



ETHICS OF COMPUTER GAMING: A GROUNDWORK

ULBRICHT, S.: *Ethics of Computer Gaming: A Groundwork*. Heidelberg : Palgrave Macmillan Berlin, 2022. 111 p. ISBN 978-3-662-64397-6.

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This publication aims to discuss the ethical context of digital games. The book thus analyses a rather current and important topic, as gaming is known to be an extremely popular activity across all ages, genders and nations. Digital games are a cultural phenomenon of our era and they are expected to become even more influential and important as a result of the fourth industrial revolution. The author of this publication, S. Ulbricht, who is based at Johannes Gutenberg University in Mainz, seeks to answer the question of whether digital games can be or are immoral. He does not want to explain the issue in a broad and general way, but chooses only a detailed slice of this broad topic. This is due to Ulbricht's professional and scholarly orientation, having studied philosophy with a focus on applied ethics, aesthetics, as well as education. It is the philosophical aspect of the publication that can be felt on all its pages, giving the author a very theoretical perspective to the readers. This perspective of his is purged of the experience that a practitioner, professional player or developer would put into the publication.

The book is divided into three main chapters, with the first two dealing with defining computer games and computer gaming as an activity. Although the discussion of these topics may seem lengthy and unnecessary at first glance, the chapters have their relevance in relation to the last one, which deals specifically with the ethics of computer games and Ulbricht's thinking is based on whether gaming is a moral activity. Each of the chapters is supplemented with many examples, in addition to information supported by good and numerous literature, so that even the less philosophically-informed reader interested in game studies can better personalize the author's ideas. In addition, every chapter, except the first, and the book as a whole contains summaries, which is always an asset in this type of publication.

In the first and shortest chapter, Ulbricht discusses the definition of computer games and tries to figure out the difference between game and play and the boundaries that separate the two terms. The author asks whether computer games define computer playing or vice versa. By progressively considering the meaning of these two terms, Ulbricht arrives at an examination of computer gaming as an activity. He devotes the entire second chapter to this issue. He discusses what defines human directed activity as such and looks for similarities with computer gaming, assuming that if human activity has a moral dimension, so does computer gaming. He bases his reasoning on philosophers, in particular Aristotle's practical syllogism, which is followed by E. Anscombe and D. Davidson. Ulbricht admits that playing computer games, as he calls digital games, are fictional and virtual activities. In the next section, already using the rather concrete example of *FIFA 19*¹, he shows how playing computer games can be a conscious or, on the contrary, unconscious activity and how gaming in general can be interpreted in different ways (from intervention

1 EA VANCOUVER: *FIFA 19*. [digital game]. Redwood City, CA : EA Sports, 2018.

in the code to impersonation with a character in the game). This part of the theoretical work is extremely well done and has a popularizing character. The third chapter is the longest in scope and is directly devoted to the topic of the whole publication, i.e. ethics. As a philosopher, Ulbricht draws critically on Aristotle's utilitarianism and the subsequent work of P. Singer and H. Sidgwick. He reflects on the traditional questions of the issue of digital games, namely whether gaming can have harmful consequences and whether gamers behave maliciously. But a utilitarian approach does not resolve Ulbricht's questions, because he comes up against the fictional nature of in-game activities. He therefore goes on to look for answers in I. Kant's deontology, where he is already more or less inclined to the possibility that even virtual actions can have moral or immoral character. However, he is still unable to define the moral status of fictional action, which he seeks in the final 22 pages. Whether or not Ulbricht has found it, we will not divulge. It is, however, very pleasing to observe the thinking, synthesizing, and comparing of insights in this work of Ulbricht's. This is what makes the result of his reasoning believable and something to build any argument on in the field of the morality of digital games.

The *Ethics of Computer Gaming* was originally published in German and translated into English by artificial intelligence, so the book's stylistics may strike many readers as awkward, making both comprehension and the overall experience difficult. On the other hand, the content of the publication is full of substance, fulfilling the goals it set out to achieve at the outset. In addition to the basic question about the morality of games, Ulbricht asks many other questions, which he manages to answer, although he also leaves room for readers' own interpretations. He discusses individual issues in a complex way and from multiple perspectives, which is why he closes the topics in question on the one hand, but also leaves them open to a certain extent at the same time. Just like the whole issue of the ethics of digital games. The publication clearly contributes to the discourse in question and should certainly be read not only by students but also by educators involved in game studies. It may be a useful supplement to courses that deal with the ethical aspects of games, but it may also be of benefit to philosophers who wish to bring an up-to-date context to their studies or teaching.

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