game environments

global network play authority PewDiePie guild god Let's Play angel undead wtf authentic mediatization Skill dungeon PVP contest
game rule system gameplay avatar WoW blessing noob kills demon race body fight prop spell ingame rebirth PS4 discussion digital
religion gamer analysis representation lore religion o-scape soul diablo class tradition experience witch clan wedding
simulation lol ludology The Last of Us death resurrection funeral rules ritual virtual identity buff priest genesis mage XBox 360 PVE gamer
narrative hell immersion community symbols salvation

gamevironments

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Potentials and Limits of Decision-Making Situations in Computer Games for Ethical and Moral Judgement

Rahel Stahmann-Ammour

Abstract
This report presents the concept of my doctoral dissertation which investigates the potential of computer games as media-pedagogical tools in ethics education, particularly their ability to contribute to students' ethical and moral reasoning and judgement.[i] It explores whether the interactive nature of computer games makes them uniquely suited to transform ethics lessons into a moral laboratory. Given that computer games provide a space for training and practice, this research suggests that they have significant relevance for real-world decision-making processes. The study focuses on comparing various didactic theories on ethical reasoning and analyzing how decision-making situations in games can be utilized as a mode of experiential learning. Employing a design-based research methodology, a game-based teaching sequence is designed, implemented, and analyzed across four iterative loops. The research aims to determine how game-inherent prompts can initiate processes of ethical reasoning and assesses the broader implications of integrating such decision-making scenarios into ethics curricula.

165

IASGAR PhD Day Report

The Centre for Media, Communication and Information Research at the University of Bremen, in partnership with the International Academy for Study of Gaming and Religion, held its 3rd Annual Summer Graduate Workshop on September 28, 2024. The workshop centered on Digital Gaming and Values, bringing together early-career researchers and doctoral students alongside invited experts. The program featured collaborative discussions examining research methodologies, study design approaches, and theoretical frameworks that illuminate the relationship between culture and video gaming. Several presentations distinguished themselves through exceptional quality and have been selected for publication in this issue under the Emerging Voices in the Field section.

The Dresdner Konsens (Forum der Didaktik für Philosophie und Ethik 2016), emphasizes the „strengthening the power of reasoning" as a core objective in ethics and philosophy education. As Frankl (1985, 128) notes,

> "(a)t the beginning of human history, man lost some of the basic animal instincts in which an animal's behavior is imbedded and by which it is secured. Such security, like Paradise, is closed to man forever; man has to make choices. In addition to this, however, man has suffered another loss in his more recent development inasmuch as the traditions which buttressed his behavior are now rapidly diminishing. No instinct tells him what he has to do, and no tradition tells him what he ought to do."

This observation is particularly relevant in today's world, where the decline of traditional moral anchors (Pfeifer 2021, 18-24) has left individuals without the clear, unified directives that once guided previous generations. At the same time, the

growing diversity of moral perspectives, religious beliefs, and ethical frameworks presents an overwhelming array of choices, making it even more challenging to navigate ethical complexities.

These challenges highlight the importance of creating educational environments that help young people develop their own moral understanding and reasoning, especially in an era where external guidance is fragmented and navigating moral choices has become more complex. This research builds on the interactive nature of computer games, which require active player engagement to progress in the game. This forms the fundamental hypothesis for this dissertation: computer games inherently train judgment and decision-making, and when these decisions involve ethical content, they can be effectively integrated into ethics education.

The central research question guiding this study is as follows: *What are the potentials and limitations of decision-making situations in computer games for fostering ethical and moral reasoning in ethics education?* To explore this, the project is structured into three stages:

1. *Didactic Models:* Comparison and discussion of various models of ethical and moral judgement and reasoning.
2. *Game Analysis:* Evaluation of selected computer games for their potential to initiate ethical and moral judgement and reasoning processes.
3. *Qualitative Survey:* Investigation of how game-inherent prompts trigger these processes and how decision-making situations in games can be applied didactically.

