

THE PROMOTION OF ETHICAL EGOISM THROUGH MORALITY MECHANICS IN  
*MASS EFFECT, FABLE III & FALLOUT NEW VEGAS:*  
A ROLE-PLAYING VIDEO GAME EXPLORATION

by

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## DECLARATION

I, Carli Grobler (206036566), hereby declare that the treatise for Master of Arts in Media Studies (Coursework) to be awarded is my own work and that it has not previously been submitted for assessment or completion of any postgraduate qualification to another University or for another qualification.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Carli Grobler', written in a cursive style.

*Carli Grobler*

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## **PREFACE**

The idea for this thesis was sparked while playing *Mass Effect* and my passion for video games and storytelling fueled that spark. In light of this, much of the information in this study is based on my personal experience as a gamer.

Due to the fact that video game studies is an emerging field, there is little published information on video games. As such, I have used wikis and websites to fill the gaps where my personal knowledge of the games is not complete. These wikis and game websites are managed and maintained by avid gamers who have great passion for the respective games and have spent many hours cataloguing the exact details of the games. These wikis provide detailed accounts of quests, storyline, rewards, items, characters, etc. and have become an invaluable secondary source of information on each game.

I must also point out that I am aware of the variations in British - vs. American spelling. These are made on purpose in order to keep original spelling intact when citing American authors, ensuring a less cluttered read.

Furthermore, I would encourage non-gamer readers to keep the glossary handy and to make use of the Web in order to gain a deeper understanding of each game.

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## **GLOSSARY**

alignment	the moral alignment of a character (also character's morality)
casual gamer	a gamer who plays infrequently or plays simplistic games that can be played and completed in short sessions ("Casual Gamer" 2015a:s.p.)
character level	experience level of a character, usually measured numerically
companion	a non-playable character who accompanies the main character on their quest, providing support, especially in combat, and often other perks / benefits
cut-scene	non-interactive sequence in a video game that breaks up gameplay, can be used to move story forward or provide new insight into a character, etc.
game time	real time measurement of time spent playing the video game
gamer / player	real life individual participating in video game play
hardcore gamer	a gamer who plays video games as one of their main hobbies, often play competitively and enjoy complex games (this term is mostly used within the gaming culture to differentiate between "real" gamers and people who "merely play games" ("Hardcore Gamer 2015b:s.p.)
morality mechanic	set of rules created by the game designer where morality points are attributed for certain in-game actions or decisions
morality points	points given to measure the amount of "good" or "evil" actions a character has performed
non-player character (NPC)	characters in a game that are not controlled by the gamer, however, the player can interact with some NPCs

open world	used to describe a video game in which players are given freedom to explore the world and can choose when and how to complete quests and other game objectives
player-character	used when both player and in-game character are affected
playstyle	the specific manner in which someone plays, the style of their gameplay
role-playing game (RPG)	a game in which the gamer assumes the role of a character to interact with a fantasy world, these games are heavily based on narrative progression and character development
strategy game	a game which places emphasis on planning, strategy and logistics in order for the gamer to attain victory; these games often include economic and military factors in game play

## SUMMARY

The aim of this study is to determine whether or not ethical egoism is promoted during gameplay of three role-playing video games namely *Mass Effect*, *Fable III* and *Fallout New Vegas*. The rapid expansion of the video gaming industry as well as game studies as an academic field have made it necessary to understand what effects video games may have on society. This study shows that gamers come into contact with various ethico-moral dilemmas during gameplay and act in an egoistic manner in order to complete video games.

Firstly, an explanation of game and gameplay are provided as well as an outline of two game studies methodologies, namely narratology and ludology. These two methodologies are then combined into a hybrid approach which is used to analyse the video games from both a narrative and gameplay point of view which allows for a more comprehensive analysis of each respective game. Thereafter, a discussion of B.F. Skinner's behaviourism is given in order to better understand gamer behaviour. Skinner's concepts of positive reinforcement, schedules of reinforcement and operant conditioning are then linked to video games to show behaviourism's influences on game design. Ethical egoism, as theorised by Thomas Hobbes and Jesse Kalin, provides the ethico-moral theory necessary for the analysis of the morality mechanic in each game. Ethico-moral dilemmas identified within each game are discussed with regards to the hybrid approach which details both narrative and gameplay consequences of in-game ethico-moral decision making.

The study concludes that gamers are ethical egoists when engaged in gameplay, due to their desire to complete the video game. However, during gameplay, gamers are exposed to altruism which is often promoted through the narrative and the nature of in-game objectives. Suggestions for further studies are also given for example a more detailed analysis of gamer behaviour, a qualitative study of in-game ethico-moral actions as well as a study of games that are non-violent in nature.

**Key words:** behaviourism, operant conditioning, positive reinforcement, ethical egoism, narratology, ludology, gaming, role-playing game, morality mechanic

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### ***1.1. Introduction***

The video game industry's revenue is expected to increase to \$82 billion over the next two years globally, an increase of \$15 billion from 2012 (Gaudiosi 2012:s.p.), with some analysts even suggesting a figure of \$100 billion (Goldman 2010:s.p.). Many game developers and publishers would like to see the continuous increase of their industry and therefore a deeper understanding of what makes a successful game is imperative in our society. In South Africa, a similar growth pattern can be seen with the gaming market being "a R1.72 billion industry... almost 3.9 million physical games were sold generating over R900 million in revenue, surpassing movie ticket sales, pegged at R788 million" in 2012 (Etherington-Smith 2012:s.p.). Furthermore, "[l]ocally the growth of the industry has been synonymous with more gamers entering the scene" which includes both casual- and hardcore gamers (BizCommunity 2012:s.p.). This increase in gamers could be attributed to the rapid expansion of social media and the greater use of mobile smart phones, both of which are excellent platforms for casual gaming. Mobile gaming is a major component of gaming in South Africa and it "will overtake console gaming in terms of market value in South Africa by 2018" (Oxford 2014:s.p.). Gaming is becoming a large part of South Africans' lives, whether on a casual or hardcore level, and most predictors indicate that the industry will continue to grow over the next years.

Along with this growth in industry comes growth in the field of game studies; Espen Aarseth (2015:s.p.), a leading game theorist, argues that "[a]s far as research fields go, game studies is a success... New conferences, teaching programs, even departments and institutes spring up and thrive". Aarseth further points out that there are multiple countries where game studies is flourishing, including Sweden, Denmark, China, and Poland, where conferences, game studies publications and institutions have taken root (Aarseth 2015:s.p.). Moreover, "[t]wo related trends can now be observed: game research is increasingly accepted in traditional research communities such as HCI [human-computer interaction] and media studies" as well as emerging "specialized game studies venues", which include "Music, Queerness, Philosophy, History, and Literary Theory" (Aarseth 2015:s.p.). This acceptance into related fields bodes well for the future of game studies as well as the expansion of these specialised, niche fields.

Due to the rapid expansion of the gaming industry, which is taking place both globally and in South Africa, it is important to study the effects of video games on society. The incorporation of morality mechanics<sup>1</sup> in role-playing games (RPGs) presents an entry-point for exploring the possible ethico-moral<sup>2</sup> values that are promoted in specific video games. In this study, three games are analysed in terms of the ethical values they promote, namely *Mass Effect* (BioWare 2007), *Fable III* (Lionhead Studios 2010) and *Fallout New Vegas* (Obsidian Entertainment 2010).

Morality has been embedded within human existence throughout history. It has filtered into daily decision-making, the laws of countries, the entertainment industry, and how we treat our environment. Morality has been an important topic of discussion among philosophers across the ages, from Aristotle to Rawls, and continues to be a prominent factor of religious beliefs and practices. It is therefore not surprising that it has found its way into video games.

The first video game to include moral choices in its gameplay was Yoichi Erikawa's simulation-RPG-strategy *Nobunaga's Ambition* released in 1983 as part of the greater Nobunaga<sup>3</sup> series (Koei 1983). Set in feudal Japan, this "strategy game used moral choices like resource management to affect troop morale and loyalty" (Rudoblo 2012:s.p.). In contemporary games, morality mechanics are mostly associated with role-playing games (hereafter RPGs), recently however, these mechanics have also been included in first-person shooter games such as *BioShock* (2K Games & Feral Interactive, 2007). Morality mechanics give the player a sense of ownership over the story as they are continuously contributing to it; according to John Dovey and Helen W. Kennedy (2006:26), players "actively participate in the creation of the game as [they] play it". Gamers contribute to the story by making decisions in the game that affect the outcome of later events, alter their character's appearance, or allow access to different parts of the storyline. The ability to make decisions in-game provides a more profound gaming experience because "players as ethical agents are not mere providers of input: they understand the nature of their actions within the semantics of the infosphere<sup>4</sup>, and they act upon that moral understanding" (Sicart 2009:195).

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<sup>1</sup> Game mechanics will be explained later in this chapter.

<sup>2</sup> Due to the complicated nature of the player-character dynamic, the terms 'ethical' and 'moral' are combined in this study in order to discuss both the ethical conduct of the player as well as the moral decisions of the player-character that are made in-game.

<sup>3</sup> Oda Nobunaga was a samurai who worked towards the unification of Japan. ("Oda Nobunaga" s.a.:s.p.)

<sup>4</sup> "The infosphere is an ecological environment of informational agents, patients, and their mutual relations. All elements of the infosphere are in one or another mutually connected, precisely like in an ecosystem, and the

Furthermore, in our understanding of Aristotle's theories on virtue ethics "the essence of morality lies not in abiding by a certain basic principle, but in the cultivation of a certain character," (Gan 2010:433) which is one of the fundamental elements of an RPG: creating and developing a character within a storyline.

The swift expansion of the video game industry has led to games becoming one of the most popular forms of entertainment. As such, it is important to identify and understand the various moral values and discourses that gamers come into contact with especially through role-playing games, where much of the gameplay relies on ethico-moral decisions. By examining three video games, *Mass Effect*, *Fable III* and *Fallout New Vegas*, this study analyses their moral mechanics in order to determine whether or not they promote ethical egoism. In the next section of this chapter, a means to understanding and analysing video games is discussed followed by an explanation of game mechanics. The morality mechanic in each game analysed in this study is then described. Furthermore, in Chapter 2 an explanation of B. F. Skinner's work on behaviourism is provided as well as how this relates to game mechanics and gamer behaviour. The second part of Chapter 2 details the concept of ethical egoism as presented by Thomas Hobbes and Jesse Kalin. Also included in Chapter 2 is an explanation of how gamers process ethical and moral interactions with games as well as Miguel Sicart's approach to understanding gamers as ethical agents. Chapter 3 analyses the three video games, *Mass Effect*, *Fable III* and *Fallout New Vegas*, according to the theories and concepts laid out in Chapter 2 and by using some of the game studies elements explained in the next section. Chapter 4 concludes by providing a brief summary of the argument, as well as suggestions for further studies related to the topic.

## ***1.2. Analysing Video Games***

### ***1.2.1. Game***

To understand gameplay and how games can be analysed it is first important to provide a definition of a game. Suits (1978) believes that "games are goal-directed activities in which inefficient means are intentionally chosen" (Suits 1978:24). What Suits means by this is that playing a game does not necessarily mean the player is completing the game objectives in the most efficient way possible. Rules are set in place in order to provide a challenge and the "observance of rules is part of the end of the activity" (Suits 1978:27). 'Inefficient' in this

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balance of this system can be affected, leading to harm and thus defining what ethical actions or relations are" (Sicart 2009, p. 129).

case, means 'playing by the rules'. Suits argues that "lines are drawn", i.e. rules are made, in order to provide a satisfying playing experience:

the decision to draw an arbitrary line with respect to permissible means need not itself be an arbitrary decision. The decision to be arbitrary may have a purpose, and the purpose may be to play a game. It seems to be the case that the lines drawn in games are not really arbitrary at all. For both that the lines are drawn and also where they are drawn have important consequences not only for the type, but also for the quality, of the game to be played. (1978:30)

In other words, games that have rules and are challenging to play provide a better experience to players. This concept which Suits based on traditional, non-digital games, can also be applied to video games. Video games have rules in the form of game mechanics (to be discussed in Section 1.3. of this chapter) which allow or restrict certain behaviours and provide the terms by which the gamer must complete the video game. It is important to note that Suits placed emphasis on the quality of the game experience as one that is challenging but neither impossible to accomplish nor too easy. This study will understand a 'good quality game' or 'satisfying game experience' as one that is challenging but manageable.

This section has provided an understanding of game and what constitutes a good gaming experience. The next section explains the concept of gameplay followed by the game studies methodologies of narratology and ludology in Sections 1.2.3. and 1.2.4. respectively. These two sections provide an understanding of the two approaches taken by video games scholars in their research.

### ***1.2.2. Gameplay***

Due to the relatively recent origin of the field of video game studies "little has been done to actively develop a methodological system for the qualitative, critical analysis of games as 'texts'" despite the fact that the "study of digital games is taking off" (Consalvo & Dutton 2006:s.p.). Several game studies researchers such as "Aarseth (2003), Brooker (2001) and Konzack (2002) have noted the lack of methodologies of critical analysis, and begun to address the need" (Consalvo & Dutton 2006:s.p.). The existing methodologies "do not systematically lay out elements in a game that can help a researcher with the specifics of analysis" (Consalvo & Dutton 2006:s.p.). Furthermore, "[s]ome scholars would argue that games are not texts at all and certainly cannot be understood through media studies methods such as textual or ideological analysis (Juul 2000 cited in Consalvo & Dutton 2006:s.p.). Due to this lack of methodologies, game scholars have 'borrowed' from the schools of film -,

media - and cultural studies as well as psychology, however a "major difficulty arises for traditional Media Studies [and by extension other 'borrowed' approaches] when the 'text' which is its primary object of study becomes interactive" (Dovey & Kennedy 2006:5). As Dovey and Kennedy explain:

Computer games are by their very nature interactive and the importance of this fundamental quality cannot be overestimated. In order to study a computer game we cannot have recourse solely to its textual characteristics; we have to pay particular attention to the moment of its enactment as it is *played*. The 'text', if we are to use that term at all, becomes the complex interaction between player and game - or what is described as **gameplay**. (Dovey & Kennedy 2006:6, original emphasis)

Liestol (2004:400) defines gameplay as "the activity that is produced over time as a result of the subject's engagement with the rules, objects, and activities of the game" (cited in Dovey & Kennedy 2006:7). Gameplay requires a large amount of "'decoding' or learning" as players must learn how to navigate, use weapons, interact with NPCs, as well as the "decoding of its structure or system (of levels, of architectural organization, of scoring systems, timing of events...)"; in short, how the mechanics of the game work (Dovey & Kennedy 2006:7). Furthermore, this process has to be repeated not only for different games, but also throughout the progression of a game as new elements such as character abilities or map areas become available (Dovey & Kennedy 2006:7). Several scholars now use the term *configuration* to describe

the complexity of the active processes of both interpretation and interaction as the player literally constructs the game 'on the fly' through the practices of gameplay. Here the idea of 'point and click' interactivity, in which the user makes simple reading choices, is transformed into the idea of the user making significant interventions into a game world that have dynamic effects throughout its system (Dovey & Kennedy 2006:7).

Immersion through simulation plays an important role in gameplay. Aarseth (2004) argues that "simulation is the critical means through which to articulate the distinctiveness of computer games from other media forms and to assert the specificity of player agency as distinct from viewer / reader agency" (cited in Dovey & Kennedy 2006:10).

It is important to note that gameplay is based on values that are generally associated with masculinity, such as competition, violence, logic and aggression. Competition, whether with

other players in online games or with NPCs in single player games, is one of the main components of most video games. As Valerie Walkerdine points out:

Many games are the site for the production of contemporary masculinity because they both demand and appear to ensure performances such as heroism, killing, winning, competition, and action, combined with technological skill and rationality (2007:48).

These actions, or themes, identified by Walkerdine are traditionally viewed as masculine and are present in most video games. Due to the limited scope of this study, the gendered nature of video games and gameplay and the implications of this will not be explored. This may, however, be useful for further study which is mentioned in Chapter 4.

The fact that video games are becoming "a form of mass entertainment has prompted a return to theories of play" in order to find a methodological toolkit for analysing video games (Dovey & Kennedy 2006:20). As Dovey and Kennedy point out, "[t]he forms of analysis considered useful for the study of computer games has been motivated by two distinct forces, which have been described as **narratology** and **ludology**" (2006:22, original emphasis). Proponents of narratology argue "that games can be studied through recourse to existing literary and humanities methods of understanding texts" whilst ludologists argue "that this cannot be the case since a computer game is not a conventional text at all but an activity more akin to play or sport", i.e. an interactive system (Dovey & Kennedy 2006:23).

### ***1.2.3. Narratology***

Narratology is "characterized by the application of theory used in the analysis of stories" (Kromhout & Forceville 2013:102). In recent years, "narrativists see games as a new type of story-telling" and as such many studies take a narrativist approach when attempting to analyse games (Kromhout & Forceville 2013:102). Sky LaRell Anderson (2013:291) argues that "a study of a game's character or story is understood to be narratology". He further points out that narratology "takes video games' nature as granted and investigates them as any other media" whereas ludology often attempts to define the nature of games before they can be discussed (Anderson 2013:291). Narratology "examines the ways that narrative structures our perception of both cultural artifacts and the world around us" and it is "particularly important since our ordering of time and space in narrative forms constitutes one of the primary ways we construct meaning in general" (Felluga 2011:s.p.).

