Foreword

It is a great privilege to be able to write a few prefatory words about Designing Games for Ethics: Models, Techniques, and Frameworks. Games are one of the most powerful and durable new forms of popular culture for the information age. More and more, the challenging models of mastery, which are embodied in all games, are being explicitly applied to games for learning. What Karen Schrier and David Gibson have done in bringing these contributions together is asked us to think about the ethics of what it means to design games and to think of how we can design games that help us to explore and understand ethics.

Media theorist Henry Jenkins has addressed the dual challenges of encoding a moral vision into a game and developing moral frameworks around the experience of playing a game. He notes that "…the first requires an intervention on the level of design, or encouraging the people who make the games to take seriously their potential as a medium for exploring ethical issues. The second requires an intervention on the level of education, or fostering a mode of play that encourages players to use games to perform meaningful thought experiments and using them as a vehicle through which to explore and refine their own emerging ethical perspectives." This collection of articles expands upon the designer-educator theme and brings to readers the personal journeys of researchers, developers, and explorers.

The essays in this collection focus on the challenges Jenkins identifies, and also extend beyond those to other different, interlocking issues and questions. How do we design the best possible games for fostering ethical thinking in an urgent and timely manner? What theories help us understand the ethical imperatives of the stories, rules, systems, worlds, and images we design? Are there methodologies developed in other fields that we might appropriate for the study of the ethics of game design? How do we weigh the relative impact of images and narrative, and rules and systems, and what is the relationship of all of these to the actual experience of playing a game, including the mechanics and qualities that make a game exciting? Since both narrative and game rules are intertwined, what are the signs of effective integration? How do we measure "effectiveness" in ethical terms? What about the social aspects of play—how do the norms and values of an online world or offline peer group inform our experiences? What are the inherent dangers as well as potentials?

There are also specific cultural factors to be included. For example, how are marginalized groups served or harmed more by a game that focuses on their characteristic struggles? One ethical issue all game designers confront relates to violence in games. What is the line between realism and violence, especially when portraying those in economically-disadvantaged worlds? Is there a way for violence to be a subject of ethical inquiry for the game player without being exploitative? Why is the very notion of violence in games so controversial in our society?

Similarly, in what ways does gender factor into the discussion of ethics in gaming? A world without girls and women is hardly ethical, but how does one represent females in games in a way that is egalitarian and appropriate given the way that many forms of popular culture, including game culture, feature

and sometimes exploit sexuality so flagrantly? Simply representing females without conventional beauty prescriptions circumvents one set of problems, while introducing equally problematic ethical concerns.

None of these are easy questions, and none of the answers are simple either. These essays often combine the scholarly with the experiential, and, in some cases, game designers learn lessons in the course of trying to teach ethics. More than one author, for example, sets out on the educational path, determined to "teach an ethical lesson" through a game, only to wind up learning a lesson instead. That experience helped them to add complexity and nuance to their original conceptions, and perhaps even to their early idea of what does or does not constitute an "ethical" game dilemma. What will their next game development idea involve as a result? Will they begin with an historical event or a situation where history will be made through peer-to-peer pedagogy? Other authors examine the impact of immersive reality on deciding among multiple perspectives. Such an experience can heighten the discomfort of leaving aside one's initial ethical positions, to accept the legitimacy of another's point of view. Does such an experience expand the definition and cultural value of a game?

We have entered a new era, with constantly evolving platforms for communication and learning, and we concomitantly innovative ways to think about game design, game play, game practice, and game mechanics. These essays lead the way, offering us many new possibilities in digital games and simulations. No one can predict what the games of the future will be. That's as it should be. Uncertainty, intrigue, problems, and challenges that require on-the-spot decision making are the heart of game mechanics and are also at the heart of this serious, thoughtful, imaginative, and challenging inquiry into Designing Games for Ethics.

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