Research Questions and Theoretical Framework

The first research question asks how ethical and moral reasoning is promoted in ethics lessons. To explore this, various didactical models of ethical and moral reasoning are examined, including Pfeifer's four-step model (2021), Tödt's Theory of Making Ethical Judgements (1997), Thein's didactic concept of problem-oriented reasoning and understanding (2020) and Henke's two-column model (2017). These frameworks lay the foundation for analyzing decision-making processes in computer games by outlining the methods and steps of how moral reasoning is fostered in traditional ethics and philosophy classes.

The second research question addresses the processes of ethical and moral reasoning that are engaged in decision-making situations within computer games. Games are inherently interactive, requiring players to interpret and evaluate game actions, often making decisions with ethical implications. Sicart's concept of ludic phronesis (Sicart 2009, 105), an adaptation of Aristotelian phronesis, describes the player's purposeful rationality in these scenarios, serving as both a moral reasoning process and its outcome (ibid., 117-118). The parallels between ethical and moral reasoning models and game decision-making highlight the untapped potential for integrating games into ethics education, despite their limited use in current curricula.

This research focuses on Commercial Off-the-Shelf Games (COTS), which, while not developed for educational purposes, offer immersive, narrative-driven experiences that engage students in experiential learning. By allowing students to actively explore moral dilemmas in a controlled, consequence-free environment (Ernst 2020, 181) the ethics classroom turns into a moral laboratory, where students can experiment with ethical principles, practice reasoned decision-making, and explore different moral stances – even deliberately choosing immoral options to better understand their

implications (Schulzke 2020, 112 and 138) – ultimately opening the door for deeper ethical and philosophical analysis in the classroom. As players take an active role in the game (Sicart 2009, 55), they directly influence the game world, experience the consequences of their actions (Klager 2016, 116), and receive feedback from the game, NPCs, or the environment in response to their decisions. This demands a complex interplay of cognitive abilities (Gee 2003, 13-15), supporting the „holistic concept of reasoning" advocated by the Dresdner Konsens (Forum der Didaktik für Philosophie und Ethik 2016). Furthermore, the process of justifying and understanding beliefs, engaging in self-determined, reflective actions, and assuming responsibility are central educational goals in ethics lessons. These objectives are not only realized in the classroom but also extend into students' everyday lives, including their leisure activities, such as playing computer games. This approach presents an opportunity to make lessons more relevant to students' real-world experiences and supports the broader objectives of consumer education (Institut für Medienforschung und Medienpädagogik (IMM) der TH Köln 2018, 23). Given that students often engage with digital games in their personal lives, it makes sense to integrate their media habits into the learning process (Helmke 2014, 237, Maisenhölder 2018 18), making them fruitful for ethical-philosophical education. By discussing COTS titles in the classroom, teachers also encourage a more nuanced and critical engagement with these games outside of school, fostering lifelong learning and critical thinking.

169

In the second stage, this study employs a structuring qualitative content analysis to categorize computer games by their potential to trigger ethical and moral reasoning, with a focus on games featuring morally significant decision-making mechanics. These decision points provide a valuable opportunity to develop ethical and moral reasoning skills, making computer games an effective tool for teaching complex ethical concepts, particularly for students who may struggle with traditional

philosophical texts (Maisenhölder 2018, 17-18). The process of playing itself becomes an epitome of practiced judgment (Schrier 2021, 6-9), offering students a basis for reflection and allowing them to explore ethically relevant topics in a student-centered way.

Finally, the third research level addresses the key questions: Do the game-inherent prompts trigger processes of ethical and moral reasoning? How can the identified potential of these prompts be effectively used in ethics lessons? Computer games enable players to interactively experience various fictional interaction structures and constellations, using virtual spaces as a moral exploration ground without real-world consequences. Video games often encourage actions that align with in-game rewards (Sicart 2010, 7) rather than ethical reflection, therefore reducing cognitive friction. By intentionally including situations and decision with a high cognitive friction, as suggested by Sicart (2010, 9), games could foster deeper moral engagement. This research aims to explore how such friction points in games can be leveraged in ethics education to encourage reflective judgment in students. Moreover, by incorporating these elements into ethics lessons, computer games can help raise awareness of social responsibility and sustainable action, allowing students to experience the impact of their decisions in virtual worlds. To assess the extent to which computer gamers engage in reflective judgment during decision-making situations, this third step will focus on integrating a selected computer game into a teaching-learning setting. The game, or games, identified as suitable during the second stage – using Mayring's structuring qualitative analysis (2015) – will serve as the basis for the next phase.