Much of the literature regarding game studies attempts to provide an all-encompassing method for analysing video games, however some believe that "[r]ather than trying to come up with a grand unified theory" we should adopt "[Marie-Laure] Ryan's (2006) more balanced suggestion that 'some games have a narrative design and others do not'" (cited in Caracciolo 2015:233). Ryan explains that

in a narrative game, story is meant to enhance gameplay, while in a playable story, gameplay is meant to produce a story. The concepts of narrative game and playable story reflect, in their opposition, the distinction made by the French sociologist Roger Caillois between two types of game: ludus and paidia (2009:45). (ludus and paidia will be looked at more closely in the next section)

It is clear then, that a narratological analysis of video games can be approached from two different angles, depending on the nature of the game itself and how the narrative is presented. Other scholars also advocate for a narratological approach to game studies, such as Janet Murray who believes that the "symbolic content of games" is imperative in this field of study (2006:186).

Marco Caracciolo (2015) highlights the work of Meir Sternberg (1993) who argues that narrative experience consists of three "master interests" namely suspense, curiosity and surprise (cited in Caracciolo 2015:235). These interests can surface in video games when the narrative causes gamers to be concerned about the outcomes of certain events, generating curiosity about the game world or plot twists within the storyline (Caracciolo 2015:235).

In his 2003 book *More Than a Game*, Barry Atkins explores "questions of 'narrative point of view', the possibility of 'subversive readings', 'closure', the meaning of terms such as 'realism', 'counterfactual historiography' and the 'handling of time within narrative'" (cited in Dovey & Kennedy 2006:88). Atkins argues that there is "'an unspoken tacit agreement between player and text to make fewer demands of game fictions than of films or novels'" and that gamers do not expect "'great dialogue in a game fiction'" (Atkins 2003 cited in Dovey & Kennedy 2006:88). Markku Eskelinen (2001) has similar ideas about the lack of narrative gravitas, stating that "'stories are just uninteresting ornaments or gift-wrappings to games, and laying any emphasis on studying these kinds of marketing tools is just a waste of time and energy'" (cited in Dovey & Kennedy 2006:88). In Atkins' analysis of *Half-Life* (Valve 1998), he makes

"little or no reference to the rule set or the gameplay structure which a ludologist would argue was central to any game analysis", subsequently "we are left without too much idea as to what it might be like to play the game" (Dovey & Kennedy 2006:89). However, it is important to remember that "the formal system of a game, the game considered as a set of rules" is not the "experience of the game" (Salen & Zimmerman 2004 cited in Dovey & Kennedy 2006:92).

#### ***1.2.4. Ludology***

Recently, "theorists have turned to pre-existing frameworks for understanding the role of play in our culture" as a means to "describe and understand the computer game" which has become "a significant site of investigation since it is produced by the interplay between an increasingly ludic culture and a world that is increasingly technologically mediated" (Dovey & Kennedy 2006:23). The use of "cultural history, psychology, anthropology and systems theory" in ludology "has served to remind us that games are not static media texts - they are *activities*" (Dovey & Kennedy 2006:23, original emphasis). Johan Huizinga (1949) and Roger Caillois (1961) both offer "a way into understanding the relationships between play and culture" although "their ideas need a radical overhaul to be relevant to the contemporary sphere" (Dovey & Kennedy 2006:23). For Huizinga:

Play is a voluntary activity or occupation executed within certain fixed limits of time and place, according to rules freely accepted but absolutely binding having its aim in itself and accompanied by a feeling of tension, joy, and the consciousness that it is 'different' from ordinary life (1949:28).

Roger Caillois extended Huizinga's work and did much in the way of defining terminology to describe different types of play. Caillois identified two distinct kinds of play, namely *ludus*, rule-based games "which have a clear win or lose conclusion, or zero sum games"; and *paidia*, "open-ended play, spontaneous improvised play, often thought of as 'true creative' play - active, tumultuous [and] exuberant" (Dovey & Kennedy 2006:25). Most video games employ a combination of both kinds of play and even those games that are heavily rule-based such as *FIFA* (EA Sports) or other sports-based games still allow the player opportunities to 'play around'. Caillois' "structuralist approach to naming the formal elements of play and of games has become dominant in a number of attempts to define what a computer game is" (Dovey & Kennedy 2006:25) and has been greatly expanded on by Jesper Juul (2003:s.p.) who pinpoints six elements that he believes are characteristic of games:

**1) Rules:** Games are rule-based. **2) Variable, quantifiable outcome:** Games have variable, quantifiable outcomes. **3) Value assigned to possible outcomes:** That the different potential outcomes of the game are assigned different values,

some being positive, some being negative. **4) Player effort:** That the player invests effort in order to influence the outcome. (i.e. games are challenging.) **5) Player attached to outcome:** That the players are attached to the outcomes of the game in the sense that a player will be the winner and "happy" if a positive outcome happens, and loser and "unhappy" if a negative outcome happens. **6) Negotiable consequences:** The same game [set of rules] can be played with or without real-life consequences.

Rules "shape and structure our experience of playing a game; they are what we must seek to understand the moment we begin to play"; they govern "the ways in which the character or avatar can or cannot interact with or negotiate the game world" and they are "significant in determining the quality of the game experience" (Dovey & Kennedy 2006:26&27). Ludology provides a means to study games as a system of rules and how these rules interact with gamers in order to create gameplay.

Juul (2003) and other scholars have formed "critical definitions of what makes a game - definitions that then allow for distinctions and variations to be classified and understood" (Dovey & Kennedy 2006:28). There are some games that are variants of the basic six features of a game as defined by Juul, placing more emphasis on some features and less on others. These six elements can aid in the analysis of video games by providing a basis of factors that should be considered. Rules and mechanics "shape and structure our experience of a game to a greater or lesser degree, but they do not inevitably *determine* our *whole* experience" (Dovey & Kennedy 2006:28, original emphasis). Dovey and Kennedy (2006:29) succinctly explain how we can understand games within the cultural sphere by drawing from other scholars:

To understand fully the specificity of games, Salen and Zimmerman (2004) argue that we have to understand both 'play' as an 'experiential' dimension of games and 'culture' as a 'contextual' dimension of games. In other words, they assert that 'play' and 'culture' are in a formative relationship. This position is echoed by Sutton-Smith, who describes play's 'intrinsic' and 'extrinsic' force. Here, 'intrinsic' refers to the 'game related motives for playing' – that is, how the rules structure our experience of the gameplay. 'Extrinsic' refers to the cultural value of play – how the game itself relates to the cultural world which produces it, for instance, in terms of representation, ideology and pleasure (Sutton-Smith 2001:17).

The understanding of "play as located in the world of social reality points away from purely structural accounts of computer gameplay and towards a more nuanced understanding of the relationships between play and cultural context" and is critical for the analysis of video games (Dovey & Kennedy 2006:29). Dovey and Kennedy (2006:84) "attempt to generate an analytic toolkit which is sensitive to the specificity of the computer game" by arguing for "a synthesis

of existing approaches, hybridizing methodologies for hybridized media forms". As mentioned above, "the chief proponents for the specificity and difference of the computer game have been the ludologists" as they have attempted "to articulate the structural qualities that distinguish games from other kinds of mediated experience" (Dovey & Kennedy 2006:85). Scholars such as Juul (2003) and Aki Järvinen (2003) afford "a primacy to the rule set as a point of departure for understanding computer games as a cultural form and as an experience" (Dovey & Kennedy 2006:85).

Early games that are heavily rule-based such as *Pac-Man* (Namco 1980) and *Tetris* (Pajitnov and Pokhilko 1984) "with minimal or non-existent narrative or representational qualities" still have a "'holding power' that was formally significant insofar as it proved that the pure structural features of gameplay - goals, rules and manipulable elements - could provide compelling entertainment" (Turkle 1984 cited in Dovey & Kennedy 2006:88). However, many contemporary video games have a high level of visual realism where "[t]echniques of film, graphic and text are combined in ways that reference existing forms of representation such as cinema, television, sport or literature" making them "rich in representational pleasures that overlay and enhance the gameplay mechanic" (Dovey & Kennedy 2006:88). Despite one of the leading games theorists, Aarseth, being "particularly hostile to conventional methodologies of media analysis for understanding games", Dovey & Kennedy argue that:

It seems rather futile and unnecessarily limiting for an emergent discipline to seek to establish its methodological or analytical specificity through a refutation of this dominant contemporary trend or to argue for the exclusion of the analysis of these elements of the computer game (2006:85&88).

The next section provides a hybrid approach to game studies which combines aspects from both narratology and ludology in order to provide a comprehensive study of video games. This hybrid approach is used in Chapter 3 to analyse three video games.

### ***1.2.5. Hybrid Approach***

With the development of game studies as a field "we have observed both traditional and radical scholars adapting existing approaches at the same time as they fashion new methodologies" (Dovey & Kennedy 2006:85). As Dovey and Kennedy explain:

This recognition of methodological hybridity allows us to expand and develop an understanding of the computer game that includes both the structuralist analysis so dear to ludologists and an understanding of the way that the game is

mediated through cultures in the form of representation, narrative and intertextuality (2006:86).

Janet Murray (2004:s.p.) argues for "a new genre altogether" in which we "should instead think of the characteristics of stories and games and how these separable characteristics are being recombined and reinvented within the astonishingly plastic world of cyberspace" (2004:s.p.). Ryan (2006) believes that "[c]omputer games are an art of compromise between narrative and gameplay" (cited in Caracciolo 2015:237). Carracciolo explains that

In the moment-by-moment dynamic of engaging with a videogame the ludic interests of agency, competitiveness, and strategic planning may prevail, but these may be embedded in a broader narrative structure, with suspense, curiosity, and surprise emerging from time to time and orienting the overall experience (2015:236-237)

As mentioned, there is a trend towards combining theories in order to analyse the various facets of video games, both as stories and as interactive media. This hybrid approach, combining narratology and ludology, is adopted in this study in order to provide an analysis of the morality mechanic in each game and whether certain ethico-moral values are promoted within the respective video games through both the narrative and gameplay. The next sections briefly explain what game mechanics are and how the morality mechanic functions in each of the video games analysed.

### ***1.3. Game Mechanics***

Game mechanics form part of the overall "Game engines...[which] are dynamic rule-based systems made up from millions of lines of computer code which create worlds that audiences clearly find compelling and immersive" (Dovey & Kennedy 2006:12). Many researchers believe there is a "difference between the rules of the game and the actions afforded to players by those rules" (Sicart 2008:s.p.). However, "this formal distinction between rules and mechanics is not always applied in game mechanics research" (Sicart 2008:s.p.). Sus Lundgren and Staffan Björk (2003:4) believe that game mechanics can be defined as "any part of the rule system of a game that covers one, and only one, possible kind of interaction that takes place during the game, be it general or specific... mechanics are regarded as a way to summarize game rules". Similarly, Tracy Fullerton, Steven Hoffman and Christopher Swain (2004) define game mechanics as "'the actions or methods of play allowed by the rules (...) they guide player behaviour, creating interactions'" (cited in Sicart 2008:s.p.). This

definition argues that game mechanics only exist whilst a player is directly interacting with the game (i.e. 'the rules') and does not make allowance for other forms of mechanics, e.g. the mechanics that determine the physics in a game or the mechanics of simulation. Sicart argues that "these approaches lack a deep explanation of the connections between rules and mechanics. These connections are fundamental for the formal analysis of games" (Sicart 2008:s.p.). David Cook (2006:s.p.) expands on the base definition of mechanics by adding the player's response to the factors that should be considered: "game mechanics are rule based system / simulations that facilitate and encourage a user to explore and learn the properties of their possibility space through the use of feedback mechanisms". Here, Cook briefly touches on a concept pioneered by behaviourist B.F. Skinner, namely operant conditioning, which is looked at in further detail in Chapter 2.

Järvinen "distinguishes rules from mechanics" and "relates the latter with player agency, both in terms of psychological and gameplay experiences" and defines mechanics as a "'means to guide the player into particular behaviour by constraining the space of possible plans to attain goals'" (Järvinen 2008 cited in Sicart 2008:s.p.). Sicart (2008:s.p.) goes on to describe Järvinen's beliefs:

In relation to rules, Järvinen perceives mechanics as making 'a particular set of rules available to the player in the form of prescribed causal relations between game elements and their consequence to particular game states'... which leads to the creation of player strategies derived from the intersection of rules and mechanics.

Järvinen argues that players use the interplay between the rules of the game and what is made possible by the mechanics of the game to accomplish goals. Sicart believes that "Järvinen's approach is rather deterministic" and that it implies that mechanics are only in place in order to achieve goals, which does not account for games like *The Sims* (Maxis 2002), that depend on free play and do not have set goals or an end point (Sicart 2008:s.p.). Sicart argues that "game mechanics are methods invoked by agents, designed for interaction with the game state" (Sicart 2008:s.p.). Sicart makes use of a programming paradigm called Object Oriented Programming to explain his definition, because it "provides a set of metaphors that describe the elements of systems and their interrelations" (Sicart 2008:s.p.). Under this terminology, "a method is understood as the actions or behaviors available to a class... Methods are the mechanisms an object has for accessing data within another object" (Sicart 2008:s.p.). Therefore, a game mechanic is understood as an action or a behaviour that is taken by the gamer to "interact with the game world, as constrained by the game rules", i.e. the player has

to perform the physical action of pressing a button which transmits data in order for something to happen in the game world (Sicart 2008:s.p.). In-game actions such as grab, shoot, jump, reload, "are methods for agency within the game world, actions the player can take within the space of possibility created by the rules" (Sicart 2008:s.p.).

For the purpose of this study, game mechanics are understood as a combination of the above definitions and include any interaction the player can have within the game. It also includes the physics engine and simulation of the game. The game mechanic most pertinent to this study, however, is the morality mechanic which is prevalent in most role-playing games. This mechanic is a set of rules created by the game designer which governs the distribution of morality points based on certain in-game actions or decisions. A brief explanation of what constitutes a role-playing game follows below as well as how the morality mechanic works in each of the video games to be analysed.

#### ***1.4. Video Games to be Analysed***

##### ***1.4.1. Role-Playing Games***

Role-playing games are games in which the player assumes the role of a character within a fictional game world usually set in a fantasy or science fiction location. Tom Golumbia (2009:187) states that RPGs "take their name from the basic premise that the player identifies with a central character or group of characters, such as a wizard, fighter, or priest, and attempts to guide the character through adventures or battles". RPGs are similar to Caillois' *mimicry* in which "[p]lay can consist of not only deploying actions or submitting to one's fate in an imaginary milieu, but of becoming an illusory character oneself, and of so behaving" (Caillois 1961:20).

In order to complete a role-playing game, players must follow the main story line in the form of quests or missions which advance the story as well as provide experience. Players can use this experience to upgrade their character. Subplots in the form of side quests also exist parallel to the main narrative and provide additional experience points which allows the player to level-up faster.

A central feature to RPGs is character creation or customisation where players can create or enhance an avatar. In games such as *Mass Effect* (BioWare 2007), the player can adjust facial features as well as eye colour, hair type, and even scarring before starting the game. Once in

the game, players have the option to change the character's outfit. Outfits are not only for aesthetic purposes, but also provide special attributes that can assist with the player's particular playing style. For example, a player who enjoys being in the heat of battle might opt for an outfit that provides additional defense capabilities. Other games, for example *Fable III* (Lionhead Studios 2010), provide a ready-made character that can only be customised, i.e. once in-game, players can change the character's hair, tattoos and clothing. Many RPGs also use the morality mechanic to change the aesthetics of a character according to their moral alignment, a feature which is discussed in the analysis section of each video game in Chapter 3.

In the United States, the RPG genre is the fourth most popular video game genre, exceeded by, in order of popularity, shooter, action and sports games (McCarthy 2015:s.p.). RPG titles are highly popular with single-player games which do not require online gameplay. Games from other genres, especially shooter and action, are increasingly making use of RPG elements to increase the enjoyment of their games and often include a storyline with complex characters. *Mass Effect*, *Fable* and *Fallout* are three of the most popular video game series, each with several titles released, and substantial fandoms. The popularity of these franchises and their ability to set trends have resulted in their being prime examples to study. Furthermore, each of these games include a morality mechanic with measurable morality points which are imperative for the successful analysis conducted in Chapter 3.

In the next sections, a brief overview of each video game's plot is given as well as an explanation of its morality mechanic.

