

Chapter 1

Quick Takes on Ethics and Games: Voices from Industry and Academia

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter, seven experts from the games industry and from academia discuss late-breaking and big picture trends in ethics and games. Rather than deep analyses of the issues, these brief perspectives introduce main ideas related to current problems in ethics and games. These quick takes open up discourse on timely topics and ask questions that will lead to new research streams. A microcosm of the entire book, these quick reflections telegraph the themes that will emerge in the rest of the book. First, Mia Consalvo will discuss decision making in Dragon Age; next Greg Costikyan talks about Diplomacy and how game mechanics support ethical behavior. Drew Davidson then provides a meditation on the value of games, Nick Fortugno talks about ethics and Farmville, and educator David Shaenfield looks at new ways to support citizenship skills through gaming. Finally, designer Pete Vigeant gives his personal take on Red Dead Redemption and Bethesda Softworks founder and MIT professor Christopher Weaver unpacks controversies surrounding games.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-60960-120-1.ch001

INTRODUCTION

Karen Schrier

Game design practices evolve as new relationships, cultural norms, social behavior and technologies emerge. Likewise, theories, frameworks, and methodologies relevant to games research need to constantly grow as we develop new games, ideas, critiques, cultural practices, and values. To capture the spirit of the breadth of ethics and games today, I curated a selection of experts from industry and academia. Unlike the deeper analyses in the rest of the book, these pieces are shorter, more personal and more reflective visions of the past, present, and future of ethics and games. An *amuse-bouche* for the meal of the rest of the book, these pieces cover the three themes, or strands of study, that are represented in this book. These include: (1) how we can use games to better teach ethics, values and citizenship, and the design principles underlying teaching values through play; (2) developing a design ethic for games, and the ethics of creating games, including their production, development, and distribution; (3) cultural, historical, psychological, and sociological aspects, including the cultural practices related to gaming, discourses surrounding gaming, or how players interact with individual games as texts, media or artifacts. Games, as we will see, can be a window into our own humanity. While these strands interweave and overlap, each contributor defines his or her unique path, and what results is a just-in-time perspective on a timely topic.

First, Mia Consalvo, a visiting professor at MIT, discusses decision making in *Dragon Age*, giving an inside look at her own ethical choices and experiences playing the popular RPG game. Next famed indie game designer Greg Costikyan talks about his view on *Diplomacy* and uses it to show how game mechanics can support particular types of ethical behavior.

Director of the Entertainment Technology Center at Carnegie Mellon, Drew Davidson, then

provides a meditation on the value of games by discussing insights from his edited collection, *Well Played 1.0*. Nick Fortugno, casual games expert and designer of games such as *Diner Dash*, compares *Farmville* to slot machines, and questions the ethics of particular game mechanics. Human development researcher and professor, David Shaenfield, looks at how games could support citizenship and ethical thinking skills, such as collaboration and argumentation.

Next, interaction designer Pete Vigeant provides a personal take on *Red Dead Redemption*, which at the time of this book's submission, has only been released for a few weeks. And finally, Chris Weaver—founder of Bethesda, which developed popular commercial games with ethical components such as *Fallout 3* and *Morrowind*—unpacks controversies surrounding games.

I hope this chapter serves as a useful introduction to the key issues and questions in *Designing Games for Ethics: Models, techniques and Framework*.

CONFESSIONS OF A GAMER: I ALWAYS PLAY THE NICE GAL

Mia Consalvo

It was just a bit annoying—Jowan was staring at me, waiting for my answer—would I help him or not? I couldn't decide. I felt there was something important about him that I'd forgotten, something that might come back to haunt me later if I made the wrong choice. And in Bioware's *Dragon Age* (2009)—an RPG featuring branching storylines and the ability to choose between multiple paths that offer selfless as well as selfish choices in order to complete quests—I'd learned to be a little cautious before acting. In replaying the game and starting over as a mage, my character began her training at the Circle Tower, the point of entry for any mage's origin story, and within the fiction of the game the place where all mages

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