TO ETHICALLY PLAY WELL

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I "fell into" the issues concerning ethics and videogames by accident. In mid-2008 I was freshly graduated and fortunate to start working as an Assistant Professor at DePaul University. Prior to the start of the academic year, I was asked if I would like to teach their "Ethics in Computer Games and Cinema" course. At the time I had limited knowledge of moral philosophy and ethics but (naively) felt that I knew enough about videogames that this should not be too hard. Preparing for that class quickly cooled me of my bravado while also opening my eyes to the realization that there were a lot of interesting things to discuss, think about, and share with students. Unfortunately, there was not a lot of work on videogames and morality at the time[1] and I struggled to find "enough" readings for students. There were notable exceptions, including Reynolds' (2002) analysis of *Grand Theft Auto III* using different ethical theories, Sicart's (2004) call for the awareness of ethical concerns regarding the relationship between the game industry and scholarly researchers, Dodig-Crnkovic and Larsson's (2005) examination of the need for virtuous game developers, and Mia Consalvo's seminal book on

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1. I was also sadly ignorant at the time of the rich body of work on sportsmanship and its associated moral questions.

cheating (2007). Articles such as these would form the backbone of the course and would significantly shape the way I thought about ethics and videogames.

Over the years, as I continued to teach the class, my struggle in finding videogame-related articles for students to read and discuss shifted. I now struggled to whittle down a rapidly increasing list of excellent readings to something that was manageable for the students. What a great problem to have.

This special issue of Well Played is the result of an open call for participation that encouraged its potential contributors to explore a third sense of well played. From the perspective of ethics and videogames and what it means to "play well", or for a game to have been "well played." For instance, are successful cheaters to be celebrated because they have subverted a game so skillfully that their opponents never became aware of the deception? Is this well played? Is it to play well to strive to win at all costs in the context of competitive games? In the context of sports, we often speak of sportsmanship – the consideration for one's opponents and respect for the rules of a game. How do ideas of sportsmanship relate to "playing well"? How do these notions also apply to esports and competitive videogame play? And then, how do we consider those games that are not competitive or framed in the language of domination or completion. Can you play well casually? Also, what does this sense of well played say about the player and their values and who they are, or aspire to be, as people. How do, and should, these values reflect in the kinds of games they choose to play and how they go about playing them? Is it to play well when ones' personal values are aligned with those that may be encoded in, or expressed by, a game? Do the games we choose to "play well" reflect on our character and integrity in any meaningful way? Are you a bad person for playing ultra-violent videogames well? Should you be celebrated for your skills and abilities to lie and deceive your opponents in a game of Poker despite the fact that

we find lying reprehensible outside of a game? Is it virtuous to play well in these contexts? Do we demonstrate virtue by always striving to play well?

As the response to the original call for participation, this issue represents an example of "how far we have come" – a special issue on ethics and videogames was unimaginable to me fifteen years ago. Especially one that purposefully attempted to narrow its scope to "only" the ethical meaning of well played.

Enjoy, thank you, and apologies for the indulgence.

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