#### ***1.4.2. Mass Effect***

*Mass Effect* was developed by BioWare and released in 2007 by publisher Microsoft Games Studios. It is a sci-fi shooter Role Playing Game that follows the story of Commander Shepard as he / she attempts to save the galaxy from Saren Arterius, a Spectre<sup>5</sup> who has gone rogue and is planning to release an army of sentient machines determined to destroy all life (BioWare 2007). Morality in *Mass Effect* is measured by Paragon ('hero') and Renegade ('antihero') points. Gaining Paragon points does not lower Renegade points and vice versa;

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<sup>5</sup> **Special Tactics and Reconnaissance agent:** special agents appointed by the Citadel Council who are allowed to complete missions as they see fit. Spectres are considered above the law but can be stripped of their status for gross misconduct ("Spectres" s.a.:s.p.)

accordingly, a character can gain both Paragon and Renegade points independently and non-player characters (NPCs) will respond to whichever is highest. This means that small acts of kindness made infrequently will not alleviate a character's overall status as Renegade; and conversely, a small amount of Renegade actions will not change a Paragon's heroic status. A higher amount of Paragon points leads to special Paragon dialogue options as well as the potential for a higher level of the Charm skill (used to charm more information out of NPCs that could potentially assist in missions), whilst more Renegade points open up Renegade dialogue options and a higher level of the Intimidate skill (used similarly to Charm to extract more information from NPCs). It is therefore in a gamer's best interest to play a true Paragon or true Renegade to be able to obtain the maximum benefits from either alignment. If a character has a balanced amount of Paragon and Renegade points, they may find themselves blocked off from certain dialogue options as well as the higher levels of the Charm / Intimidate skill.

#### ***1.4.3. Fable III***

*Fable III* is an action / adventure RPG released in 2010 by Microsoft Game Studios and developed by Lionhead Studios (Lionhead Studios 2010). *Fable III* is set in the mythical land of Albion, which is just entering the industrial age. The protagonist is the Princess (or Prince) of the kingdom and younger sibling to King Logan. Logan has become increasingly tyrannical and with the help of the protagonist's father's trusted advisors, the young royal leads a revolution in an attempt to de-throne Logan. Morality in *Fable III* works on one scale, i.e. gaining good points means decreasing evil points and vice versa. Unlike in *Mass Effect*, a character can start out good and end up evil with as much variation in between, including playing neutral. The character's alignment directly influences how NPCs react to the character with townsfolk cheering and whistling at good Heroes and booing or even running away from evil Heroes. Character morality affects the storyline to some degree in that promises made to allies early on in the game become harder to keep as the game progresses, leaving the gamer with some tough decisions to make that directly affect gameplay and narrative.

#### ***1.4.4. Fallout New Vegas***

*Fallout New Vegas* was developed by Obsidian Entertainment and published in 2010 by Bethesda Softworks (Obsidian Entertainment 2010). *Fallout New Vegas* (hereafter *Fallout NV*) is an action RPG which follows the story of a recently revived courier in a post-

apocalyptic Nevada, USA. The courier attempts to track down the man who shot him / her and encounters many factions and tribes on this quest, including the New California Republic and The Legion who are both attempting to gain control of the region. Morality in the *Fallout* series is known as karma and whilst it is measured by points, the gamer is only made aware of their karma level by means of a title. There are thirty achievable titles for each good, neutral or evil alignment. The karma meter works on one scale, as it does in *Fable III*, allowing the player to increase or decrease their karma points with +1000 being pure good and -1000 being pure evil. Acts committed within the game to change karma level also affect the character's reputation. This reputation is responsible for how various factions and tribes in the game react to the character.

Game mechanics form an integral part of understanding video games, how the game functions and how players are allowed to interact with the game and within the game world. Some of these mechanics are, at their core, reward systems which is a concept from the school of behaviourism. B.F. Skinner was one of the pioneers of this field and as such the next chapter starts with an explanation of his work and how these apply to game mechanics. The second section of Chapter 2 outlines ethical egoism through the work of Thomas Hobbes and Jesse Kalin as a means to understand the ethico-moral challenges presented to gamers during gameplay. The last section of Chapter 2 provides an explanation of moral management, i.e. how players cope with morality as well as players as ethical agents.

## CHAPTER TWO

### 2.1. Behaviourism

#### 2.1.1. Introduction to Behaviourism

Behaviourism refers to a field of study that believes "behaviors can be measured, trained, and changed", it is "a theory of learning based upon the idea that all behaviors are acquired through conditioning" (Cherry s.a.:s.p.). Jay Moore succinctly describes the rise of behaviourism in his 2009 article in *Behavior and Philosophy*:

The historical record indicates that behaviorism grew in part from concerns about empiricism, reliability, observability, objectivity... Consequently, behaviorism is commonly thought of as a position that says nothing about private events and talks only about publicly observable relations between publicly observable stimuli and responses, all in an effort to avoid the problems of the earlier viewpoints based on introspection (Moore 2009:23).

Behaviourism gave rise to two different conditioning methods. The first, classical conditioning, was put forward by John B. Watson, who published a manifesto titled *Psychology as the Behaviorist Views It*, which was inspired by Ivan Pavlov's work with dogs as discussed in his 1903 paper *The Experimental Psychology and Psychopathology of Animals* ("Ivan Pavlov - Biographical" 2014:s.p.). In classical conditioning "people learn to associate two stimuli when they occur together, such that the response originally elicited by one stimulus is transferred to another" (Sammons s.a.:1). Watson's experiments with classical conditioning include presenting a young boy, called Little Albert, with a white rat and a loud, disturbing noise at the same time. Little Albert showed discomfort towards the loud noise and his reaction transferred to rats and later even rabbits or fur coats. However, classical stimulus-response behaviourism could not explain the sometimes varying responses of subjects to certain stimuli and researchers began to look at "internal, causally effective antecedents" in order to explain such instances (Moore 2009:23).

"Whereas classical conditioning only allows the person to produce existing responses to new stimuli, operant conditioning allows them to learn new responses" by implementing a reward and punishment system so that "an association is made between a behavior and a consequence for that behavior" (Sammons s.a.:s.p.; Cherry s.a.:s.p.). The term operant conditioning was coined by B.F. Skinner who published the first edition of *About Behaviorism* (1974:7) in an attempt to further the public's, and some experts', understanding of a science which he believed was misunderstood. Skinner believed that Watson and Pavlov

were "forced into hasty interpretations of complex behavior" due to the lack of factual evidence and were thereby damaging this emerging science (Skinner 1974:6).

Skinner's expansion of behaviourism is known as behaviour analysis. "The philosophy of science underlying behavior analysis is called radical behaviorism" which, in 1989, Skinner defines in *Recent issues in the analysis of behavior*:

I don't believe I coined the term radical behaviorism, but when asked what I mean by it, I have always said, "the philosophy of a science of behavior treated as subject matter in its own right apart from internal explanations, mental or physiological." (Skinner 1989:122 cited in Moore 2011:456)

Radical behaviourism "offers an alternative to the traditional treatments of mind that avoids some of the insoluble problems raised by those views" (Malone & Cruchon 2001:31). In short, radical behaviorists "do not distinguish between observational and theoretical terms in their analyses" (Moore 2009:35). Essentially, radical behaviourists did not make distinctions between what could be scientifically observed and what was happening internally, for example a subject's feelings or thought processes. It is therefore radical in that it argues that behaviour is all-encompassing, unlike folk psychology which refers to processes of the mind as being in a different dimension and therefore unobservable. Skinner believed that this folk psychology view was merely theoretical and therefore could not be studied, whereas in behavioural analysis "a person is an organism... which has acquired a repertoire of behavior" and was considered as a whole (Malone & Cruchon 2001:31&52).

This section has provided an overview of behaviourism as well as its major influencers, namely Watson, Pavlov and Skinner. The next section provides insight into how behaviourists view consciousness and the mind. It is relevant to this study because it provides an understanding of what behaviourists considered to be behaviour. Thereafter an explanation of Skinner's concepts of covert behaviour and operant conditioning is provided followed by how these concepts can be applied to video gaming in Section 2.1.5.

### ***2.1.2. The Whole Organism / Mind-Body Dualism***

While cognitive psychology has not had much success in explaining behaviour of an organism as a whole; "the framework provided by behavior analysis, on the other hand, affords an understanding of the behavior of the whole organism" (Smith 2013:145). John C. Malone and Natalie M. Cruchon explain that Skinner believes "[t]here is no independent

entity, the 'mind', that causes certain behaviors to occur - the person is a sum of current activities, including overt behavior, verbal behavior, and visceral activity" (Malone & Cruchon 2001:52). Skinner argues that behaviour does not originate from the mind, but instead that all behaviour is linked in a chain of behaviour, and that thinking is merely a behavioural link of that chain, an idea shared with Watson; who points out that "thought is a bodily process like any other act" (cited in Calkins 2013:200). Moore (2009:29) quotes Skinner himself on the topic of thinking:

To think is to behave, but at a covert level. This sort of private event functions as a link in a causal chain of behavior. Again, these private events are not causal in the sense of an autonomous, initiating cause or a mediating process. Rather, they function as discriminative stimulation for subsequent behavior, either verbal or nonverbal, either public or private.

Radical behaviourism "boldly identifies consciousness with bodily process and mind with bodily organisms" (Calkins 2013:199). In other words, radical behaviourists considered matters of the mind to be merely part of the behavioural process and, because they could not directly be observed, internal factors were considered less relevant and unreliable as scientific data. They argued that these mental processes did not cause behaviour. Malone and Cruchon also compare Skinner's ideas on the mind to those of Sigmund Freud:

"Upon examination, Skinner's interpretation of conscious and unconscious 'mind' are not so different from Freud's conception. But Skinner insisted that neither has causal efficacy. Socialization is the source of consciousness and our species' heritage accounts for part of personality." (Malone & Cruchon 2001:51)

Moderate behaviourism, however, "admits the existence of consciousness and the existence of conscious selves, but contends that neither selves nor consciousness are topics fit for scientific consideration" and therefore internal processes were largely ignored or attributed to behaviour, as the radical behaviourists did (Calkins 2013:199-202). Neither Skinner nor Watson denied "the existence or the importance of personal experience" but Skinner did, however, "deny the mind/body dualism of the mentalists and the methodological behaviorists" and advocated for internal processes such as thoughts to be considered as part of behaviour (Malone & Cruchon 2001:33). Watson believed that the study of private events, i.e. personal experience, such as thinking was unscientific, whereas Skinner attributed them to covert behaviour which he defines as "behavior executed on such a small scale that it is not visible to others" (Skinner 1974:27).

In summary, Skinner attributed the internal processes of thoughts and feelings to behaviour. He believed that these internal, private behaviours formed part of a behaviour chain which was linked on either end by observable stimuli and responses. The next section discusses this covert behaviour, as Skinner termed it, in more detail. Since ethico-moral decision making is an internal process it is considered to be covert behaviour and therefore an explanation of this form of behaviour is relevant to this study.

### **2.1.3. Covert Behaviour**

Moore (2009:25) explains that for "radical behaviorists, the concept of a behavioral event is not limited to something that is publicly observable". Due to radical behaviourism's consideration of an organism as a whole, which was discussed in the previous section, it contradicts the mentalistic approach of viewing private events in a different dimension, separate from the body and other observable behaviour. For Moore, "[o]verall, the conception of private events as behavioral allows radical behaviorists to relate those events to operant contingencies at a descriptively consistent level" and "covert behavior can therefore be just as relevant to the analysis of behavior as it occurs in context as is overt behavior" (2009:37&30). In other words, the behavioural chain includes both observable stimuli and responses, and non-observable, internal processes, i.e. private events.

Skinner (1974:16) explains very early on in *About Behaviorism* that radical behaviourism "does not deny the possibility of self-observation... or its possible usefulness", it merely questions "the reliability of the observations" as they are subjective. In his argument for the validity of the radical behaviourist conception of private events, Moore concludes that its importance lies in the fact that we can still "predict and control both public and private behavior on the basis of knowing one's genetic endowment and the environmental circumstances of the past, as well as those circumstances with which an individual is currently in contact" (2009:37). In other words, Skinner believed that covert behaviour is an unreliable subject for scientific study due to its subjective nature. Similar to Skinner, Moore argues that these covert behaviours are part of the behavioural process and do not originate behaviours.

Skinner's inclusion of private events (internal processes of thought or emotion) allows us to understand it under the paradigm of behaviourism, specifically under the term covert behaviour. This means that ethico-moral decisions made by gamers are considered to be

covert behaviour and form part of the behavioural process that is necessary for gameplay. The next section discusses how behaviour, both overt and covert, can be influenced by external stimuli and how these behaviours can become conditioned.

#### **2.1.4. Operant Conditioning**

For this study it is important to explain Skinner's thoughts on operant conditioning, positive reinforcement and punishment as these elements provide insight into gamer behaviour as well as game design. The links that can be drawn between games and behaviourism are detailed in the next section, but first the key concepts mentioned above must be explained.

To understand positive reinforcement, this study must first look at operant behaviour which "is determined by the events that follow the response" (Hjelle & Ziegler 1992: 304). In other words, the behaviour is exhibited which is then followed by a consequence. Furthermore, Skinner believed that the nature of the consequence will dictate the frequency with which the behaviour is exhibited. If the consequences are viewed as desirable or positive then "the behavior is said to be *strengthened* by its consequences, and for that reason the consequences themselves are called 'reinforcers'" (Skinner 1974:39, original emphasis). On the other hand, if the consequences are considered negative, non-reinforcing, then the behaviour being repeated is less likely. For example, if a child is given dessert after eating all his vegetables, the child is likely to eat all his vegetables every time in order to get dessert - the behaviour of eating vegetables is reinforced by the desirable consequence of dessert. However, if the child is given soup after eating all his vegetables he is less likely to eat his vegetables - the soup, therefore, is non-reinforcing and the child will be less likely to repeat the behaviour of eating his vegetables. Skinner called this learning of behaviour and adapting to new environments *operant conditioning* (Skinner 1974:39).

Operant behaviour is conditioned by a "*schedule of reinforcement...* a rule stating the contingencies under which reinforcements will be presented" (Hjelle & Ziegler 1992:306). In other words, behaviour can only be conditioned if the subject understands under which circumstances rewards or punishments will be elicited. Skinner developed several reinforcement schedules, the four basic schedules are: fixed-ratio, fixed-interval, variable-ratio and variable-interval. Fixed-ratio refers to reinforcers being presented after a fixed amount of suitable responses, e.g. the rat has to press the lever ten times before receiving a food pellet. A fixed-interval schedule allows reinforcers to be available only after a certain

amount of time has lapsed since the previous one, e.g. 5 minutes have passed since the rat pressed the lever and received a food pellet and the rat has since been pressing the lever. Variable-ratio reinforcement occurs after an average amount of desired responses, e.g. the rat has to press the lever an average of five times before receiving a pellet. The variable-interval schedules make reinforcers available after an unpredictable interval of time: "VI schedules generate higher rates of responding..." (Hjelle & Ziegler 1992:308). For example, the rat has been pressing the lever and keeps pressing until receiving a food pellet. Skinner believed that a "characteristic of intermittent reinforcement [is] that behavior may be sustained over long periods of time with very little return", for example gamblers who frequently gamble without receiving substantial winnings (Skinner 1974:61). These schedules can help in the understanding of behaviour and why certain behaviours are repeated. Furthermore, these schedules teach the subject how and when to respond, causing their behaviour to become conditioned. When something pleases us we are more likely to repeat the behaviour that elicited the pleasing consequence, conversely, we are less likely to repeat behaviour that leads to unpleasant experiences.

Skinner makes a clear link between the likelihood of specific behaviour and the extent to which a person desires the proverbial dangling carrot: "If we know the level of deprivation...we can more accurately predict how reinforcing a given event will be and how likely it is that a person will engage in relevant behaviour" (Skinner 1974:50). The careful balancing of these two factors can be used to control behaviour under certain conditions. Skinner however, argues that the behaviour does not stem from desire, but rather that the behaviour is induced by deprivation. In other words, Skinner believes that a person deprived of water for several days will be extremely likely to engage in relevant behaviour to obtain water (the reinforcer), as opposed to someone who has not been deprived of water. The person not deprived is less likely to engage in relevant behaviour as the water is not as reinforcing. The probability of certain behaviours occurring can also change "as the contingencies change" (Skinner 1974:57-58). Frequent reinforcement creates a sense of confidence in the exhibited behaviour, increasing its probability. Without reinforcement "behavior undergoes 'extinction' and appears rarely, if at all" (Skinner 1974:58). In other words, in the absence of reinforcers, behaviour will become 'unconditioned'.

This section has provided an explanation of operant conditioning and how reinforcement / punishment is taught to subjects through schedules of reinforcement. These elements help us

to understand the process of behaviour and why certain behaviours are more likely to be repeated than others. The next section aims to provide a link between behaviourism, specifically the concepts mentioned above, and gaming, in an attempt to better understand the behavioural process of gameplay.

### **2.1.5. Behaviourism & Gaming**

Video games are occasionally "described as a 'Skinner box' because of the way they offer reward or punishment for the player's behaviour"; however, other concepts from behaviourism can also be used to understand how games work (Reeve 2012:s.p.). This section gives examples as to how Skinner's other theories can be applied to games and also attempts to give examples of specific games where possible. Firstly, as Carlton Reeve mentions, reward and punishment plays a major role in games. Digital rewards can be both in-game as well as out-of-game with the advent of Microsoft Xbox's Achievements system and Steam's Badges, to name only two. These systems allow players to earn rewards outside of the games they play through a digital player profile and also encourage them to interact with other gamers, who can see their achievements / badges. These rewards can be given for completing certain actions in a game, for example, in *Mass Effect* (BioWare 2007) a player can earn the 'Mail Slot' Achievement for successfully eliminating enemies carrying tactical shields by firing through the eye slit, or for the amount of years they have played games, as with Steam's 'Years of Service' awards.

