today, the notion of games and ethics often sparks controversy over games themselves. For example, some scholarship today focuses on whether videogames are too violent, or if they too powerfully influence the creation of bad values—evoking similar reactions as film, comic books, television, rap, and rock music when they were introduced. In this book series, we seek to look beyond whether games are inherently good or bad, and instead think about how people negotiate values, and how play might foster reflection on one’s own, society’s or a particular game’s ethics. The authors in this collection want to understand the potential for games to motivate and develop thought about ethics and values, and not how to use games to prescribe a dose of “proper values.” After all, societal values evolve, norms change, and ethics differ from culture to culture. Simply indoctrinating citizens with good values for one specific moment and social context is not going to help them navigate complicated questions within other situations or circumstances. Social and global issues are complex and the answers are never clear. We need global citizens who can think deeply about choices, fully engage with complicated issues, reflect on their values, and decide what is right for them, their families, their societies and the world—today, tomorrow and yesterday.

This book is about developing engaged, informed citizens, not just by using games themselves, but through the study and practice of games and game cultures. As games become increasingly embedded into everyday life, understanding the ethics of their creation and use, as well as their potential for practicing ethical thinking, becomes more relevant. That means helping equip designers, developers, players, purchasers, writers of games with a deeper understanding of the ethics of gaming, game production, and distribution. For example, game publishers, parents, journalists, players, policy makers, and creators want to understand the ethical issues surrounding games and game play, such as the use of gaming hardware for other purposes, cheating in games, or the representation of violence, gender, race, and sex in games. Moreover, commercial game developers are increasingly integrating moral choices into off-the-shelf games, such as the Fable, Fallout and Mass Effect series, enabling—with mixed results—players to grapple with real-world ethical issues within a fictional game world. The popularity and growing ethical complexity of newer games, such as Heavy Rain, Red Dead Redemption and Dragon Age, all released since the first book in this series, show that developers are seeking ways to incorporate ethical landscapes into their designs, and audiences are intrigued.

I wrote in the first book’s preface that the notion that games can help people reflect on values is both innovative and as old as humankind. Play has always been a way to allow people to experiment with other perspectives, to reenact scenarios and possibilities, to practice collaborating and competing, and to try out different roles. One way to support play is through games. I argue that games may be particularly well-suited to the practice and development of ethical thinking, since, for example, the computationally rich media platform offers the ability to iterate and reflect on multiple possibilities and consequences (Schrier and Gibson, 2010). Games also provide a virtually authentic content within which to practice and experience ethical dilemmas and decision making. They enable players to reflect on their decisions and outcomes, and allow them to consider the implications of their choices, without many of the risks of real-world consequences (Schrier and Kinzer, 2009).

A few weeks ago, I had this extremely vivid dream. In it, I inhabited another person, who looked just like me, but had much different histories, experiences, beliefs and values than my own. I was a jewel thief, and at the moment I entered the dream, I was evading the police, deleting incriminating files off of my laptop, and then happily escaping with the expensive gems. I was embodying a totally different ethical and emotional system, one which led me to feel no remorse about stealing priceless heirlooms. My dream allowed me to experience a totally new perspective, one that I would never be able to (nor
would want to) access in my everyday life. Luckily, I woke up from the dream without having to experience any of the consequences of stealing jewels, but I still can remember what it was like to inhabit a new ethical identity.

I feel that games have the potential to evoke this, and to engage the imagination in a way that you feel like you really are a jewel thief, or a renegade, or a paragon, or any of the millions of possibilities in between. Being able to access a diversity of ethical perspectives is perhaps even necessary for fully appreciating humanity, life, and beyond.

I observe that as we delve deeper into this new field of ethics and games, it ultimately invites us to reevaluate what it means to be human and gain insight into our own humanity. Through games, and play, we are seeking new ways to experience the world, to understand humankind, to reflect on our identities, our destinies, our pasts, and our mysteries. We may never fully answer these questions, but hopefully games will help us begin to approach them.

A major goal of this collection is to bring together the diverse and growing community of voices and begin to define the field, identify its primary challenges and questions, and establish the current state of the discipline. Such a rigorous, collaborative, and holistic foundation for the study of ethics and games is necessary to appropriately inform future games, policies, standards, and curricula. This new discipline invites, and even requires, a variety of different perspectives, frameworks, and critiques—from computer science, education, philosophy, law, game design, learning theory, media studies, management, cognitive science, psychology, and art history (Gibson and Baek, 2009).

