Preface

Ethics and Game Design: Teaching Values through Play is the first book in a two-volume series addressing an emerging field of study: ethics and games. In it, we challenge scholars and researchers to answer the following questions: 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? 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 culture's 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. Digital 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 these two resources together—ethics and digital games—the result is more than the sum of the parts. The field can be broadly defined as the study of using games to support ethical thinking, reasoning, and reflection, as well as the ethical implications of game development choices, design possibilities, and distribution methods. The scholarship that is emerging to address these intersections touches on a great many disciplines—philosophy, game design, learning theory, cognitive science, psychology, and social theories. As we delve deeper into the new field, it ultimately invites us to reevaluate what it means to be human and gain insight into our own humanity.

Digital games are 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. 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).

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. Some scholarship today focuses on whether video games are too violent, or if they too powerfully influence the creation of bad values. 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 digital games to motivate and develop thought on ethics and values.

Ethical reasoning and discourse has always been an essential component of nurturing a healthy, diverse citizenship. 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). Simultaneously, media practitioners and developers are increasingly interested in creating games and other media that consider and respond to ethical and social issues. Game publishers, parents, journalists, players, and creators are also searching for ways to talk about ethical issues surrounding games, such as the representation of violence, gender, race, and sex in games. And game developers are integrating ethical choices into commercial off-the-shelf games, such as the *Fable, Fallout* and *Mass Effect* series, to enable players to grapple with real-world complexities within the fictional game world. As games become more embedded into everyday life, understanding the ethics of their creation and development, as well as their potential for learning ethics, becomes more and more relevant.

The new discipline invites, and even requires, a variety of different perspectives, frameworks, and critiques—from computer science, education, philosophy, law, media studies, management, cognitive science, psychology, and art history (Gibson and Baek, 2009). 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 is necessary to appropriately inform future games, policies, standards, and curricula.

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. We also hope the collection will inspire further interdisciplinary dialogue and research, and continue to build the ethics and games community. The following is an overview of the chapters in this first volume of the collection:

In Chapter 1, *Values between Systems: Designing Ethical Gameplay*, Miguel Sicart begins to define the notion of ethical gameplay as a consequence of game design choices. He uses games, such as *Fallout 3, Braid, Call of Duty 4*, and *Shadow of the Colossus* to explore this definition and to help him devise a new methodology for designing ethical gameplay, called ethical cognitive dissonance. Using this, he also describes how this model can be applied, and what types of challenges and questions it exposes.

Chapter 2, Gene Koo and Scott Seider's *Video Games for Prosocial Learning* sets the stage for thinking about how to better foster prosocial development through games. The authors give a detailed overview of theoretical frameworks from moral education, character education and care ethics. They consider the unique characteristics of games, using research from games and media studies. In doing this, they seek to move the discussion from thinking about games as messages transmitters, to thinking about how players interact with games and the ecosystem around games, using as examples *Zoo Tycoon* and the *Grand Theft Auto* series. In conclusion, they provide a list of questions to frame future research.

After setting the stage, the next chapters provide perspectives from the cognitive sciences and social psychology fields. In Chapter 3, Dan Staines, in his *Videogames and Moral Pedagogy: A Neo-Kohlbergian Approach*, provides a detailed overview of cognitive theories related to moral development, with particular attention to Lawrence Kohlberg and neo-Kohlbergian models. He uses Kohlberg's Four Component Model to critique the moral content in three COTS videogames, *Ultima IV, Fallout 3,* and

Mass Effect. Through a detailed account of these games, and their relationship to Kohlbergian theories, Staines investigates the extent to which those approaches can inform moral content in games.

In Chapter 4, Jaroslav Švelch's *The Good, The Bad and The Player: The Challenges to Moral Engagement in Single-Player Avatar-Based Video Games*, he develops a theoretical model to unpack design challenges related to incorporating moral choices in games. His novel model is based on moral psychology and game studies theories, as well as examples from interviews, and online discussion transcripts. His model incorporates the relationship between the player's emotions and the moral events in the video game, as well as the player's style of game play and the moral content of the game. Svelch then provides detailed accounts of how his model informs moral engagement in single-player avatar-based games, including *Fallout 3, Fable II, Mass Effect, Bioshock,* and *Baldur's Gate II*.

In Chapter 5, *Playing with Ethics: Experiencing New Ways of Being in RPGs*, David Simkins focuses on role-playing games. He argues that they are particularly amenable to ethical play, and uses philosophical, psychological and game studies frameworks to review good design principles for encouraging ethical play. He uses *Final Fantasy VI, Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion,* and *Fallout 3* to tease out his frameworks and base his design recommendations.

In the next section, the contributors look at the question of games and ethics from a philosophical perspective. In Chapter 6, *Bioshock in the Cave: Ethical Education in Plato and in Video Games*, Roger Travis provides a close reading of *Bioshock* through the lens of Plato's *Cave*, and through this analysis, provides insight into the potential for games to teach ethics.