As explained above, Skinner pointed out the importance of feedback and, for gamers, in-game feedback is what drives the game forward and forms an integral part of gameplay. The most basic and immediate form of feedback is the reward system prevalent in most games, and in all role-playing games, known as the character-leveilling mechanic. This is the set of rules by which characters gain experience, reach the next character level and are then allowed to spend the experience points (XP) they have accumulated in order to improve their character. Experience points can be gained by completing missions / quests, eliminating enemies, discovering new locations, or any other game event that the game designers have deemed important. Through completing such tasks, gamers' behaviour becomes conditioned to completing more and more of the tasks that reward their behaviour. In contrast, according to Skinner's theories, tasks that are punished are less likely to be repeated. In gameplay, such punishments can be the loss of health, not being awarded XP, being placed in 'time-out' (especially in racing games when the player's vehicle has to be reset after a crash), or any

other event that negatively affects the player-character or gameplay experience. Player behaviour is conditioned to associate certain rewards / punishments with certain behaviours and in so doing, the player learns which behaviours are beneficial within the game context.

As Dovey and Kennedy (2006) point out, gamers have to learn how to play a game (see Chapter 1 Section ii); conditioning forms a large part of that learning as the game teaches the player, through rewards, which actions are desirable and should be repeated, and which actions, through punishment, should not. Skinner considered learning to be "a change in observable behaviour caused by external stimuli in the environment" (Reeve 2012:s.p.). These changes can be seen in gamers as they learn new button combinations to perform tasks or special moves, or how to employ game mechanics to their advantage; for example, in *Army of TWO: Devil's Cartel* (Visceral Games 2013), the player can shoot a gas container to create an explosion. Through learning this video game mechanic the gamer can eliminate a large amount of enemies by firing a well-timed shot at the containers - an observable change in gamer behaviour. This learning of new behaviour and adapting to new environments (for Skinner known as operant conditioning) is a process which gamers go through constantly while playing a game and a process that they have to adhere to in order to complete the game.

Feedback does not necessarily have to be in the form of punishment or reward. Many games now also have a 'stats' system where players can keep track of game events ranging from 'side quests completed' to 'crimes committed'. This system also usually shows the player how much of the game has been completed and how many main story missions they have finished. These statistics provide the player with a measurement of their success and performance in the game. This is a purely informational feedback system and is there, mostly, for the player's interest. However, the information from this system could be used to assess specific gamer behaviour, such as the amount of good vs. evil acts committed, but this aspect is beyond the scope of this study.

Another aspect of Skinner's work that can be found to some degree in games is his schedules of reinforcement. These schedules regulate operant conditioning, i.e. the rules by which reinforcement is given as discussed in Section 2.1.4. of this Chapter. Fixed-ratio provides reinforcement after a fixed amount of suitable responses and is similar to the mechanics governing levelling up - once the player has gained enough experience points through repeating various suitable in-game actions the player is rewarded with a new level. Many

games provide players with 'power-ups' which give the player-character an advantage for a limited time, e.g. in the *Grand Theft Auto* (Rockstar North 1997-2015) series of games, players can pick up body armour / weapons / health for their character at various locations; these items will only re-spawn after a certain amount of time has lapsed, making them very similar to Skinner's fixed-interval schedule. The variable-ratio schedule requires an average amount of desired responses and is comparable to games that employ quick time events<sup>6</sup> during which players are usually required to rapidly press one or multiple buttons in order to successfully complete the event. The random nature of the variable-interval schedule can be used to explain games that have a 'random encounter' mechanic. Random encounters are game events that occur indiscriminately in the game world and are usually linked to a small side quest after which, if completed successfully, the player is rewarded (typically with a special item / weapon).

It is clear from the above examples that behaviourism had some effect on game design, especially with regards to how and when rewards or punishment is enforced. These rewards / punishments condition the players' behaviour and teaches them how to play the game. An understanding of these concepts is relevant to this study as it is used in the analysis of the video games *Mass Effect*, *Fable III* and *Fallout NV* to compare rewards / punishments given to the player after ethico-moral decisions are made. Furthermore, it provides insight into the operation of game mechanics and how players' behaviour becomes conditioned to performing certain tasks. The next section discusses the concept of ethical egoism in order to provide a philosophical basis on which to judge the ethico-moral decisions presented to players in the video games to be analysed in Chapter 3.

## ***2.2. Ethical Egoism***

### ***2.2.1 Ethics & Egoism***

In the Western philosophical tradition, the study of ethics has been divided into three categories namely metaethics, normative ethics, and applied ethics (Fieser (a) s.a.:s.p.). Metaethics "investigates where our ethical principles come from, and what they mean" while

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<sup>6</sup> A Quick Time Event is typically a form of interactive cut-scene (see glossary), where main control of the on-screen action is replaced by a lengthy animation with limited user interaction. Most games that feature QTEs flash an on-screen icon to tell players which button or direction to press to successfully continue the animation. Failing to press the proper buttons in a timely fashion usually results in some form of penalty, such as failing to execute the attempted move, getting hit by incoming objects, and so on. ("Quick Time Events" 2015:s.p.)

also considering "universal truths, the will of God, the role of reason in ethical judgments, and the meaning of ethical terms themselves" (Fieser (a) s.a.:s.p.). Normative ethics is practically concerned with "moral standards that regulate right and wrong conduct" while applied ethics examines "specific controversial issues such as abortion" (Fieser (a) s.a.:s.p.).

Metaethics is the "least precisely defined area of moral philosophy", however, two main motifs can be identified: "(1) *metaphysical* issues concerning whether morality exists independently of humans" and "(2) *psychological* issues concerning the underlying mental basis of our moral judgments and conduct" (Fieser (a) s.a.:s.p., original emphasis). It is this second psychological aspect that is most useful to this study as it can provide insight into "understanding what motivates us to be moral" (Fieser (a) s.a.:s.p.).

Ethical egoism "claims that it is necessary and sufficient for an action to be morally right that it maximize one's self-interest" (Shaver 2002:s.p.). In other words, an action is considered to be 'good' if it is in one's own best interest or promotes one's own well-being. Some differences exist between ethical egoism and other moral theories, such as the "ethical egoist will rank as most important duties that bring her the highest payoff. Standard moral theories determine importance at least in part by considering the payoff to those helped" (Shaver 2002:s.p.). Tibor R. Machan (1967) quotes J.A. Brunton (1956) as arguing "that any practically viable morality must admit to some biases - e.g., altruism has a bias toward others, utilitarianism toward the well-being or pleasure of the majority - and egoism does likewise" with its bias toward the self (cited in Machan 1979:2). Egoists may adopt a positive attitude to cooperating with others when the benefits are high enough; Jesse Kalin "holds that an egoist could take an interest in others but 'the source of [any] obligation is *his* interest in them'" (cited in Machan 1979:3, emphasis added). However, some would argue that this "cooperation argument cannot be extended to justify extremely large sacrifices... that standard moral theories rank either as most important or supererogatory" in instances where "the immediate loss is one's life (or irreplaceable features such as one's sight), there is no long-term gain, and so no egoist argument for the sacrifice" (Shaver 2002:s.p.).

Laurence Thomas (1980:73) defines ethical egoism as "the view that a person morally ought to maximize the satisfaction of her or his own long-range interests... It would be a mistake to infer from this, however, that an egoist must be one who exploits and takes advantage of others at every turn". Edward Regis Jr. (1979) points out that many interpret ethical egoism

not as a theory in which the "[e]goist ought to do acts which are in his interests, but that he ought to do *only* such acts" (Regis Jr. 1979:45, original emphasis). He further explains:

Thus if egoism is conceived as authorizing any and all self interested action, the possibility of any constraints upon such action is closed off at the outset. But there is no reason why egoism need be formulated as sanctioning any and all self interested acts, and indeed it is not always so formulated (Regis Jr. 1979:46).

Instead, Regis Jr. argues for two defining characteristics of ethical egoism, viz. 1) "that the achievement of one's own personal happiness and well being ought to be the ultimate (but not only) end of one's actions"; and 2) "that no one has any unchosen moral obligation or responsibility to serve the interests or to satisfy the needs of others" (Regis Jr. 1979:46). The reasons for 2) are that "each individual is morally responsible for the fact of his own being in need" and that "men are not morally obligated to satisfy needs which they are not responsible for creating" (Regis Jr. 1979:49). In his 1979 paper, Machan discusses various ethical egoists and their defining ideas about their chosen ethico-moral theory. One such example is Ayn Rand who "advocated the view that given a clear understanding of what one is - a human being - each person should live so as to promote his or her self-interest" (Machan 1979:2). Rand (1964) further believes that, when it comes to "choosing values... we must regard 'man's life as the standard of value - and his own life as the ethical purpose of every individual'" (cited in Machan 1979:4).

Machan believes that one of the "distinctive features of Hobbesian egoism is that it presupposes a view of the human self such that the motivation underlying human action consists of the combination of various passions and interests" (1979:6). These interests and the "myriad of passions [that] motivate human conduct [are] tempered only by everyone's interest in self-preservation" (Machan 1979:6). Hobbes' distinct ideas on ethical egoism are discussed in the next section.

The concept of ethical egoism is relevant to this study as gamers have to make ethico-moral decisions in-game while still attempting to beat the game, resulting in a careful balance of ethics and egoism. This section has aimed at exploring various writers' concept of ethical egoism to provide a broad understanding of this ethico-moral theory. The work of Thomas Hobbes provides an appropriate theoretical basis for analysing the moral choices that gamers are exposed to and is looked at in more detail in the next section. Thereafter the more recent expansion of ethical egoism by Jesse Kalin is explained.

### 2.2.2. Hobbes

British philosopher Thomas Hobbes, whose most influential work "centers on his ideas about human motivation", believed that the motivations for human behaviour stem from "selfish desires... This view is called psychological egoism and maintains that self-oriented interests ultimately motivate all human actions" (Williams, s.a.:s.p.; Fieser, s.a.:s.p.). Hobbes further argued that "human judgment is unreliable, and needs to be guided by science" due to the fact that "our judgments tend to be distorted by self-interest or by the pleasures and pains of the moment" (Williams, s.a.:s.p.). Garrath Williams (s.a.:s.p.) further explains that:

In fact, a lot of the problems that befall human beings, according to Hobbes, result from their being *too little* concerned with self-interest. Too often, he thinks, we are too much concerned with what others think of us, or inflamed by religious doctrine, or carried away by others' inflammatory words. This weakness as regards our self-interest has even led some to think that Hobbes is advocating a theory known as ethical egoism (original emphasis).

Morality, in its contemporary setting, "emerged from custom and law under the name of the law of nature or natural law. It was regarded as a set of rules universally binding on all men" (Peters 1956:155). This natural law "was thought to be rooted in man as an individual, who was in certain respects like all other individuals, rather than derivative from his civic or ecclesiastical status" (Peters 1956:156). This led Hobbes to believe that what he holds true for himself, can to some degree be considered to be true of most men. Hobbes "explicitly states that 'there is no such *finis ultimus*, utmost end, nor *summum bonum*, greatest good, as is spoken of in the books of the old moral philosophers'" (cited in Sorell 1996:170).

In his book on Hobbes, Richard Peters explains that "[m]orality is not concerned simply with the pursuit of good, but with the limitation of its pursuit when it affects that of others" (1956:155). He further argues that, for Hobbes, "[t]o say that something is good implies that it should be chosen or pursued" and that "goodness is relative to the person who describes it as good" (Peters 1956:154&152). In essence, Hobbes believed that there is "no common rule of good and evil, to be taken from the nature of the objects themselves" (cited in Peters 1956:152). For Hobbes the 'common rule' of objects is what allows him "to use reason as the basis for his arguments concerning morality and the proper ordering of the state" (Sorell 1996:164).

Hobbes further maintained that through his fear of death and desire for self-preservation, man becomes rational (Peters 1956:157). He also "assumed that rationality was compatible with

egoism and that the law of nature could be defended equally well on a basis of rational self-interest" (Peters 1956:162). In other words, Hobbes believed that there is a link between what a man "ought to do" and his needs (Peters 1956:166). According to Hobbes,

[t]he greatest of goods for each is his own preservation. For nature is so arranged that all desire good for themselves. In so far as it is within their capacities, it is necessary to desire life, health, and further, in so far as it can be done, security of future time" (cited in Sorell 1996:163).

Therefore, Hobbes' view of "rational behaviour loosely resembles psychological egoism", he believed "that the only rationally required desires are those that concern a person's own long-term benefit, primarily their preservation" (Sorell 1996:169).

Hobbes believed that the sources of human behaviour could stem from "the constitution of the body, from experience, from habit, from the goods of fortune, from the opinion one has of oneself, and from authorities" (Sorell 1996:166). It is interesting to note that Hobbes had similar ideas to B.F. Skinner with regard to behaviour, as Sorell points out, Hobbes "was aware that real people behave as they do not primarily because of the way they are born, but because of the way that they have been trained" - or from Skinner's perspective, through operant conditioning (Sorell 1996:166).

Thomas Hobbes' work on ethical egoism is one of the most well-known works on the subject and has been expanded upon by many other scholars. He advocates for the pursuit of good in the form of self-interest and firmly believes in the basis of reason and rationality as a means of guiding behaviour. This section has attempted to provide a brief account of Hobbes' understanding of ethical egoism as a theoretical framework for the analyses which are conducted in Chapter 3. The next section deals with the work of Jesse Kalin, a more recent advocate of ethical egoism.

### **2.2.3. Kalin**

In his 1975 paper, *Two Kinds of Moral Reasoning: Ethical Egoism as A Moral Theory*, Jesse Kalin "defends ethical egoism as a system of personal ethics for all human beings", arguing that "'morality as a set of nontraditional principles and rules' - that is, as the 'interpersonal' and 'conventional' principles of social conduct so many critics of egoism take morality to be - 'can be based on egoistic reasons'" (cited in Machan 1979:11). Machan believes that Kalin's paper is important due to its discussion of the critical responses to ethical egoism as well as Kalin's new ideas regarding egoism as a moral principle (Machan 1979:11).

Machan points out that Kalin considers egoism to be subjectivist and that it can be customized to each individual (Machan 1979:12). Furthermore,

[w]hile it may well be that a sound moral theory should enable us to conceive of solutions of our social moral problems, such a theory need not take this task on as a primary objective. And Kalin argues precisely that, so long as we can approach our social situations based on egoistic reasoning, in view of the implausibility of other moral systems, egoism must be accepted not only as a plausible but the best moral theory (Machan 1979:12).

In essence, Kalin "believes that social morality is well founded when based on the 'egoistic purpose' of utilizing social institutions and settings" (Machan 1979:11).

Kalin distinguishes between two different types of moral reasoning, viz. traditional and non-traditional. He views traditional as "the activity of discovering moral principles and moral rules" and non-traditional as "the activity of creation... of establishing and adopting moral principles and moral rules" (Kalin 1975: 323&324). Kalin further explains that traditional moral reasoning applies to an individual or group of individuals considering moral problems, e.g. Robinson Crusoe weighing the option of suicide while shipwrecked. On the other hand, non-traditional moral reasoning occurs on an interpersonal level where individuals attempt to compromise and come to a mutual understanding of moral rules or principles (Kalin 1975). Kalin gives the example of five boys adjusting the rules of baseball in order to play a game with less players than is stated in the original rules (Kalin 1975:324).

Furthermore, Kalin identifies the two principles of practical situations as 1) the Principle of Egoism, in which "[a] person ought, all things considered, to do an action if and only if that action is in his overall self-interest"; and 2) the Principle of Equal Consideration, in which "[a] person ought, all things considered, to do an action if and only if that action is in the general interest" of a group (Kalin 1975:328). These principles are defined in relation to activities which can be either, a) "[p]ersonal (or private) assessment of actions with a view to deciding only what *I* ought to do"; or b) "[i]nterpersonal (or public) assessment of actions with a view to deciding what *we* ought to do" (Kalin 1975:329, original emphasis).

Kalin argues that an ethical egoist may have others' interests at heart but only when there is a special connection to the egoist's own wants and desires (Kalin 1975:329). Edwin E. Gantt and Judson Burton (2012:441) concur, stating that "the individual, taken to be primarily - if

not entirely - responsible for the conditions that make social life possible, is motivated always and in all ways toward relationship with others solely out of egoistic considerations". In other words, personal relationships are entered into for some egoistic benefit, or in the case of Kalin, actions taken on behalf of others are due to egoistic, personal relationships. Furthermore, when helping others it is in order to maintain or increase pleasurable feelings or to avoid unpleasant consequences or feelings (Gantt & Burton 2012:441). As Bellah, Madsen, et. al. (1985) point out, "[t]he individual is prior to society, which comes into existence only through the voluntary contract of individuals trying to maximize their own self-interest" (cited in Gantt & Burton 2012:444).

