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SI 410 ETHICS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

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Week 11a: Ethics of Game Play

THEMES

- Definitions of virtual reality
- Representation and simulation
- Ethics of video games

"It is true he studied computers, but he is not a philosopher."
*-- relative of Walaeed Hasayin, who was detained in the West Bank
for his Facebook posts. Reported in* The New York Times, *11/16/2010*

*"At first I thought he was looking at pornographic sites and chatting with
girls. That would have been normal and none of my business."*
-- Internet café owner Ahmed Abu Asab, where Mr. Hasayin spent time online

DEFINITIONS

- Four elements in virtual reality
  - A virtual world
  - Immersion
  - Sensory feedback
  - Interactivity

- Virtual reality: "a three-dimensional interactive, computer-generated environment that incorporates a first person perspective." (p. 362)
- Computer simulations: models (not necessarily realistic or interactive)

REPRESENTING REALITY

- Brey (p. 365) writes that it is a big mistake to "call anything in virtual reality real and to start treating it as such."   DISCUSS

  - Almost real
  - Imaginary

  - Simulations versus "ontological reproductions"
    - The latter have the same value or effects as their real-world counterparts
  - Reproductions: physical and institutional entities
    - GIVE SOME EXAMPLES OF BOTH TYPES

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DISTINGUISHING VIRTUAL AND REAL

- If virtuality and reality are not opposing constructs, simulation/reality and representation/ reality are distinct but blurring.

    - DISCUSS examples from multiple media

- Representations *become* reality for us when they are all the reality we know." (p. 367)

ETHICAL ISSUES (1) – DESIGN

- Misrepresentation
  - Falling short of standards of accuracy
  - Promises not fulfilled
- Biased representation
  - Selectivity
  - Stereotyping
  - One-sided fantasies
- Indecent representation
  - Virtual pornography
  - Two sides to the argument
  - What role does "harm by offense" play
  - Depiction of real persons (see 11/15/2010 NYT)

ETHICAL ISSUES (2) – USE

- Can actions in VR be unethical?

- Single user [actions that are unethical in real life are unethical in virtual environments.]
  - Moral development harm (emotional transferance)
  - Psychological harm (to third parties)
  - Bad habits harm (virtue ethics and the good life)
- Multi-user [some actions that are unethical in real life may be unethical in virtual environments.]
  - Brey falls back on ambiguity
  - Limitations on physical impact on real world
  - The psychology of role playing

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ETHICS OF COMPUTER GAMES

- Big business ($19.6 billion 2009; $21.4 billion 2008)
  - Call of Duty: Black Ops - $360 million first day sales

- Case against: addiction, aggression, maladjustment
- Case for: pleasure, creativity, fantasy acts

- Value proposition:
  - No question of social construction of reality
  - Do video games influence the values of the players?
  - Do those values translate to behavior in the real world?

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