The study involves thirty secondary school students and will be conducted in four loops within a design-based research framework[ii]:

1. *Initial Assessment*: In the first loop, we will investigate whether the game's inherent prompts are sufficient to trigger ethical and moral reasoning without additional support. One group will play a game sequence and explain their decisions and thought processes in a problem-centered interview. The second group will verbalize their thoughts while playing, with their responses recorded via audio and screen capture.

2. *Didactic Integration + Pilot Testing*: Based on the initial findings, the second loop will develop a teaching sequence that enhances the game's prompts with didactic structures. The didactic models for reasoning previously analyzed will guide the participants during this phase. The third loop involves piloting the teaching sequence. After implementation, the results will be analyzed, and design elements will be revised and adapted based on the insights gained.

3. *Pilot Testing:* In the third loop, the revised teaching sequence. After conducting the implementation, the findings will guide the targeted revision and further development of the teaching sequence.

4. *Final Implementation:* The last loop will involve implementing the refined setting and assessing its capacity to promote ethical and moral reasoning. This phase aims to demonstrate how the computer game functions as a central teaching and learning medium in ethics education and to refine strategies for didactic support.

Throughout this process, the students will be considered as co-researchers, contributing their insights to the development of the didactic framework. Their feedback will be instrumental in shaping the final outcomes. The findings will be compiled into a didactic chapter, with the possibility of including a specific handbook tailored to the game used in the study, making the dissertation a practical tool for

digital ethics education.

Own Preparatory Work

My master's thesis *Philosophizing with computer games? The potential of computer games as a didactic medium in ethics classes for moral dilemmas* serves as the foundation for my dissertation. It explored and identified gaps in Sicart's work, while also focusing on the potential of promising concepts like ludic phronesis (Sicart 2009, 105), the ludic hermeneutic circle (ibid., 122), wicked problems (Sicart 2013, 105), and the intentional use of cognitive friction (Sicart 2010, 9). To address Sicart's limited discussion on the transfer effects of games to everyday life, I incorporated Fritz's lifeworld transfer model, which links cognitive schemata between the virtual and everyday worlds (Fritz 2011, 121-124). Additionally, Narvaez and Lapsley's four-component model (Narvaez and Lapsley 2005, 156-157) and Schulzke's analogy between games and thought experiments (Schulzke 2020, 72) were integrated, examining their compatibility with the Baden-Württemberg ethics curriculum. The analysis of *Life is Strange* (2015) further explored these theories as a moral laboratory. My dissertation will expand on these theoretical intersections and findings.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this research aims to explore the potential of computer games as innovative tools for ethics education, with a focus on their ability to foster ethical and moral reasoning. By integrating decision-making scenarios from computer games into the classroom, this study seeks to bridge the gap between theoretical models of ethical decision-making and their practical application in educational settings. By analyzing the interplay between narrative complexity, ethical dilemmas, and student

engagement, this research highlights the potential of games to function as moral laboratories, enhancing students' critical thinking and ethical and moral reasoning skills. As this research progresses, it aims to refine the proposed methodologies and explore the impact of game-based ethical and moral reasoning on students' real-world moral judgments, paving the way for a deeper understanding of the role of digital media in education.

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[i] The German term *ethisch-moralische Urteilsbildung*, used in philosophy and ethics didactics, does not have a direct one-to-one English equivalent. The translation as *ethical and moral reasoning/judgement* is intended to reflect both the theoretical foundation (ethical) and the personal decision-making process (moral). Furthermore, the nominalization *Urteilsbildung* encompasses both the formation and the act of making a judgement or decision – an aspect that, in my view, is not fully captured by the English term *ethical judgement*. The dual phrasing used throughout this paper seeks to preserve the conceptual nuance of the German original while aligning with the English terminological conventions.
[ii] Adapted design based on Prediger, Gravemeijer and Confrey (2015).