According to the principles and activities defined by Kalin, "[i]nterpersonal assessing is an activity of practical reasoning in which rational agents share a practical problem and must come up with a reasoned answer as to what *they* ought to do in the given situation" (Kalin 1975:331). The cooperation within a community is an example of this interpersonal assessing, which the egoist may enter into after personal assessment on the grounds of the principle of egoism. As Kalin believes, the only reasons for entering into such an accord are egoistic in nature. Furthermore, what motivates cooperation is that these actions are usually to our long-term advantage and as such an egoist may enter into these communal pursuits (Kalin 1975:332). Kalin argues that egoists should accept that others might also adopt the stance of ethical egoism and have their own self interests as their moral guide (Machan 1979:3). Therefore, "[e]ngaging in the activity of interpersonal reasoning, since it involves granting a co-ordinate status to others, requires restricting this latter sort of behavior" (Kalin 1975:337).

Kalin argues that moral systems and rules "*as they stand*" are "morally unusable because they have a core of indeterminacy which can be removed only by a mutual decision to understand them in a specific way" (Kalin 1975:332, original emphasis). For example, while most communities forbid harming others, these principles "can vary in what they admit as a 'harm'... There is no way to make these notions have a determinate content except, in the final analysis, mutual agreement" by those who have elected to be part of that community (Kalin 1975:332). Kalin argues that these moral systems, their punishments, exceptions and hierarchy, are implemented by "the mutual adoption (usually tacit) of a particular practice and are thus nontraditional in character", i.e. they are created, not 'discovered' (1975:333). He believes that

egoism is a traditional principle which obtains its force from its reasonableness, while equal consideration, or whatever is taken to be the basic principle of morality, is a nontraditional one which obtains its force from mutual adoption. This means that morality is nontraditional in character and is to be understood as instituted in a complex way in accord with egoistic considerations. (Kalin 1975:334)

In other words, the "principles and rules characterizing interpersonal or moral reasoning receive their rationality from the egoistic purposes of those using such an institution" (Kalin 1975:334). Kalin further argues that "a particular moral system will have force on an individual only if that person has accepted membership in that system and has adopted those rules and principles as governing his, that is, their, activity of moral reasoning" (Kalin 1975:334). This also means that individuals can "'opt out' of morality and that doing so will indeed be rational if a system of interpersonal reasoning is no longer in one's overall self-interest" (Kalin 1975:334).

Kalin believes that "[e]thical egoism is best understood not as a lone principle which is to be applied as it stands to each action, but rather as the foundation for establishing a system of interpersonal, or moral, reasons which are nontraditional in character" (Kalin 1975:338). He further believes that "moral reasons will have been designed to restrict and override egoistic reasons in interpersonal contexts, they will be able to do so only if they have force" (Kalin 1975:354). However, "moral reasons are... superior only in the context of an ongoing activity of interpersonal reasoning, which, while usually present, is itself a sub-context of the more basic ethical activity of personal reasoning" (Kalin 1975:354). Kalin (1975:355) concludes his thoughts on ethical egoism by stating that:

It begins, rather, with a desire to avoid what it senses as an irreparable loss, the sacrifice of one's life or interests to the interests of others... Along the way, the egoist's desire to avoid personal sacrifice becomes confirmed by the discovery that there is no nonconstructed objective, common good and this is given expression in Principle I<sup>7</sup>. It remains, however, that his motivation and goal in this philosophical investigation is not simply to validate his own interests but to be rational... When nature plays its games, we must choose between the ethical and the moral, and reason is now on the side of the ethical.

Kalin advocates for a system of ethical egoism that allows the individual to enter into other moral systems, even if it is motivated by self-interest. Furthermore, he states that moral systems are formed through mutual agreement by ethical egoists entering into interpersonal reasoning and that these systems will only apply to individuals who subscribe to its principles.

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<sup>7</sup> Only a person's own wants and desires give him reasons for acting (Kalin 1975:329).

Kalin believes that it is 'good' or 'right' for individuals to remove themselves from such systems when the benefits of the system are defunct. For ethical egoists, if there is no benefit to being part of a system or group then it is within their own self interest to remove themselves from such a group.

#### ***2.2.4. Ethical Egoism Definition***

In this study, ethical egoism is understood to have the following key elements: 1) Self-interest is the first and foremost motivator of behaviour, it occurs on a personal level and informs public behaviour; 2) ethical egoists may enter into other ethico-moral systems on the basis that these will be beneficial. Moral reasoning then takes place on an interpersonal level i.e. what *we* ought to do; 3) ethical egoists are right to leave these secondary ethico-moral systems when these no longer provide a benefit; 4) ethical egoists are not obligated to satisfy the needs of others unless compelled to do so by 1) or 2), which is subject to 3); 5) ethical egoism is based on rationality, especially the need to survive; 6) ethical egoists should make allowance for the fact that others may subscribe to the same ethico-moral system as themselves and as such their needs may conflict.<sup>8</sup>

Concepts from Skinner, Hobbs and Kalin described in the first part of this chapter provide hermeneutic keys to understanding the video games to be analysed in Chapter 3. During gameplay, gamers are faced with ethico-moral decisions, particularly when playing RPGs. As such, the next section briefly describes ways in which gamers interact with these moral challenges as well as Miguel Sicart's approach to understanding gamers as ethical agents.

#### ***2.3. Games, Ethics & Moral Management***

This section provides an understanding of how gamers may process ethico-moral decisions during and after gameplay. Furthermore, an explanation of Miguel Sicart's argument for gamers as ethical agents is also given. It is important to note that gamers are not merely providing input when engaged in gameplay, but are actively and critically aware of their engagement, as such the following discussions are relevant to this study.

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<sup>8</sup> The author acknowledges that real life is far more complex than the experiences undergone in a video game and that ethical and moral codes are far more nuanced in reality. This study merely attempts to identify whether the key elements of ethical egoism is promoted through gameplay, not whether such an ethico-moral code is, in fact, a valid one.

Games give us the opportunity to live various lives, in different worlds with diverse morality codes and Sicart believes they "raise moral awareness" (Sicart 2009a:13). It is important to remember that the game-world dictates what is 'good' and what is 'evil', therefore "[a]s players, we construct our agent values with those ethical affordances and the constraints provided by the system" (Sicart 2009b:195). In-game choices "must be rendered against the morality of the world in which our character functions" (Heron & Belford 2014:11). To do otherwise would be "to import a system of morality from our offline world into a given virtual space; but such heterogeneous spaces are by definition constituted from different contingency relations" (Young & Whitty 2012:237). Others argue that "moral decisions in video games are more about locking and unlocking content paths than they are about presenting the player with complex, nuanced scenarios to contemplate" (Heron & Belford 2014:2). Most games present their players with moral dilemmas that are "typically weak because they are shallow, cannot easily assess intentionality, and skewed ludically in such a way that consistency of action is more important than fidelity of characterisation" (Heron & Belford 2014:10). Heron and Belford also believe that some games "favour one path over the other" where the entire narrative seems to push the player in one direction, leaving the other branch of the storyline meager (Heron & Belford 2014:3). For games which do not offer themselves as "vehicles for moral contemplation" this type of bias is "entirely appropriate... the moral systems used here are tools for ensuring replayability" (Heron & Belford 2014:3). It is possible that developers and publishers have become aware of this fact as there is a "growing corpus of work... emerging where ethical and moral issues are handled not as branching choices within a game, but instead as moral dilemmas externalised onto the player (Heron & Belford 2014:3). This "concept of externalising the moral message of a game is still somewhat alien", however it would lend credence to Miguel Sicart's argument that players are moral agents which will be discussed in the next section.

There have not been many studies that conducted research on the moral implications outside of the game world. Rather, "the most extensive research on the effects of video game content has focused on the behavioural consequences of playing these [violent] games" (Young & Whitty 2012:238). However, the effects of playing violent games "has clear moral implications if / when these effects transcend the virtual realm" (Young & Whitty 2012:238). Most gamers attempt to cope with experiences in the virtual world, especially violent ones, by means of what Klimmt, Schmid, Nosper, Hartmann and Vorderer (2008) describe as "moral management" in *Moral Management: Dealing with Moral Concerns to Maintain*

*Enjoyment of Violent Video Games*. Moral management "involves cognitively managing the conflict that potentially arises within the gamer between enjoying the gameplay and any aversion they may have towards the violent acts represented and even virtually engaged in" (Young & Whitty 2012:243). During this study, Klimmt et al. led a focus group which identified important themes for coping, these are: game violence as self-defence, fighting evil, game-reality distinction, and game violence as necessary part of (sports-like) performance (Young & Whitty 2012:243-4). Young and Whitty agree with these views and refer to this as 'sanctioned equivalence' which "holds that certain violent acts - killing, for example - can occur in legitimate or illegitimate ways" (Young & Whitty 2012:243). For example, killing enemies during times of war (as in games such as Visceral Games' *Army of TWO: The Devil's Cartel* (2013)) would be a sanctioned equivalent of killing.

In 2011, Shu-Fang Lin led a study to determine the effect of opponent type on a gamer's moral emotions. The results showed that "participants deemed the player-controlled character that shot monsters as being more justified than the one who shot human characters. Participants also felt more ashamed and guilty when fighting against human characters" (2011:697). Lin also explained that the narrative of the game often help gamers to "justify violent actions that may violate moral standards" (2011:695). In order to enjoy some games "players may adopt strategies to alleviate the negative feelings caused by violations in moral conduct" such as those themes identified under moral management (Lin 2011:695).

De Vane and Squire (2008) suggest "that experienced players 'develop metacognitive understandings of how violence is represented' within the game... namely, as instrumental to success of the game, or even as immersed within narrative" (cited in Young & Whitty 2012:244). Potter and Tomasello (2003) state that "[i]t is our interpretation of the act... that ultimately determines how we react to what we are witnessing" (cited in Young & Whitty 2012:245). Our interaction and interpretation of video games "has led Juul (2005) to think of video games as 'half-real': for the way we interact with the game provides some indication of our relation to the game 'in reality'... the fiction-reality divide may be blurred" (Young & Whitty 2012:246). Most gamers, however, will apply moral management in the form of game-reality distinction to cope with this.

It is important for researchers to "understand what these interactions are taken to mean by those engaged in them within the context in which they occur" (Young & Whitty 2012:244). In other words, too few researchers, particularly regarding the effects of violent video games,

take into consideration the fact that gamers are moral agents, as suggested by Sicart who argues that gamers are responsible for the interpretation of moral complexities experienced in a video game. Sicart believes that gamers should actively engage and analyse their gaming experiences and that they are not "passive moral creatures, exposed to unethical content: computer game players reflect, relate and create with an ethical mind" (Sicart 2009a:4). He goes on to explain that players should respect the age restrictions put forward by video game content rating systems as these are indicators of the level of maturity required not only because of the level of violence, but also to understand the moral implications of acts, ideas or events experienced in the virtual world. The playing of video games is therefore "the experience of a moral object by an ethical subject" (Sicart 2009a:4).

Klimmt et al. (2006) suggest that there should not be any concern regarding the real vs virtual moral tension because the "non-reality status of video games" renders such concerns as "not 'necessary', applicable, or rational in their context; there simply seems nothing to be 'real' in a game that moral concerns could arise from" and therefore players are not bound by "moral ruminations" (cited in Young & Whitty 2012:238). In his 2014 article entitled *The Other Side of the Valley; Or, Between Freud and Videogames*, Kent Aardse borrows the concept of 'uncanny' from Freud to explain that reality and game-world are separated by "the uncanny valley", which can also be applied to any form of fiction:

In fiction, we encounter something that is familiar but has become stylized or mediated, and it is when we are reminded of this fiction that the uncanny strikes us. It is not simply the experience that reminds us of the uncanny, but the representation or the fictionality, the rhetoric of being reminded of the distance between reality and fiction. The uncanny valley reinforces this distance, by enforcing the fact that we are engaged with a fictional world. Moreover, once we are reminded of this fiction, we analyze the real world through the lens of this fiction, and this in turn leads us back towards a feeling of uncanniness. (2014:5)

Aardse further explains that players can derive satisfaction from playing violent games "precisely because the graphics *are* uncanny"; it "encourages the divide between fiction and reality, meaning that the player is able to enjoy the pleasures of the game without a sense of guilt or reservation" because they are aware of the fact that it is a fictional game (Aardse 2014:4). Aardse goes on to state that for "[Marcus] Schulzke, the morality of decision making in the fictional world will hopefully perpetuate itself in the real world" (Aardse 2014:7).

Aardse believes that making moral decisions in-game "will never lead the player to a systematic moral philosophy, but it will help teach the practical wisdom which Aristotle thought was so much more valuable than theoretical knowledge" (Aardse 2014:7).

### ***2.3.1. The Ludic Hermeneutic Circle***

In *The Ethics of Computer Games*, Sicart (2009) discusses his theory for analysing ethical computer games which he calls the ludic hermeneutic circle: "a model for describing the process that takes place when an embodied, cultural human being becomes a player, and how that player relates to her subjectivity, the game experience, and the subject external to the game" (Sicart 2009a:117). He draws his inspiration from his own experience; "[w]hen playing *Deus Ex* I felt that a computer game was challenging me as a moral being, showing me new ways of understanding games as well as my presence and actions as a player" (Sicart 2009a:2). He explains that games have become the "bull's eye of morality" as cinema and rock 'n' roll once had been through the attention it receives in the mass media (Sicart 2009a:3). The ever-present discussions on violence in video games has once again received attention with a recent idea surfacing to put a tax on violent media (Templeton 2013). Sicart provides a way for interpreting games on an ethico-moral level and shows that gamers should have the ability to recognise the satirical value in some violent games.

Sicart believes that "[e]thics can be defined as a system or set of moral values" where morals are "the right or wrong of actions or objects" (2009a:3). He argues that in order to "describe the ethics of a computer game, we should first analyze its rules: what the player is forced and / or encouraged to do", i.e. gameplay and game mechanics (Sicart 2009a:24). Analysing the rules provides insight into the design of the game and can also shed light on the developer's intentions for the game. Rules "create the possibility of the game" and "limit and reward player's actions" (Sicart 2009a:28). It is important to note that in most analogue games (including sports) rules can be changed to suit the situation or the players' preferences, whereas "[c]omputer games *impose* the rules: they are not subject to discussion" (Sicart 2009a:26). Despite this, gamers "in their phenomenological experience of the game... tend to be creative and reflective, even with games that do not afford them control over the rules" (Sicart 2009a:9).

Playing games can be defined as "interacting with systems that have been created with the intention of encouraging their users to perform a number of actions to reach some predefined goals" (Sicart 2009a:24). As players, we enjoy being challenged and "as ethical beings, we

have to be interested in what those actions and goals are" (Sicart 2009a:24). Sicart describes a non-ethical game as one that does "not allow players to create their own ethical game values" or when a game's rules conflict with the morality set out in the game's fiction (Sicart 2009a:9). This conflict causes tension between the system and the virtual world which undermines the gaming experience, i.e. there is a disparity between the gamer's narratological and ludological experiences of the game.

Sicart puts the responsibility of morality firmly on the gamer by stating that:

As designed objects, computer games create practices that could be considered unethical. Yet these practices are voluntarily undertaken by a moral agent who not only has the capacity, but also the duty to develop herself as an ethical being by means of practicing her own player-centric ethical thinking while preserving the pleasures and balances of the game experience. (Sicart 2009a:17).

In other words, Sicart argues that the onus is on the gamer to critically engage with the game on an ethico-moral level. This development of gamers into ethical beings is accomplished through the Aristotelian ideal of *phronesis* or practical wisdom which "is defined as 'a state conjoined with reason, true, having human good for its object, and apt to do'" and it is "an attribute of a reasoning mind" (Sicart 2009a:100). This practical wisdom is gained through playing, i.e. "the more we play, the more literate we are in the rhetoric and play styles of computer games" (Sicart 2009a:89). Once enough experience has been gained, players have the ability to use their "ludic practical wisdom" to interpret ethical games and to make ethical decisions (Sicart 2009a:100). Sicart explains that this practical wisdom comes into play when games require players to perform unethical acts, because "as a player you want to win, but as a human being, you have to think about what winning means, and what the actions that are being simulated mean" (Sicart 2009a:101).

Sicart states that *phronesis* is prevalent on two levels: 1) within the gamer: "determining the player's best choices and behaviors in order to preserve the game experience" and 2) "the ethical triggers that dismiss the player-subject when the game experience actually forces the player to make choices that are deemed unethical by the being who is external to the game" (Sicart 2009a:113). He goes on to explain that a good player, according to Aristotle's virtue ethics, is one that upholds "ethical integrity both outside the game... and inside the game" through ludic *phronesis* and "ought to critically and ethically reflect on her actions as well as on the design of the system she is engaged with" (Sicart 2009a:113&116).

