Subjectivist and Objectivist Ludo-Ethics

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I will introduce *subjectivist ethics* and *objectivist ethics* to videogame research. The former is derived from Friedrich Nietzsche's (1883) subjectivist notion of ethical virtues: "when you have a virtue, and it is your own virtue, you have it in common with no one" (33). The latter is derived from Ayn Rand's (1957) moral philosophy, which relies on subjective virtues too but moves on by claiming that every rational human being will choose selfishness, i.e. the "concern with one's own interests" (1961, 5) as her or his foremost ethical virtue. I propose objectivist ethics to be especially applicable to esports and competitive gaming, whereas subjectivist ethics has the highest potential to guide behavior in single-player videogame play.

Both subjectivist and objectivist ethics can be considered radically different from the most applied ethical framework in present videogame research, Aristotelian virtue ethics (e.g. Sicart 2005; Schulzke 2009; Björk 2010). Miguel Sicart (2009) describes the latter as "learning the practices that the historical community considers desirable and undesirable" (91), concluding with virtues that players should have:

> sense of achievement, explorative curiosity, socializing nature, balanced aggression, care for game balance, sportsmanship. All these virtues are put into practice when playing a game, forming players' practical wisdom, their phronesis, defined as the gameplay choices taken by players following the virtues in order to become good game players from an ethical perspective (101)

Neither subjectivist nor objectivist ludo-ethics recognizes any of the above as matters of fact (see Hurka 2013), but gives the player the freedom to choose those virtues that she or he considers worth pursuing. The two ethical stances are explained in more detail below.

Nietzsche and Subjectivist Ludo-Ethics

Nietzsche's ethical and moral thoughts have been (mis)interpreted in numerous ways and there is no need to enter those debates here. I take Nietzschean ethics as a specific instance of virtue ethics in which the individual is given the freedom to choose her or his own virtues. After the virtues have been chosen, morally appropriate behavior for the individual is that which serves the virtues she or he honors. Along these lines, Nietzsche (1887) finds the

> *sovereign individual* as the ripest fruit on its tree, like only to itself, having freed itself from the morality of custom, an autonomous, supra-ethical individual [with] his own, independent, enduring will, whose *prerogative it is to promise …* the 'free' man, the possessor of an enduring, unbreakable will, thus has his own *standard of value* (37)

It is important to observe that behaving according to one's subjective virtues (or standards of value) does not mean behaving as one wishes, but behaving according to the subjective virtues that one has chosen as her or his ethical premises. Accordingly, subjectivist ludo-ethics is defined as a semi-normative framework in which players choose to respect ad hoc virtues and—if they behave in

morally appropriate ways—do their best to pursue those virtues. As an example, players may choose ferocity as their virtue in the role-playing game *The Knights of the Old Republic*, after which the appropriate moral behavior entails choosing ferocious options even if other alternatives offer greater benefits.

Rand and Objectivist Ludo-Ethics

Rand's objectivist ethics is an echo of Nietzsche, who is often considered to have advanced so-called objectivist thoughts as well (e.g. Nietzsche 1882). Objectivist Randian ethics initiates from the same virtue-ethical freedom of choice as does subjectivist ethics, but adds that rational human beings will always choose themselves as the foremost beneficiaries in their self-created ethical systems:

> To redeem both man and morality, it is the concept of 'selfishness' that one has to redeem. … the purpose of morality is to define man's proper values and interests, that *concern with his own interests* is the essence of a moral existence, and that man *must be the beneficiary of his own moral actions*. (Rand 1961, 5)

Objectivist ethics is thus a genuine branch of normative (constitutivist) ethics and ethical egoism in particular. Accordingly, objectivist ludo-ethics is defined as a framework that includes the predetermined virtue of selfishness, i.e., the virtue of playing for one's own competitive success. This must not be confused with self-interest (or psychological egoism) that David Myers (2003) rightly considers as the root of all human play: "human play, regardless of context or group, can be best explained and understood as originating within *individual* players—in and according to *self*" (232). In objectivist ludo-ethics the morally right choice in *The Knights of the Old Republic* is always that which she or he believes to provide the highest lusory gains, regardless of whether that choice is ferocious, benevolent, or something else.

Discussion

It appears, then, that subjectivist ludo-ethics applies well to single-player videogame play. Since all videogames can be enjoyed by following various diverse virtues, it is the players' right and obligation to choose the ones they consider best. To experience the videogame from the perspective of the chosen virtues, players must respect those virtues as well.

In esports and competitive gaming the pre-defined purpose of play is competition. Players are expected to compete in order for the activity to remain what it is; transgressive forms of play like "just having fun" or "fooling around" undermine the socially determined ludic situation (see Karhulahti 2015; 2016). The selfish virtues of objectivist ludo-ethics—to pursue the highest possible lusory gains—can thus be considered a promising basis for competitive play.

I do not claim that subjectivist and objectivist ludo-ethics should be taken as solitary authorities in ludo-ethical discussion, and I do not claim that single- and multiplayer gaming (competitive and non-competitive) have no other ethical dimensions. I only claim subjectivist and objectivist ludo-ethics to be inspiring tools that help us model the ways in which people behave (and do not behave) as they play.

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