Chapter 7, John Nordlinger's *Virtual Ethics: Ethics and Massively Multiplayer Online Games*, discusses how characteristics such as emergent populations, virtual economies, and other affordances of new media, allow digital games such *World of Warcraft* and *Everquest*, to offer a fresh and dynamic way to pose and answer philosophical questions that have arisen for hundreds of year but hitherto have not had an interactive, virtual venue for exploration and discussion.

Erin Hoffman, in Chapter 8, uses philosophical frameworks to delve deeper into an important topic: the meaning of death in games. In her *Sideways into Truth: Kierkegaard, Philistines, and Why We Love Sex and Violence*, she uses Kierkegaard and Becker to understand the function of death in videogames throughout history, including *Super Columbine Massacre RPG*, *Zork, Death Race, Grand Theft Auto*, and *World of Warcraft*. She unpacks the rise of controversy surrounding games, and reflects on the role that death plays in our lives.

David Phelps reverses the question of how we can use games to teach ethics, and uses philosophical and media studies frameworks to investigate what we can learn from games about human ethics. Chapter 9, his *What Videogames have to Teach us about Screenworld and The Humanistic Ethos* details the model of Humanistic Ethos and uses the case studies of *Rock Band 2* and *Portal* to elucidate how the theory functions in today's games.

In the next section, the contributors focus on youth, family and play, and how people interact with games and each other. In Chapter 10, Sam Gilbert, a researcher at the GoodPlay Project at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, gives us insight into youth's ethical play styles. In his *Ethics at Play: Patterns of Ethical Thinking among Young Online Gamers*, he investigates how young people, age 15 to 25, think about ethical issues in online games. He describes three different models of ethical thinking and play styles, including individualistic, interpersonal and communal. By analyzing these models, Gilbert posits that we can better design games to support ethical thinking and different ethical play styles.

J. Alison Bryant and Jordana Drell don a researcher-practitioner hat, and review the interaction between games and values discourse in families. In Chapter 11, *Family Fun and Fostering Values,* the authors review family interactions with games, and discuss how to better foster values discourse in the family context using games.

In Chapter 12, Neha Khetrapal, in *Cognitive Science Helps Formulate Games for Moral Education*, proposes a synthesis of cognitive science, developmental psychology, and principles of good game design with theories of moral behavior to help guide the design of games for moral education. She carefully considers research related to children's moral and cognitive development, and uses this to recommend curricula around the use of ethics games in the classroom.

In Chapter 13, *Moral Development through Social Narratives and Game Design*, Lance Vikaros and Darnel Degand offer the perspective of developmental psychology and argue for the importance of social narratives in moral development. They consider how fantasy play can facilitate moral judgment in children. They provide an in-depth review of relevant theories, relate them to current games such as *World of Warcraft* and *The Sims*, and use this to provide recommendations of designing games to support fantasy play and moral development.

Finally, in the last section, the contributors provide practical accounts of the challenges of designing games for ethics. In Chapter 14, *The Mechanic is the Message: How to Communicate Values in Games through the Mechanics of User Action and System Response*, Chris Swain focuses on the mechanics of games and their relationship to ethics learning. To elucidate his points, he interviews leading practitioners in the field, and uses it to develop a set of best practices.

In Chapter 15, *Applied Ethics Game Design: Some Practical Guidelines*, Rudy McDaniel and Stephen M. Fiore detail accounts of two novel games, *Veritas University* and *Knights of Astrus*, which they designed. These two Flash games are targeted toward undergraduate students. Based on the authors' reflections and implementation experience, they offer six practical guidelines for improving the design of ethics games.

In Chapter 16, *Using Mission US: For Crown or Colony? to Develop Historical Empathy and Nurture Ethical Thinking*, James Diamond, David Langendoen, and Karen Schrier describe their design experience collaboratively creating and researching a game for middle school social studies students. They argue that historical empathy is a key component of ethical thinking, and that games such as Mission U.S. can help support the practice of empathy. The game, *Mission US: For Crown or Colony,* developed by Channel 13, Electric Funstuff and EDC, serves as a backdrop for discussing issues of ethical game design and designing for ethics.

In Chapter 17, Colleen Macklin provides a "thick description" of an urban game, which mixed real world and digital elements. In her *Reacting to Re:Activism: A Case Study in the Ethics of Design*, she details the first time her game was played, and uses the player's experiences to explore the ethics of game design. She discovers that sometimes failures and disruptions can inspire novel game ideas.

Stephen Balzac offers us a break from the digital with his case study of live-action role playing games for teaching ethics. In Chapter 18, *Reality from Fantasy: Using Predictive Scenarios to Explore Ethical Dilemmas*, he describes a series of predictive scenario games, a form of live-action roleplaying games, in which participants need to reenact complex scenarios, such as a major health crisis. His research has implications for digital and non-digital games alike, and based on his design experiences, he recommends other avenues for future research in predictive scenarios.

In Chapter 19, Brenda Brathwaite and John Sharp also write about non-digital games in *The Mechanic is the Message: A Post Mortem in Progress*. In this unique chapter, Brenda Brathwaite provides a personal account of her design of *Mechanic is the Message*, a series of non-digital games. John Sharp, her colleague, then takes the reins and analyzes her games from a curatorial and art historian perspective. In it, they ponder the ethics of game design from their different points of view.

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