Sicart connects the above-mentioned virtue ethics with Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutics to create his ludic hermeneutic circle. Ludic phronesis focuses only on the act of playing, but once it is linked with Gadamer's hermeneutical phenomenology we can view the entire game experience as "a process of interpretation of the game system, the game situation, and of the very subject of the player, considered from synchronic (while playing the game) and diachronic (as all the games ever played) perspectives" (Sicart 2009a:110). The ludic hermeneutic circle is "a layered interpretational moral process" which starts with a player in a "zero state" who is not yet critically engaged with the game (Sicart 2009a:118). The first level is initiated when the player applies ludic phronesis "in order to interpret her presence in the game world and the actions she should take" (Sicart 2009a:119). From here, the player becomes part of a player-community which "can be used to address topics such as cheating in single-player games, or hardcore gaming" (Sicart 2009a:119). The previous two layers culminate in the third where "our actions within the game, as members of a player community, are to be interpreted under the light of our own existence as moral beings in the world outside the game" (Sicart 2009a:120). This evolution from zero-subject to the critically engaged moral being comprises the ludic hermeneutic circle. Sicart believes that "[t]he ethics of computer games is dependent on the ethics of the players because the players are the ethical centers of the ludic hermeneutic circle" (Sicart 2009a:126).

This section has provided an explanation of gamers as ethical agents as well as the process by which gamers engage in moral reasoning both during gameplay and after. Sicart believes that gamers should be actively and critically engaged with moral ideals encountered in the game world and that these should be processed and analysed. Furthermore, as discussed in Section 2.3., gamers engage in moral management in order to come to terms with unethical or immoral actions undertaken during gameplay.

The next chapter aims to use the six elements defined in Section 2.2.4, as derived from the work of Hobbes and Kalin primarily, to identify whether or not ethical egoism is prevalent in the three video games being analysed in this study. Reward systems that require input and then give feedback in the form of reward / punishment forms a large part of video games. The concepts of reward / punishment and operant conditioning drawn from the field of behaviourism provide an understanding of gamers' behaviour during gameplay. Covert behaviour allows this study to consider moral reasoning as being part of the behaviour necessary for gameplay. By combining ethical egoism and concepts from behaviourism, this study aims to determine whether or not the rewards / punishments given to players during

gameplay promote ethical egoism through operant conditioning. Games are discussed using the hybrid approach of narratology and ludology to provide a more comprehensive analysis.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### ***3.1. Overview***

Chapter 2 has provided an understanding of behaviourism and identified several key concepts which aid in the analysis of the video games, namely rewards, punishments, schedules of reinforcement, covert behaviour and operant conditioning. In particular, these concepts are used in order to determine whether the chosen video games promote certain ethico-moral ideals. These ethico-moral ideals are analysed from an ethical egoist perspective, which was discussed in Chapter 2, specifically this study's definition of ethical egoism as determined in Section 2.2.4. It is important to note that players are not passive receptors of ethico-moral video game content, but that they actively engage and critically analyse and interpret moral choices experienced during gameplay. This section details the process by which the three video games are analysed.

As mentioned above, the rewards system of each video game is analysed. In other words, how the game rewards player behaviour, which behaviours are rewarded and how these relate to ethico-moral decisions in-game. The morality mechanic of each game is also of importance as it provides insight into whether or not one moral alignment is favoured by their respective reward systems. Furthermore, the general game mechanics that are affected by the player-character's moral alignment or decisions are also discussed. These fall under gameplay and as such form part of the ludological analysis of each game.

The counterpart of ludology in the hybrid approach which is adopted in this study is narratology. Under this approach, the storyline of each game is discussed as well as any aesthetic changes that may appear within the gameworld or the character. Both ludological and narratological elements are measured against the six key ideals of ethical egoism defined in Section 2.2.4.

The main quest of each video game is the focus of the respective analyses. Main quests follow the main storyline and are split into different phases, the completion of each phase moves the plot forward and usually unlocks new map locations. Most role-playing games also have side quests which are minor tasks that can be completed for extra experience points and items. These side quests are often small narratives, i.e. sub-

plots to the main story, but do not have any bearing on the main narrative and are not necessary for completing the game. Due to this fact, as well as the limited scope of this study, side quests will not form part of the three different analyses.

The next section provides an analysis of *Mass Effect*, first giving an overview of the game's storyline and then a narratological - and ludological analysis respectively, drawing attention to instances where ethico-moral decisions affect narrative and / or gameplay. A brief conclusion of *Mass Effect* is drawn to determine whether or not ethical egoism is promoted during gameplay. This process is repeated for the analyses of both *Fable III* and *Fallout New Vegas*.

## **3.2. *Mass Effect***

### **3.2.1. *Mass Effect* Overview**

*Mass Effect* is set in the future where the human race is still attempting to find its place within the plethora of alien races found in the galaxy. After finding technology on Mars, which was left there by an extinct alien race called the Protheans, humans were able to expand their ability to travel through space and colonised several planets. The various peoples of the human race established the Alliance in order to present a united front to alien races. The alien races are represented by the Citadel Council, a governing body made up of representatives from the dominant alien races.

The main character, controlled by the gamer, is Commander Shepard of the Alliance Military. Gamers may choose whether Shepard is male or female and can also customise their avatar before beginning the game. Apart from some minor dialogue differences and changes in the romance sub-plots, Shepard's gender has no effect on the main story.

An important gameplay aspect of *Mass Effect* is the use of a squadron or team. For each mission the player is given the opportunity to select which companions will assist during the mission. These choices are at the discretion of the player, who may choose to bring companions based on their personality or their abilities. For the most successful gameplay, it is important to have a balanced team whose abilities complement each other, i.e. a weapons

expert, tech<sup>9</sup> expert as well as biotics<sup>10</sup> expert ("Classes" s.a.:s.p.). Companions level-up alongside Shepard and the player can choose new abilities and skills for each new level. Interacting with companions outside of missions provides narrative depth, often providing insight into the different species and galactic history, as well as the opportunity for Shepard to build trust and approval. Shepard can also enter into romances with some companions, depending on gender and level of trust.



Figure 1: Squad selection screen showing skill balance (BioWare 2007).

As mentioned in Chapter 1, *Mass Effect's* morality mechanic works independently for both paragon and renegade, meaning that increasing paragon points does not decrease the renegade alignment and vice versa.

This section has provided a brief overview of the setting and the main character. The next section looks at the game from a narrative point of view, detailing the progression of the story as well as highlighting important paragon / renegade decisions. Less important sections of the main narrative and side quest storylines have been excluded from this study.

<sup>9</sup> Abilities based on engineering knowledge or hacking, useful against mechanical or synthetic enemies such as turrets or the Geth ("Classes" s.a.:s.p.).

<sup>10</sup> An ability that allows some beings to create and manipulate mass effect fields. Biotics can lift objects, leap forward with great speed or cloak themselves in a protective barrier ("Classes" s.a.:s.p.). (This gives the game developer the ability to include special powers in gameplay that would work similarly to magic in fantasy games).

### 3.2.2. *Mass Effect Narrative*

The game begins on a human colony, Eden Prime, where Shepard is sent to recover a Prothean beacon which holds information that may be advantageous to the Alliance. Once on the ground, Shepard realises that the colony is under attack by the Geth, a network of artificial intelligences who use various different forms of mechanical bodies. During the mission, Shepard discovers that Saren Arterius, a Spectre<sup>11</sup>, is in charge of the Geth attack and has betrayed the Citadel Council. Upon completing the mission, Shepard finds the beacon and awaits evacuation. During this time, one of Shepard's companions goes to inspect the beacon. Unaware of the beacon's power, Shepard intercepts them and throws them to safety. Shepard is lifted into the air and experiences strange visions, then the beacon explodes, flinging Shepard to the ground ("Mass Effect Guide" s.a.:s.p.). This moment in the game shows Shepard acting selflessly in order to save a colleague. It is important to note that this sequence takes place during a cut-scene, leaving the gamer no option whether or not to save their companion.



Figure 2: Commander Shepard is lifted by the Prothean beacon (BioWare 2007).

After the discovery of the beacon on Eden Prime, Shepard travels to the Citadel to inform the Council of Saren's betrayal as well as the Geth attack. The Council are reluctant to believe Saren is involved but show concern about the Geth presence in the galaxy. While searching for evidence to prove Saren's involvement with the Geth, Shepard meets Tali, a Quarian<sup>12</sup>, who provides a recording that exposes Saren and mentions something called the Reapers. Evidence in hand, Shepard returns to the Citadel Council who then strips Saren of

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<sup>11</sup> **Special Tactics and Reconnaissance agent:** special agents appointed by the Citadel Council who are allowed to complete missions as they see fit. Spectres are considered above the law but can be stripped of their status for gross misconduct ("Spectres" s.a.:s.p.).

<sup>12</sup> **Nomadic alien race that wear bio-suits** due to a weak immune system. The Quarians created the Geth to perform manual labour, however the Geth became sentient causing the Quarians to panic and attempt to destroy them. The Quarians lost the ensuing war and have since been nomads ("Quarian" s.a.:s.p.).

his Spectre status. Seizing this opportune moment, the human ambassador suggests the council make Shepard a Spectre in order to investigate the Geth attacks further and possibly prevent a war. Shepard becomes the first human Spectre and is given command of an Alliance warship, the SSV Normandy. Shepard is given several missions at the same time, each one on a different planet, namely Therum, Noveria and Feros ("Mass Effect Guide" s.a.:s.p.). The player can now choose which mission to complete first, however the prospect of gaining another companion means that usually gamers choose the mission to Therum first. After completing the mission on Therum, Liara<sup>13</sup> joins the crew and due to her expertise on the Protheans, attempts to assist Shepard in making some sense of the visions experienced on Eden Prime.

The mission on Noveria presents one of the first major ethico-moral decisions in the game. During this mission, Shepard confronts Matriarch Benezia who was Saren's advisor and is Liara's mother. Shepard travels to Peak 15, a research facility in the mountains of Noveria. Once at the station, Shepard discovers that an extinct sentient insect race, the Rachni, have been revived through experiments by Benezia and Saren. After fighting through waves of Rachni, Shepard confronts Benezia who attacks, despite the possibility of her daughter being present<sup>14</sup>. Once Benezia has been defeated, Shepard can talk to the Rachni Queen who is trapped in a glass chamber rigged with acid ("Mass Effect Guide" s.a.:s.p.). One of Shepard's companions points out the historical context of the situation, i.e. that the Rachni were destroyed by the Krogan (a reptilian, war-minded alien race). The Citadel Council uplifted the Krogans out of their primitive state in exchange for military assistance against the Rachni. The Rachni became extinct and the Krogans flourished beyond the Council's expectations, in turn causing more problems. If asked, the Rachni Queen explains that her children have been hostile because they have been removed from her care and would otherwise be peaceful. She asks Shepard to spare her life and promises that she will teach future rachni children to be forgiving towards the Krogans and the Citadel Council for past wrongs. Shepard must make the final decision whether to save the Queen or whether to cause the Rachni to become extinct once more. Choosing to save the Queen allows her to escape which has repercussions in later games of the *Mass Effect* series. If the Queen is killed, the Council reprimands Shepard for causing the second extinction, asking whether humans enjoy genocide.

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<sup>13</sup> Liara is an Asari, a humanoid alien race which is highly respected in the galaxy and has a seat on the Citadel Council. The Asari were one of the earliest races to discover the Protheans' technology ("Asari" s.a.:s.p.).

<sup>14</sup> The gamer can decide whether or not to take Liara on the mission, this changes dialogue in some ways but does not affect the plot.

The next significant decision the gamer has to make occurs on the planet Feros where a human colony, established by the ExoGeni Corporation, is in danger from a sentient, mind-controlling plant. After landing, Shepard finds a small community of humans living at Zhu's Hope and while speaking with their leader the settlement is attacked by Geth. Shepard has to fight off the Geth and then clear the surrounding area for the people of Zhu's Hope. Once the colony is safe, Shepard is free to travel to the ExoGeni Headquarters. At the Headquarters Shepard learns that ExoGeni discovered a mind-controlling plant, called the Thorian, under the settlement of Zhu's Hope and have allowed the colonists to become infected as part of an experiment. Some of the ExoGeni employees help Shepard in an attempt to make restitution. Shepard is provided with a special grenade upgrade that will render the now violent colonists unconscious until the Thorian can be removed. Alternatively, Shepard can choose to use lethal means to neutralise the threat from the colonists and then destroy the Thorian. Whether or not the overall colony is saved depends on Shepard's actions. If enough colonists are saved by using the knock-out grenades the colony will be safe and will continue to grow once the Thorian has been removed. However, if Shepard chooses to neutralise the infected colonists then the colony will be shut down and will be considered a failure. Choosing to save the colony has repercussions for later games in the *Mass Effect* series.

Once the three planets, Therum, Noveria and Feros, have been visited, Shepard heads to Virmire to investigate reports of Saren's presence on the planet. Two difficult ethico-moral decisions occur on Virmire. The first takes place early on after Shepard has fought through the Geth forces to reach the Salarian<sup>15</sup> camp where the attack on Saren's facility is being coordinated from by Salarian Captain Kirrahe. At the camp, Shepard is informed that Saren has been breeding a Krogan army. This information causes Shepard's Krogan companion, Wrex, to become extremely agitated towards Kirrahe. The Salarians were responsible for the development of the Krogan genophage, a biological weapon which limits the amount of viable pregnancies and as such reduced the Krogan population over time. This occurred after the Citadel Council employed the Krogan against the Rachni and the Krogan were able to flourish under the new technological advances given to them by the Council for the Rachni Wars. The genophage is a sore point for all Krogan as this has caused much despair for their people and has made them revere Krogan children. In this scenario, Kirrahe explains that

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<sup>15</sup> Amphibious, humanoid alien race known for their excellent research capabilities, especially in the fields of science and technology. Salarians were the second race to join the Citadel Council and were involved in the plan to minimise the Krogan threat after the Rachni Wars ("Salarian" s.a.:s.p.)

Saren is able to create new Krogan because he cured the genophage, however Kirrahe believes this cure should be destroyed in order to preserve the peace that has been in place since Krogan numbers have been limited. Wrex, on the other hand, desperately wants the cure for his people. Shepard has to choose how to deal with this situation in a confrontation with Wrex. Shepard can choose to kill Wrex or to signal another teammate, Ashley, to kill him. If Shepard has gained Wrex's trust (through side quests), then Wrex listens to Shepard's argument that the Krogan created by Saren are not Wrex's own people and are merely Saren's puppets, which Wrex concedes to being true and then allows the genophage cure to be destroyed. Alternatively, Shepard can choose to do nothing at which point Ashley kills Wrex in order to save Shepard, believing that Wrex was about to attack Shepard ("Mass Effect Guide" s.a.:s.p.). The gamer is faced with the decision to kill Wrex for the good of the mission, and to appease the Salarrians, or whether to spare him and attempt to reason with him. The decision made here has a large effect on gameplay, which is discussed in the next section, as well as subsequent narrative differences in the second installment of *Mass Effect*.

The second ethico-moral decision which the gamer is faced with on Virmire occurs during the main battle. Once the situation with Wrex has been resolved, Kirrahe requests that one of Shepard's squadmates join the Salarian team for the remainder of the assault. Ashley, a human soldier serving in the Alliance, and Kaidan, a human biotic who was part of a special biotics training program, both volunteer to accompany Kirrahe. Whoever the gamer chooses to send with Kirrahe becomes separated from Shepard's squad for a large part of the assault. Part of the mission is to plant a bomb at a structural weak point. It is while planting this bomb that the companion who is accompanying Kirrahe radios for assistance. Shepard heads to their location and halfway there checks in with the squad arming the bomb via radio. The bomb squad informs Shepard that they are under heavy attack from the Geth and have armed the bomb to detonate whether they are clear or not. The leader of the bomb squad will urge Shepard to continue on to rescue Kirrahe and his borrowed squadmember. At this point, Shepard has to choose which companion to save. There are no definite ethico-moral reasons for saving one teammate above the other made clear in the narrative. This decision affects both narrative and gameplay greatly as one character will die. At this point, the romance subplot may come into consideration by the gamer as both characters can be romanced by Shepard and this might inform the gamer's decision. This choice also has narrative implications in the two further *Mass Effect* games and has gameplay repercussions for *Mass Effect 3* (BioWare, 2012).

The final major ethico-moral decision that gamers are faced with while playing *Mass Effect* is whether to save the Citadel Council or not. While on Virmire, Shepard discovers that Saren is in fact being controlled by Sovereign who is part of a race of sentient machines called Reapers. The Reapers intend to destroy all organic life in the galaxy. During the final mission, Shepard follows Saren to the Citadel<sup>16</sup> where Saren is attempting to take control of the station in order to open a portal for the main Reaper invasion. At this point, Sovereign, the only Reaper present in Citadel space, is leading a Geth attack on Citadel Station. Once Saren is defeated, Shepard is able to make contact with his / her ship, the Normandy, and is informed that the Citadel Council are in danger on board their flagship, the Ascension. Joker, the pilot of the Normandy, is standing by with a human fleet and will be able to save the Council, but, due to the fact that the entire galaxy is in danger for the foreseeable future, it might be wise to keep them intact and not risk further losses ("Mass Effect Guide" s.a.:s.p.). Various companions in Shepard's squad will explain the pros and cons as mentioned above, but ultimately Shepard, and thus the gamer, must make the decision whether to save the Council or to keep the fleet in reserve.

