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SI 410 ETHICS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Week 11a: Ethics of Game Play

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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 Walaed 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

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)

• Brey, “Virtual reality and computer simulation” (2008)

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 transference)
 - 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

•Brey, “Virtual reality and computer simulation” (2008)

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?

A decorative graphic on the left side of the slide. It features a vertical stack of thin, light green lines of varying heights. To the right of these lines are several solid green circles of different sizes. The largest circle is at the top, with a smaller one below it, and two more circles of intermediate sizes further down. The text 'PAUL CONWAY' is positioned to the right of these circles.

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