Thus, each author in this volume uses a unique perspective to frame the problem: some implement cognitive or social psychology methodologies, others come from a design background, some focus on pedagogical theories, while others employ a philosophical angle. Some are game designers and practitioners, others are researchers, and still others theorists; many are hybrids of all three. We hope this multidisciplinary approach will serve readers who want to view ethics and games from other perspectives, and use those perspectives to inform their own research directions. The following is an overview of the chapters in this first volume of the collection:

In Chapter 1, *Quick Takes on Ethics and Games: Voices from Industry and Academia*, I curated a medley of reflections and perspectives in the field of ethics and games. The contributors—Mia Consalvo, Greg Costikyan, Drew Davidson, Nick Fortugno, David Shaenfield, Pete Vigueant, and Christopher Weaver—are experts in their fields, and each have a unique point of view on the major themes of this book. Rather than deep analyses of the issues, these are brief meditations on the main ideas related to current problems in ethics and games.

Chapter 2, Jose Zagal’s *Ethical Reasoning and Reflection as Supported by Single-Player Videogames* sets the stage for thinking about how to better design and use games to foster ethical reasoning and reflection. The author, a professor at DePaul University, gives a broad overview of the theoretical frameworks on ethics and morality, focusing on what he calls “ethically notable videogames,” or games that involve ethical decision making and story lines. He looks specifically at a few ethically notable commercial games, including *Ultima IV*, *Manhunt*, and *Fire Emblem: Radiant Dawn*.

In Chapter 3, Jamey Stevenson lays out a general framework for classifying and critiquing ethics games, to help practitioners and academics better navigate the topic of ethics and games. He uses this framework to then introduce and unpack some of the major issues and debates surrounding the design of games for ethics. He also uses this to recommend ways to make games more ethically engaging.

After setting the stage for the book’s themes, the next chapters offer in-depth analyses of current games and gaming environments, and consider how ethical choices, morality and values are incorporated
into a game’s design and experience. In Chapter 4, Jonathan Melenson, in his *The Axis of Good and Evil*, offers a critique of current games, and their inclusion of ethical dilemmas and decision making. He argues that games need to expand to include choices that are more morally gray. To do this, he looks at games such as *Fable II*, *Mass Effect*, and *Fallout III* as well as examples of other forms of popular culture, such as movies and books.

Chapter 5 complements Melenson’s arguments. *Ethical Dilemmas in Gameplay: Choosing Between Right and Right*, Ian Schreiber, Bryan Cash, and Link Hughes discuss the state of ethics games today, and how to better innovate the ways ethical dilemmas are incorporated into games. They specifically look at games such as *BioShock*, *PeaceMaker*, *The Suffering*, *Silent Hill 2*, *Mass Effect*, *Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow*, *Dragon Age*, and *Knights of the Old Republic*. They developed their recommendations when convening at Project Horseshoe, a conference that encouraged a mini-think tank on issues of gameplay and ethics.

In Chapter 6, *War and Play: Insensitivity and Humanity in the Realm of Pushbutton Warfare*, Devin Monnens argues for a more conscientious design of war in games. In investigating a variety of war games, including *Drop Zone 4*, *Cannon Fodder*, and *Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater*, Monnens defines and critiques, what he calls, wargames and antiwar games. He also looks at approaches to antiwar games, such as *September 12th*, *Giant Tank*, and *Train*, and develops a set of recommendations for designers of war games.

Chapter 7, Peter Rauch’s *God of War: What is it Good For? Nietzsche’s “Master Morality” and the Single-Player Action/Adventure Genre*, takes a more philosophical approach to game design critique. In this chapter, Rauch provides a close reading of *God of War* using Nietzsche’s “Master Morality” concept. He then broadens the scope by showing how this critique can be used to reflect on humanity, and to help us design better ethics games.

The next chapters hone in on the way that games are developed, used, and played, and the cultural, sociological and historical issues around gaming and game creation. In Chapter 8, *The Ethics of Reverse Engineering for Game Technology*, David Schwartz and Jessica Bayliss look into the legal concepts, cultural practices, and sociological issues surrounding the process of reverse engineering game systems to understand how it works, and to use it for a variety of purpose. They provide a series of case studies to elucidate the complex questions that reverse engineering raises, and posit suggestions on approaching these issues.

Chapter 9, Lindsay Grace’s *Critical Gameplay: Design Techniques and Case Studies*, defines critical gameplay design techniques. This chapter raises important considerations and techniques when designing games for ethics, by considering the social, cultural and psychological aspects of game play. He provides a clear framework for reflecting on and evaluating a game’s mechanics. His examples are supported using a number of well- and lesser-known games such as *The Sims*, *King of the Mountain*, *Levity*, and *I Wanna Be the Guy*.