The player-character is faced with the ethico-moral decision of saving the Council, which at this point consists only of alien races, or whether to keep a large part of the human fleet in reserve, which would ensure humanity's power in the aftermath of the battle. If Shepard chooses to save the Council, the human fleet surges into the Station and are able to destroy the Geth ships attacking the Ascension. The Council is saved and the human fleet then destroys Sovereign, halting the Reaper invasion. If Shepard decides to hold the fleet in reserve, Normandy and other human ships enter the Citadel but hold back until the Geth destroy the Ascension, killing all Council members on board. The human fleet then engages and destroys Sovereign.

Gamers are faced with several difficult ethico-moral decisions during *Mass Effect*. These decisions often have both narrative and gameplay consequences. The above has been a brief description of these scenarios and how these may affect the narrative. The next section

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<sup>16</sup> A space station that has become somewhat of a capital of the galaxy as the seat of the Citadel Council. Shepard learns that the Citadel is in fact a mass effect relay (a means of travelling through space at hyper speed) connecting the galaxy with outer space where the Reapers live ("Citadel" s.a.:s.p.)

describes how gameplay is affected by each decision, specifically which rewards or punishments are given as well as how gameplay changes after the decisions are made.

### ***3.2.3. Mass Effect Gameplay***

This section discusses gameplay changes in *Mass Effect* that occur due to ethico-moral decisions made in game. These decisions have been described in the above section already and as such this section will merely provide a brief refresher before discussing the gameplay consequences of each scenario.

The first scenario depicts Commander Shepard saving a teammate without knowing what the dangers might be. As mentioned in Section 3.2.2. this occurs during a cut-scene and the gamer has no control and therefore no choice. This is a strictly narratological ethico-moral scenario the nature of which is discussed in more depth in the next section.

The incident with the Rachni Queen on Noveria is the first major decision the player has to make. Allowing the Queen to live awards the player 24 paragon points whereas killing her awards 25 renegade points ("Morality Guide" s.a.:s.p.). This decision does not have much effect on the rest of the gameplay.

The third ethico-moral scenario takes place while Shepard is attempting to rescue the human colony of Zhu's Hope which is under the control of a sentient plant, the Thorian. Shepard must choose whether to use a knock-out grenade and melee attacks to render hostile colonists unconscious or whether to kill them. This decision has a significant gameplay impact for that particular mission. If choosing to merely knock colonists unconscious, gameplay is somewhat harder. Shepard is equipped with a limited amount of grenades and once these are spent Shepard must use melee attacks to knock down the charging colonists. This means Shepard can easily be swarmed as melee attacks can only be performed in close proximity and it takes a fair amount of time to knock down the colonists. Choosing to use lethal force has little effect on the normal gameplay as Shepard and the squad are allowed to use all the weapons and abilities in their arsenal. Furthermore, Shepard is awarded two paragon points for each colonist saved and two renegade points for killing a colonist. The total of these points affect the destiny of the colony - enough paragon points will save the colony whereas otherwise it would be shut down. Outside of this mission, there is no effect on further gameplay.

The confrontation with Wrex on Vormire regarding the genophage cure can have a great impact on gameplay for the remainder of the game. If choosing to kill Wrex, he is unavailable as a squadmate for later missions. As a war-hungry Krogan, Wrex is a very useful teammate. Not only does he have significant physical brawn but he also has biotic abilities, making him quite versatile in combat. 28 paragon points is awarded for convincing Wrex that the Krogan created by Saren are not real Krogan and that they are puppets ("Morality Guide" s.a.:s.p.). If choosing to kill Wrex, 25 renegade points will be awarded to the player. In the scenario where Ashley kills Wrex to protect Shepard, the player can still earn paragon / renegade points through their reaction to Ashley's decision.

Also on Vormire, the decision between saving either Ashley or Kaidan has "become one of the most defining moments in the Mass Effect trilogy, and is one of the hardest choices to make" (Cummings 2014:s.p.). Ashley and Kaidan are the only humans on the squad, the Normandy is crewed by humans but these members do not form part of the companions who assist Shepard in completing missions. Furthermore, both characters have been with Shepard since Eden Prime and, as mentioned in the previous section, both can be romanced by an opposite gender Shepard which would form a strong bond to one or the other. From a gameplay perspective, the gamer can choose to save the member who most benefits their play style. Ashley is a soldier proficient in weapons while Kaidan is a sentinel, trained in both biotic and tech abilities. Their constitutions in combat are almost polar opposites and as such gamers might save the one which provides the gamer with a balanced squad. This decision, as with the one regarding Wrex, has a large impact on gameplay as it removes a possible teammate permanently and will affect squad dynamics for further missions.

The final ethico-moral decision to be made occurs near the end of the game. Shepard has to choose whether to save the Citadel Council or keep the human fleet in reserve. If the Council is saved, the gamer is awarded 28 paragon points. Letting the Council die awards the gamer 29 renegade points ("Morality Guide" s.a.:s.p.). Other than the morality points, there are no real gameplay consequences.

It is clear that some ethico-moral decisions in *Mass Effect* have a larger impact on narrative while others have a larger impact on gameplay. These consequences are often far-reaching in that they have repercussions in the second and third installments in the game series. Mostly, the player is rewarded with either paragon or renegade points for making these decisions.

These points are important for unlocking various narrative branches as well as affecting gameplay through the Charm and Intimidate skills. As mentioned in Chapter 1, these two skills, for paragon and renegade respectively, can be employed to gain additional information or monetary rewards. It can be argued that the permanent loss of teammates is a punishment, however some gamers may not see the usefulness of some members of the squad. The next section discusses these scenarios more in-depth on a moral level as well as attempt to link them to the six factors of ethical egoism identified in Chapter 2.

#### ***3.2.4. Mass Effect Ethico-Moral Discussion***

Much of *Mass Effect's* plot progression centers on ethico-moral decisions and scenarios. The first instance of such a scenario occurs during a cut-scene showing Commander Shepard saving a squadmate. This is a clear, narratological moment where Shepard is acting selflessly for the good of another. The fact that this takes place during a cut-scene early on almost sets the tone for the rest of the game: Shepard is a leader who will sacrifice himself / herself for the good of others. This, to some degree, hints to gamers that Shepard is, or should be, a paragon i.e. a compassionate hero. Unlike many other role-playing games such as *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic II* (BioWare 2005) and *Black & White* (Lionhead Studios 2001), *Mass Effect* does not represent the converse of a hero paragon as an evil villain, but rather as an anti-hero whose devil-may-care attitude is not stereotypical of a military commander. This means that the narrative will progress along very similar lines, irrespective of playing as paragon or renegade. However, the above instance still promotes a paragon Shepard.

Choosing the fate of the Rachni Queen and subsequently the whole Rachni race is one of the more profound ethico-moral decisions in *Mass Effect*. The gamer must decide whether or not to drive the Rachni into extinction once more. The historical context of this decision provides the gamer with some information to aid in the decision-making. According to the history of the *Mass Effect* universe, the Rachni are a ferocious insectoid race which rapidly expanded and colonised other planets. These giant insects communicate with each other by 'singing' in 'colours' (BioWare, 2007) - i.e. it can be argued that they communicate through emotions rather than language. Due to the lack of communications ability between the Rachni and the united species of the Citadel, the Rachni were forced to defend their territory heavily when it was infringed upon by the Citadel Council. Therefore, the gamer can deduce that to allow the Rachni to breed once more might put large parts of the galaxy at risk. However, this situation raises many ethico-moral concerns such as: Should one person be allowed to decide the fate

of a whole race? Is it right to commit genocide in order to safeguard a multitude of other races? With specific relation to ethical egoism, the egoist may decide to weigh the option of whether the Rachni would make a good ally and choose to save the Queen on such a basis. In such a case, the motivation for saving the Queen would be a purely egoistic one as it would aid the egoist in forming a strong alliance thereby contributing to the main long term goal, which is survival. If the decision to save the Queen is made on such a basis, then this decision would be informed by both 1) and 5) of Section 2.2.4., which state that motivators for behaviour are self-interest oriented and that ethical egoists act rationally, especially with regards to the need to survive. With regards to gameplay, there is very little effect for either choice as the player still has to eliminate the corrupted rachni children.

Zhu's Hope presents another interesting ethico-moral conflict. In this scenario, the player-character must decide whether to use lethal force or to employ the more difficult tactic of knocking colonists unconscious. Despite the fact that this decision is largely a gameplay one, the ethico-moral nature of it cannot be denied. While it can be argued that the colonists are infected with a mind-controlling pollen making them hostile and therefore legitimate targets, it raises ethico-moral questions such as whether or not it is right to neutralise them forcibly simply because the alternative is harder and would take a longer time to accomplish. The renegade decision to simply kill the colonists is a distinctly egoistic one as it saves time and requires no extra effort on the part of the gamer. Choosing to save the colonists is more altruistic, however, the player is still rewarded in the form of paragon points for this behaviour. From a gameplay perspective, choosing to use the grenade upgrade and melee attacks only provides a greater challenge and therefore a more satisfying gameplay experience, according to Suits' definition of a high-quality game (1978:24).

The decision to kill or spare Wrex during the first stage of the assault on Vormire has both narratological and gameplay consequences. This scenario raises ethico-moral questions such as, in a combat situation, is it right to remove a soldier who is compromising the mission and therefore the safety of others? This is one of the few decisions where not acting results in a teammate doing so on the player-character's behalf. It is interesting to note that the 'default' choice is to kill Wrex, despite the fact that he has legitimate cause for concern. This scenario also raises one of the most intense ethico-moral conflicts within the *Mass Effect* series, namely the genophage. Similar to the Rachni problem, this begs the question whether it is right to 'sterilise' a race undergoing a rapid population increase when that race is violent by

nature. However, this does not form part of the decisions in *Mass Effect*, but rather features in *Mass Effect 2* (BioWare, 2010) and *Mass Effect 3* (BioWare, 2012) and is therefore beyond the scope of this study.

Similar to the confrontation with Wrex, choosing to save either Ashley or Kaidan has both narratological and gameplay repercussions. Morally, this is one of the most complex decisions the gamer has to make. In this scenario, there is no clear right or wrong decision to be made based on our society's moral standards which informs the gamer's moral code in real life. In other words, according to most real societies' moral codes there is no right or wrong answer in this instance. Similarly, the moral code within the *Mass Effect* universe (interpreted from the narrative and game mechanics) does not have a distinct paragon or renegade decision - both choices are equal on moral grounds but one character must be sacrificed in order to save the other. Within the context of the game's moral rules, there is also no clear right or wrong decision. As such, the gamer is forced to think of reasons outside of the game and in so doing has to think of his own interests. As mentioned during the gameplay discussion, gamers can make the decision based on their own needs as a gamer, i.e. their personal playing style. This is a distinctly egoistic decision as it serves the gamer's self-interest. However, gamers who enjoy role-playing may elect to save their romantic interest or simply the character they like the most.

The final decision which raises an ethico-moral challenge is when Shepard must choose between saving the Citadel Council or letting them die. Letting the Council die places the human systems Alliance in a strong position in the aftermath of the Battle for Citadel Station. Choosing to let the Council die means that humans begin to outnumber other races in high political and military ranks. However, as a Spectre, Shepard answers to the Citadel Council and as such has a duty to protect them. This scenario raises important questions such as whether soldiers should always protect their leaders, whether humans (or any specific group) should always further their own interest, etcetera. The renegade option of letting the Council die to further human interests can be considered an ethical egoist decision, specifically with regard to points 2) and 4) of Section 2.2.4. These two points state that ethical egoists may enter into communities or groups and that to satisfy their needs while not an obligation, might still be in the egoist's self-interest. In this case, choosing the renegade way would allow the player-character to further his own interests by furthering those of the group he belongs to, i.e. humanity.

In essence, the narrative of *Mass Effect* promotes altruism rather than egoism. Shepard is shown as a hero, whether compassionate or roguish depends on the player, who at the end of the game saves the galaxy from a violent invasion. Throughout the progression of the main plot, Shepard is assisting others through the various missions. However, the gameplay, specifically the morality mechanic, affords the player the opportunity to play as a renegade which promotes a more egoistic approach to completing these missions within the overarching altruistic narrative.

The next section provides an overview of *Fable III* followed by narratological and ludological analyses of specific moments in the game which present the gamer with ethico-moral decisions. Those decisions are then discussed within the context of ethical egoism.

### **3.3.1. *Fable III* Overview**

*Fable III* is set in the fantasy world of Albion, a land which is just entering the industrial age, and ruled by the tyrannical King Logan. Albion is a land in which the Heroes' Guild used to protect the people. The Heroes' Guild consisted of supernatural humans with special abilities and magical powers who accepted quests from the people of Albion who sought aid. The young royals in *Fable III*, Logan and the Prince / Princess, are descendents of the old Hero King who was the first Hero to become the Ruler of Albion.

The main character of *Fable III* is the Prince / Princess, King Logan's younger sibling. The player is allowed to choose whether to play as a male or a female but does not have the ability to change their avatar's appearance at the beginning of the game. The Prince / Princess is forced into overthrowing King Logan when it becomes clear that Logan is becoming a tyrant. On the journey to revolution, the Prince / Princess discovers that he / she is in fact a Hero like his / her father and as such must learn new abilities in order to successfully overthrow Logan and take control of the Kingdom. Aided by several advisors, the young Hero begins to organise an underground revolution.

Morality in the game works on the basis of good and evil. This game mechanic is set on 'one slider' and as such an increase in good points decreases evil points and vice versa ("Alignments" s.a.:s.p.). Moral alignment affects both gameplay and narrative in *Fable III* and these are discussed in the relevant sections below.

This section has provided a brief overview of the game and the main character. The next section looks at the manner in which ethico-moral decisions affect the narrative of *Fable III*. As with *Mass Effect*, side quests and less relevant moments along the main plot are excluded from this study. Furthermore, the aesthetic changes in *Fable III* are also discussed in the following section. Once the narrative has been explored, an analysis of gameplay changes due to changes in character morality is discussed. An overview of ethico-moral challenges in the game specifically in relation to ethical egoism concludes the analysis of *Fable III*.

### **3.3.2. *Fable III* Narrative**

The main narrative of *Fable III* is split into two distinct chapters, the first is "The Road to Rule", during which the Hero attempts to overthrow Logan, and "The Weight of the World", which begins after the Hero has become ruler of Albion and must decide how to govern ("Fable III Storyline" s.a.:s.p.).

The gamer takes control of the Hero shortly after being woken by the butler, Jasper. The Hero must choose an outfit and meet with their prospective love interest in the castle gardens. Shortly after, the Hero is met by Sir Walter, trusted advisor of the late Hero King, who shows the Hero how to wield a sword. During combat training, the Hero's love interest bursts into the room to call Walter and the Hero as there are protesters outside the castle. During a cutscene, Walter leaves to confront Logan in the War Room and is assaulted by the guards. The Hero is appalled and begins to argue with Logan who cannot be reasoned with. The King, angered by the Hero's naivety and inability to comprehend the whole context of the situation, forces a difficult decision on the young royal: whether to execute the ring leaders of the protest or the Hero's love interest. Logan further states that refraining from making a choice will result in everyone being executed ("Fable III Storyline" s.a.:s.p.). Choosing to kill the love interest means that the love story ends very early on and makes the love interest unavailable for marriage later in the game. Choosing to execute the protesters means that more people have to die. Whichever choice is made, the Hero vows to never forgive Logan and later that night escapes the castle with Jasper and Walter to start the revolution against Logan.

After leaving the castle, Walter leads the Hero to a remote part of the Mistpeak Mountains where a small human settlement is hidden away. Here, the Hero meets Sabine, the leader of

the Dwellers (as the small community is called) who gives the Hero three tasks to complete before the Dwellers will pledge allegiance to the young royal ("Road to Rule" s.a.:s.p.). Upon completion of these tasks, Sabine and his Dwellers join the rebellion on the condition that the Hero must restore the Dweller village to its former glory once becoming King / Queen.

Similar scenarios occur for a large part of the first chapter of the game where the player-character must complete quests and make promises in order to gain allies throughout Albion. Once all the allies in Albion are recruited, the Hero, Walter and the newly-joined Ben Finn, a soldier, set sail for Aurora, Albion's neighbouring country. During the crossing, the revolutionaries are fired upon by one of Logan's ships and the group is shipwrecked. Walter and the Hero become separated from Ben Finn, but decide to continue on foot to their destination. Walter leads the Hero through a cave, which appears to have been a temple. Exploring the cave temple further, reveals that it is inhabited by shadow creatures that begin to attack the Hero with an eerie voice stating that darkness will cover the lands of Aurora and Albion. Walter, suffering from claustrophobia, is severely unnerved by the presence of the shadows and their ominous leader, The Crawler ("Road to Rule" s.a.:s.p.). The Crawler is a creature from the void and serves an entity known only as The Corruption. The Crawler becomes the main antagonist in *Fable III* and attempts to cover Albion in darkness. While in the cave, Walter becomes overwhelmed by the darkness and is blinded. The Hero must lead him by the hand to the cave exit and into the Aurora desert. Shortly afterward, the Hero must decide whether to leave Walter behind or whether to continue leading him through the desert. Even if the Hero leads Walter further, he will eventually collapse and the Hero is forced to continue on alone. The narrative is not greatly affected by this choice, however it does raise an ethico-moral challenge which are discussed in more detail later.

