Developing Fictionally Immoral Attitudes:
Spaces of Moral and Narrative Possibilities in Computer Games

Daniel Alexander Milne

Bielefeld University

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Universität Bielefeld

Thesis

If artworks are artistically valuable insofar as they get us to *adopt* what's fictionally an immoral attitude,

then this holds for computer games that are like *BioShock* in the relevant sense *all the more* – insofar as they get us to *freely develop* what's fictionally an immoral attitude.

Two Steps

First, I will specify how computer games that are like *BioShock* in the relevant sense are to be characterised.

Second, I will argue that *if* artworks are artistically valuable insofar as they get us to adopt what's fictionally an immoral attitude, *then, a fortiori,* computer games as specified in step 1 are artistically valuable insofar as they get us to freely develop what's fictionally an immoral attitude.
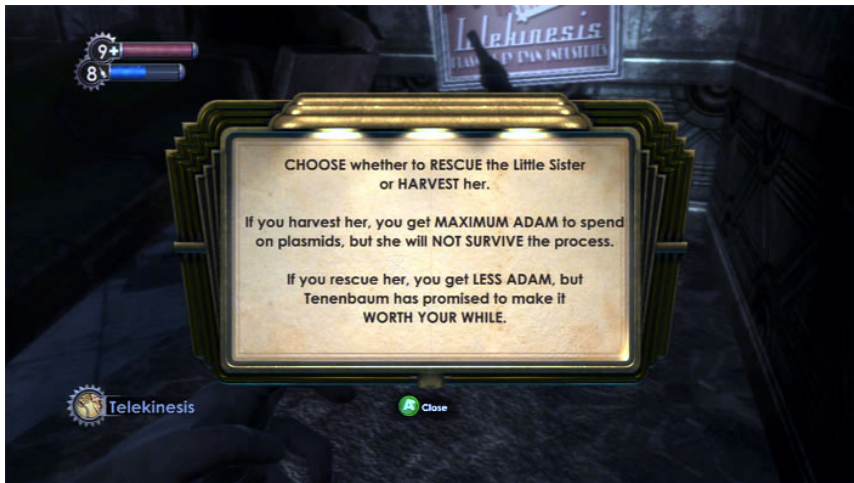
Definition

A game is a *computer game* if and only if

    (1) it's interactive,

    (2) it's run on a computer and

    (3) it's interactive because it's run on a computer.

(Lopes 2010: 26)

Step 1: From Computer Games to Interactive Narrative Machines

- a work's display: "the structured entity that results from the artist's creativity and that we tune into when we appreciate the work" (Lopes 2010: 4).
- computer games: interactive in the sense that they *prescribe* their players to have a direct impact on their displays
- computer game: the work that's appreciated while the player appreciates her generated display as *one among many possible displays of that computer game*

(cf. Lopes 2010: 59)

Step 1: From Computer Games to Interactive Narrative Machines

- computer game's display: moving images on a screen, acoustic elements, haptic elements
- can represent situations with an imagined existence only

(cf. Tavinor 2009: 38)

Definition

A computer game is an *Interactive Fiction Machine (IFM)* if and only if its displays are *fictions*.

- IFMs prescribe players to imagine that something is the case
- IFMs prescribe players to generate fictions themselves
  - generating fiction that represents Little Sisters as being killed?
  - generating fiction that represents Little Sisters as being saved?

    $\rightarrow$ is that *all* that's going on?

Step 1: From Computer Games to Interactive Narrative Machines

- *what player does* is essential for the generated fiction
- tight *player-display connection*

(cf. Tavinor 2009: 40ff.)

Step 1: From Computer Games to Interactive Narrative Machines

display world: fictional world of an IFM's display

- Every Little Sister was harvested

    $\rightarrow$ true in my display world

make-believe world: fictional world of the game of make-believe that one plays with an IFM

- I felt so-and-so while initiating the killing of the Little Sister

    $\rightarrow$ true in my make-believe world

(cf. Walton 1990: 58)

Step 1: From Computer Games to Interactive Narrative Machines

- normally: make-believe world *supplements* fiction
- computer games: make-believe world *influences* fiction

(cf. Walton 1990: 59; also Tavinor 2009: 57)

- part of make-believe world: *imaginings from the inside*
- imagining to experience what one makes player-controlled character experience in a fiction oneself

      $\rightarrow$ can influence generated fiction substantially

      $\rightarrow$ sometimes: experiences of fiction-directed emotions?