Mitu Khandaker, in Chapter 10, *How Games Can Touch You: Ethics of the Video Game Controller*, expands our perspective on games by looking specific on the kinesthetic and mimetic videogame interfaces, such as the Wii Remote and *Guitar Hero* or *Rock Band* instruments. By looking at games such as *Manhunt 2* and *Rock Band*, she uncovers the ethical implications of these interfaces.

In Chapter 11, *Toward an Ethic of Representation: Ethics and the Representation of Marginalized Groups in Videogames*, Adrienne Shaw moves the question of how we should represent marginalized groups in videogames to more broadly addressing understanding the issues of representation in games. She creatively uses theories from hospitality, recognition and truthfulness to lay out her arguments.
In the next section, the contributors look at the question of how to better design games for learning and supporting ethical thinking, reasoning and reflection. In Chapter 12, Nathan Freier and Emilie Saulnier discuss the moral and social development of children and adolescents, particularly as it relates to virtual worlds and massively multiplayer online games (MMOGs). They specifically look at Club Penguin and World of Warcraft, and reflect specifically on ways they might affect perspective-taking skills, stereotyping behavior, and social and moral problem solving abilities.

Randy Kulman, Gary Stoner, Louis Ruffolo, Stephanie Marshall, Jennifer Slater, Amanda Dyl, and Alice Cheng collaborate in Chapter 13, Teaching Executive Functions, Self-Management, and Ethical Decision-Making through Popular Video Game Play. In this chapter, they look at the ways games might help support attention and memory skills, which can enhance ethical thinking and decision making skills, particularly for those who have Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and learning disabilities.

In Chapter 14, researchers Rania Hodhod, Paul Cairns and Daniel Kudenko, in Fostering Character Education with Games and Interactive Story Generation, investigate how their novel educational game, AEINS, may support the teaching of ethical virtues and promote character education. They discuss the theoretical framework underlying the game’s creation, as well as their design process and results.

In Chapter 15, Leveraging Digital Games for Moral Development in Education: A Practitioner’s Reflection, Ross FitzGerald and Jennifer Groff take a practical approach to use games to teach ethics. Using a moral and cognitive development perspective, they describe two case studies of in-classroom use of ethics games. They tested two games, Diplomacy and Civilization IV: Colonization at the Shady Hill, a pre-K to 8 grade school in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Finally, in the last section, the contributors investigate how games might promote social change and citizenship skills. In Chapter 16, Power to the People: Anti-Oppressive Game Design, Andrea Gunraj, Susana Ruiz and Ashley York explain the principles of anti-oppression and how they could be incorporated into game design. To do this, they interview four organizations—Take Action Games, the Metropolitan Action Committee on Violence Against Women and Children, Values @ Play, Global Kids, and Mollein-dustria—and from this, develop a set of guidelines to support integration of anti-oppression principles.

In Chapter 17, The Doctor Will Be You Now: A Case Study on Medical Ethics and Role Play, Nahil Sharkasi describes her novel game, Seeds, and how it supports ethical decision making. Seeds is a role-playing game and ethics simulation about Assisted Reproductive Technology and its effect on 21st century medical decisions. In her chapter, she reflects on her design choices, and recommends future directions.

In Chapter 18, Games, Ethics and Engagement: Potential Consequences of Civic-minded Game Design and Gameplay, Sharman Siebenthal Adams and Jeremiah Holden examine the potential for games to support citizenship and civic engagement. To do this, they looked deeply into the ways players interacted with The Arab Israeli Conflict and First Wind, both web-based games.

To conclude the book, in Chapter 19, Sasha Barab, Tyler Dodge, Edward Gentry, Asmalina Saleh and Patrick Pettyjohn describe a novel game in Uganda’s Road to Peace May Run through the River of Forgiveness: Designing Playable Fictions to Teach Complex Values. In this compelling chapter, they describe a game design focused on the struggle of Uganda, called River of Justice. They provide a close reflection on their design choices, and explicate a list of lessons learned and implications.

My hope is that this book collection will continue to inspire interdisciplinary dialogue and research, and further strengthen the ethics and games community, and more broadly, the global community.

Karen Schrier
Columbia University, USA
REFERENCES


Schrier, K. and Gibson, D. (2010). Ethics and game design: Teaching values through play, Hershey, PA: IGI.