Step 1: From Computer Games to Interactive Narrative Machines

- belief that oneself is actually in danger is a necessary condition for fear for oneself
- but: true in *my display world* that Big Daddies threaten player-controlled character
- and: true in *my make-believe* world that I myself am threatened by Big Daddy
  $\rightarrow$ fear-like sensations (quasi-fear)

$\rightarrow$ truth *in my make-believe world* that I myself fear Big Daddy

(Walton 1978)

- such experiences enrich fictions with a sense of meaning and significance
- *narratives* involve transmission of how someone *felt* in a certain situation (Fludernik 2010: 122)

> $\rightarrow$ A computer game is an *Interactive Narrative Machine (INM)* if its displays are narratives in this *experience*-transmitting sense.

- decision based on experiences (quasi-emotions) that are real emotions within the fiction
- quasi-emotions occur automatically
- quasi-emotions are *real experiences*

$\rightarrow$ one is responsible for them
$\rightarrow$ one can learn something from them
$\rightarrow$ fictions which prescribe these can satisfy one's desire for diverse experiences

- artwork can be *artistically valuable* insofar as it prescribes such a psychologically intelligible and self-illuminating imaginative experience
- in particular, if this experience leads to the adoption of what's fictionally an *immoral* attitude

(cf. Kieran 2003: 57)

(1) Imaginative experiences are valuable insofar as they enhance our understanding of something in otherwise unavailable ways.

(2) Artworks are artistically valuable insofar as they prescribe valuable imaginative experiences.

Hence, (3) artworks are artistically valuable insofar as they prescribe imaginative experiences that enhance our understanding of something in otherwise unavailable ways.

(Kieran 2003: 63)

(3) Artworks are artistically valuable insofar as they prescribe imaginative experiences that enhance our understanding of something in otherwise unavailable ways.

(4) Imaginative experiences that get us to take up fictionally immoral attitudes can enhance our understanding of something in otherwise unavailable ways.

Hence, (C) artworks can be artistically valuable insofar as they prescribe imaginative experiences that get us to take up fictionally immoral attitudes.

(Kieran 2003: 63)

- understanding: grasping why and how something is as it is
- full understanding: requires comparative cases
  - includes relevantly contrasting kinds
  - for morally good experiences: morally bad experiences (two kinds)

(Kieran 2003: 63ff.)

- imaginatively taking up immoral attitude: epistemically valuable substitute for actually taking up attitude
- must be presented so that one is psychologically able and willing to entertain it
  - imaginatively experiencing immoral attitude from within (as being in a certain situation)
    - $\rightarrow$ actual experiences, which are fictionally emotions
    - $\rightarrow$ make it fictional that I myself experience attitude immorally

(cf. Kieran 2003: 63ff.)

(4+) *If* imaginative experiences that get us to *take up* fictionally immoral attitudes can enhance our understanding of something in otherwise unavailable ways, *then* imaginative experiences that get us to *develop* fictionally immoral attitudes can enhance our understanding of something in otherwise unavailable ways *all the more*.

(C+) *If* artworks can be artistically valuable insofar as they prescribe imaginative experiences that get us to *take up* fictionally immoral attitudes, *then* they can be artistically valuable insofar as they prescribe imaginative experiences that get us to *develop* fictionally immoral attitudes *all the more.*

- certain INMs: works that prescribe player to develop fictionally immoral attitude
- serve as evidence for the truth of the preceding *a fortiori* conditionals

- non-interactive artworks: one learns what it feels like to *be* in a state of mind that results in immoral actions
- INMs: one learns, additionally, what it feels like

    + ... to *develop* such a state of mind
    + ... to *act* in accordance with it
    + ... to be *responsible* for being in and acting in accordance with it

    → knowledge that isn't otherwise to be had

- given (C), insofar as a work succeeds in getting one to imaginatively *adopt* an immoral attitude, renders it intelligible, and provides epistemic rewards for having engaged in this imaginative experience, the work is *artistically valuable* (Kieran 03: 70f.)

  $\rightarrow$ given (C+), insofar as an INM succeeds in getting one to imaginatively *develop* an immoral attitude, renders it *more* intelligible and provides *richer* epistemic rewards than any non-interactive work could, the INM is artistically *more* valuable than any non-interactive work could be

Conclusion

- "morality systems"?
- artistic evaluation: matters to what extent prescribed imaginative experience is psychologically intelligible and epistemically rewarding

  $\rightarrow$ experiencing what are non-deliberately occurring emotions in imagination fulfils condition to high degree

  $\rightarrow$ imaginatively *developing* immoral attitude might deepen understanding of

  - why certain immoral actions are pursued
  - how it feels like to freely act immorally
  - how it feels like to be responsible for such actions

- INMs allow for the development of such attitudes in imagination

  $\rightarrow$ particularly and distinctively well-suited to provide imaginative acquaintances of how one would feel if one *fully* engaged in immoral attitude

  $\rightarrow$ epistemically and, thus, artistically valuable

References

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