While crossing the desert, the Hero is tormented by hallucinations from the Crawler and eventually becomes unconscious. Upon waking, the Hero learns that Ben Finn survived the shipwreck and was able to lead a search party of Aurorans<sup>17</sup> in order to find the Hero and Walter. Walter also survives, whether he was left behind intentionally or not, and his sight is restored. While in Aurora, the Hero meets Kalin, the leader, and learns that Logan had been on an expedition in Aurora and met the Crawler himself. In order to save Albion from the darkness and the Crawler, Logan became tyrannical, oppressing his people and passing strict

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<sup>17</sup> People of Aurora. Currently confined to the city of Aurora as most of the country of Aurora has been destroyed by the Crawler and the darkness he spreads ("Aurora" s.a.:s.p.)

laws in order to raise much needed funds for the Albion defences. The Hero learns that, at heart, Logan may not be an evil person, but in order to save his people he had to make difficult decisions. Despite this realisation, the Hero returns to Albion with all his / her allies and overthrows Logan.

This point signifies the end of the first chapter and the beginning of Chapter 2 in which the Hero must rule Albion in such a way that it is protected from the imminent Crawler attack. At the Hero's coronation, the gamer is presented with the choice to execute Logan or to pardon him. Logan attempts to defend himself by giving reasons for the harsh choices he had to make. The Hero's allies will also attempt to advise the best course of action, but the player must make the decision whether to spare his life or to execute him. Pardoning Logan results in him pledging his allegiance to the new Hero monarch as well as providing the support of his soldiers in the upcoming battle against the Crawler. Executing Logan brings joy to the people of Albion who are happy to be rid of the tyrant.

The remainder of the ethico-moral choices in this section of the game are often based on promises made during the first half of the game. In light of the coming attack on Albion, these promises are now much more difficult to keep. At this point in the game, choices are closely tied to the royal treasury which is used to fund the defenses of the country. In order to protect the people of Albion, the treasury must have 6.5 million gold pieces available ("The Weight of the World" s.a.:s.p.). Players are allowed to donate their personal funds to the treasury. This is, however, a gameplay mechanic and is discussed in more detail in the next section. While there are several choices to make, this study only discusses two.

The first arises from a proposal to drain one of Albion's lakes in order to mine the resources found in the lake bed. The Hero can choose to accept the proposal, which will open Millfield Mines, or to place protection on the lake, making it a conservation area. The area in dispute is situated in a scenic region of Albion which also contains the most expensive real estate in the game. While most of the impact from this choice is experienced from a ludological perspective, the ethico-moral issues this raises are profound and are discussed in more detail in the final section of the *Fable III* analysis.

Another choice the Hero monarch is faced with during the Weight of the World section of the game is whether to keep the promise made to Sabine, leader of the Dweller people. Keeping

the promise results in the lands of Mistpeak becoming the property of the Dwellers once more and any policies or laws passed by Logan are revoked, leaving the Dwellers a free people once more, but still allies of the Hero. Breaking the promise allows Reaver, an industrialist, to open a logging camp. This increases the kingdom's resources but Sabine and the Dweller people become the Hero's enemies.



Figure 3: Good vs Evil Hero (Lionhead Studios 2010).

The aesthetics of the game changes according to the choices made by the gamer. The most noticeable change is based on the character's moral alignment. An evil Hero will sprout horns, have rotten teeth, red eyes and black hair whilst a good hero will have blond hair, blue eyes, pristine teeth and a halo ("Alignments" s.a.:s.p.). At the extremes of the evil vs good scale, the Hero will even have wings when performing certain acts or when interacting with non-player characters (See Figure 3 above). If the Hero is extremely good, the wings will be white and an aura of feathers and sparkles will surround the Hero. Black and red wings, large horns and darkness are indicative of an evil Hero. These aesthetic changes are clearly representative of an angel and a devil or demon, respectively. This appeals to the common sense ideas of good and evil in which light, health, and angelic qualities are associated with moral goodness and darkness, demon-like qualities and a foreboding demeanor are indicative of evil. Further, many of the choices will also impact the aesthetics of the game world. For example, in the case of choosing to build Millfield Mines will result in the removal of the lake and instead a quarry will be visible in its place. The air quality of the region will also decrease if the mine is built. This change in world aesthetics is true for several other in-game decisions that were not discussed in this study.

The underlying game mechanics that affect the aesthetics of the game also change some gameplay aspects. These changes as well as the changes effected through the decisions laid

out in the narrative section are discussed in the next section with a ludological approach. A further discussion of the ethico-moral situations presented in *Fable III* follows.

### 3.3.3. *Fable III* Gameplay

This section discusses the six above-mentioned ethico-moral choices which gamers are faced with while playing *Fable III*, specifically with regard to how these choices affect gameplay.

The first instance of an ethico-moral decision occurs early on in the game where the player-character is forced to make a decision between executing their love interest or the ring leaders of a protest. This choice has no reward in the form of morality points, either good or evil, and also has very little narrative consequences ("*Fable III* Storyline" s.a.:s.p.). It does, however, raise a pertinent moral question which is discussed in the next section.

While escaping from the Crawler into the Auroran desert, the Hero has to choose whether or not to drag Walter by the hand when he becomes helpless. While this choice does not affect the story, as the Hero is forced to leave him behind at a later stage when choosing to assist him, it does have an impact on gameplay. Choosing to leave Walter immediately earns 50 evil points, but frees the Hero to explore the surrounding area much faster ("*Road to Rule*" s.a.:s.p.). Dragging Walter as far as possible earns the Hero 50 good points, at which point he collapses and the Hero is forced to seek help alone. However, this is an extremely slow and cumbersome process, especially amid his pleas to be left behind.

The dilemma of whether or not to execute Logan is one of the more nuanced decisions in the game. The people of Albion want him executed for the tyrannical oppression he has forced on them and will cheer if the Hero chooses this option. Apart from narrative consequences, there is very little change in gameplay whichever choice the player makes. Despite the fact that Logan pledges allegiance and his soldiers to the new ruler of Albion, these additional assets do not alleviate the burden placed on the Hero to raise funds.

After Logan is executed or pardoned, the Hero becomes King / Queen and suddenly has the added responsibility of needing to raise funds to protect the people of Albion. The game mechanic of the royal treasury now comes into play. The player-character must raise an amount of 6.5 million gold coins in order to ensure the survival of Albion. Players are allowed

to donate their own money earned through quests, general loot<sup>18</sup> or owned property to aid in the defense of Albion. Once this mechanic comes into play, making ethico-moral decisions is more challenging as suddenly the fate of Albion is on the line. Playing pure good results in a deficit of 2 million gold, meaning that good Heroes have to donate 8.5 million gold from their personal income in order to save Albion. Evil Heroes earn 4.45 million gold from making evil judgements, such as breaking promises, and only have to invest 2.05 million pieces of their own gold ("The Weight of the World" s.a.:s.p.). Playing as an evil Hero makes it slightly simpler to raise the funds as the good Hero has to spend more time in the game world raising money through renting out property and performing many side quests.



Figure 4: Walter is consumed by the darkness (Lionhead Studios 2010).

Choosing to mine Bower Lake for resources is one such choice which also affects the treasury. The proposal to drain and mine the lake comes from Reaver, and the Hero must decide whether to accept Reaver's proposal or whether to protect the lake and its surrounding area. The gameworld is directly affected by this choice as it will either leave a location unchanged or place a mine in the center of this location. This mine can be explored and also has a quest related to it. Further changes in gameplay include the addition of 25 evil points for accepting the proposal and 25 good points for placing the lake under protection. However, protecting the lake costs the treasury 50 thousand gold whereas the mine provides a profit of 400 thousand ("The Weight of the World" s.a.:s.p.). These outcomes must be weighed by the gamer and the most beneficial way forward must be decided upon before being able to continue the narrative.

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<sup>18</sup> Items, weapons, armour or money found while exploring the world. These items are not considered to be someone's property and are therefore 'free for the taking'.

The first promise the young royal makes is to restore the Dweller camp. Ironically, this is the last major ethico-moral decision the gamer has to make with regard to ruling the land of Albion. Keeping the promise made to Sabine earns the Hero 25 good points and costs the treasury 50 thousand gold. Breaking this promise earns 25 evil points and results in the building of a logging camp which provides an income of 400 thousand gold ("The Weight of the World" s.a.:s.p.). This decision may have a large effect on gameplay depending on whether the Hero has raised enough funds up until this point. As a last effort to save the kingdom, the Hero might have to break this promise in order to raise enough funds to protect the people of Albion. Other than the above rewards, there are no major gameplay changes after this decision. However, depending on how much gold has been raised, the fate of Albion might hinge on this decision.

The morality mechanic in *Fable III* impacts several aspects of gameplay. The first and most noticeable is the Hero's physical appearance which was discussed under the narrative analysis. With regard to gameplay, moral alignment affects how non-player characters react to the Hero. Evil Heroes are booed and peasants will often run away when they approach, whereas good Heroes are met with cheers and applause. Minor interactions with villagers will also earn the Hero morality points. Threatening, assaulting, or dragging villagers to work will earn evil points whilst capturing criminals or giving money to beggars earns good points.

Morality can also affect the Hero's weapons. *Fable III* has a unique morphing mechanic which allows weapons to react to the gamer's playstyle and choices. For example, giving beggars gold 50 times will cause the Hero pistol or rifle to have a silver grip with a blue emblem ("Hero Weapons" s.a.:s.p.). Various actions throughout the gameworld will affect the aesthetics of Hero weapons. Furthermore, weapons' special qualities will change according to playstyle. For example, killing a certain amount of a specific enemy will make a weapon more efficient against that type of enemy.

This section has provided a gameplay analysis of *Fable III* with specific references to ethico-moral concepts within the game. The next section discusses these scenarios in more detail and attempt to relate them to the definition of ethical egoism put forward by this study.

### **3.3.4. *Fable III* Ethico-Moral Discussion**

The first choice the gamer is faced with raises the ethico-moral dilemma of whether it is good to sacrifice one for the sake of many. In *Fable III*, however, this decision is made more difficult due to the fact that the 'one' is the Hero's love interest. Choosing to save the love interest could be seen as furthering one's own self-interest and is therefore an egoistic choice whereas saving the protesters provides no real benefit to the Hero. The fact that Logan informs the Hero that everyone will be executed if no choice is made forces the player-character to choose the lesser of two evils. However, the game awards no morality points for making a choice, perhaps in an attempt to show the gamer that there is no right or wrong decision in this scenario.

The scenario in the desert requires the player to choose between dragging a companion to safety or whether to leave them behind. As discussed above, this has little effect on the storyline but does affect the gameplay for that particular part of the quest. Choosing to leave Walter immediately is an egoistic way of solving this problem as it frees the Hero to pursue his own course, thereby furthering his own self-interest. It can be argued that, according to 2) of Section 2.2.4., the Hero has chosen to enter into a companionship with Walter. However, as 3) states, ethical egoists may choose to leave such arrangements when these no longer provide sufficient benefits. The situation with Walter in the desert is such a case where the challenge of dragging him outweighs the benefits of his companionship and as such, an ethical egoist would reasonably decide to leave Walter behind.

Logan's execution raises ethico-moral challenges such as the death penalty, issues of human rights and the lengths to which rulers should go to protect their countries. Executing Logan has no real benefit other than brief approval from the people of Albion. Contrary to the other scenarios, choosing the 'good' option (according to the game's moral code) is in fact, the most egoistic. Firstly, Logan is the Hero's brother and therefore the Hero should be compelled to have Logan's interests at heart according to 4) as explained in Section 2.2.4. Furthermore, Logan can provide additional soldiers for the Albion Army if he is spared and this is most definitely in the player-character's interest.

*Fable III* raises environmental issues through the ethico-moral scenario involving Bower Lake. The Hero must decide whether to convert the lake area into a mine or whether the lake is worth preserving. Environmental issues have become of great concern to many

governments and questions of what is right and wrong regarding our environment have become commonplace. From an ethical egoist perspective, accepting the proposal to build the mine makes logical sense as this alleviates some of the financial pressures on the Hero and is therefore in the Hero's self-interest. The good choice, according to the game's morality mechanic, would be to protect the lake despite the fact that this course of action costs gold and therefore puts more pressure on the Hero.

Breaking the promise made to Sabine and the Dweller people is a clear egoistic choice. If the Hero elected to enter into an agreement with this community, as stated in 2), then it is reasonable for the Hero to leave, as defined by 3), due to the fact that keeping this promise would not further the Hero's self-interest and provides no benefit at this point. This scenario raises ethico-moral questions such as where or not it is just to exploit others for one's own benefit. Also, whether or not governments should be allowed to retract aid which was promised to less fortunate groups. Choosing to keep the promise might be considered the right thing to do according to societal standards, but it makes the game more challenging for the player-character as this choice requires the spending of the player's own gold.

Due to the narrative structure of the first chapter of *Fable III*, it can be argued that the storyline promotes an altruistic Hero. The fact that Logan is portrayed as a tyrant and the Hero has to overthrow him by leading a rebellion are indicators of this fact. Furthermore, the first chapter requires the Hero to assist many people living in Albion as well as make promises to restore certain areas, such as the Dweller Camp in Mistpeak. However, once the Hero becomes Ruler of Albion, it becomes clear that, in order to safeguard the country, it might be easier to become a tyrant, driven by an ethical egoist agenda. Most of the evil choices, as dictated by the game's morality mechanic, are of an egoistic nature, with a few exceptions, such as Logan's execution. Gameplay allows for both altruistic and egoistic styles, each with its own benefits. However, due to the strong narratological setup portraying the Hero as the liberator of the people, it is hard to accept the concept of an evil Hero.

The next section provides an analysis of *Fallout New Vegas* and starts with a brief overview, followed by narratological and ludological analyses. The section is then concluded with a discussion regarding the ethico-moral decisions in the game and how these relate to ethical egoism. Thereafter, Chapter 4 provides a conclusion and suggestions for further study.

### 3.4.1. *Fallout New Vegas Overview*

*Fallout NV* is set in post-apocalyptic United States where factions are fighting for their own piece of the Mojave wasteland (Obsidian Entertainment 2010). Small communities have begun to flourish and those who were fortunate enough to take part in the Vault<sup>19</sup> programmes are beginning to emerge. The two strongest factions, and central to the plot, are Caesar's Legion (or the Legion) and the New California Republic (NCR). The Legion follows the will of Ceasar (*Kai-sahr*, as they pronounce it) as their society is based on the ancient Romans. They are known to be slavers and any tribes that are conquered become part of the Legion's slave army. The NCR is an organisation closest to resembling a government in the wasteland and consists mainly of a large army. It stands for order and democracy in an otherwise chaotic world. Independently of these two factions stands Mr. House who is in charge of the New Vegas Strip, the "Free Economic Zone of New Vegas" where wastelanders<sup>20</sup> can find casinos, shops and other amenities ("*New Vegas Strip*", s.a.:s.p.).



Figure 5: The Legion vs NCR (Obsidian Entertainment 2010).

The player's character is known as the Courier, and was due to deliver a package to New Vegas when he / she was shot in the head and left to die ("*Fallout New Vegas Walkthrough*" s.a.:s.p.). Upon waking, the Courier learns that he / she was found by a robot named Victor and taken to Doc Mitchell in the town of Goodsprings. Doc manages to save the Courier's life and after a brief tutorial during which the player creates their character, the Courier is free to

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<sup>19</sup> Underground bunkers that were built to withstand nuclear strikes. These vaults are self-sufficient and as such many of them remained sealed for several generations ("*Vault*" s.a.:s.p.)

<sup>20</sup> Inhabitants of the wasteland at large.

explore the wasteland. Gamers can choose to play as either male or female and have the ability to customise their character's appearance before commencing with the game.

Morality in *Fallout NV* is known as karma and works similarly to *Fable III* in that an increase in karma points decreases evil karma, and vice versa. Karma can range between -1000 and +1000, a negative number is considered evil and a positive number is considered good ("Karma (Fallout: New Vegas)" s.a.:s.p.). Morality affects how some factions react to the player-character, i.e. evil factions will react favourably to an evil Courier but negatively toward a law-abiding, good character and vice versa. A large portion of learning how to play the game is exploring which factions are good and evil, which may vary from one player to the next.

*Fallout NV* has a more complex morality mechanic than *Mass Effect* and *Fable III* as it is linked to the reputation mechanic. Reputation can be earned independently from karma, however, a player earns either fame or infamy with a faction depending on whether they approve of actions or not. In other words, the reputation gained by the player-character depends on each faction's morality. For example, stealing an item from Van Graff's Silver Mine (an energy weapons shop) will decrease karma as well as gain infamy with the Van Graffs. The decrease in karma is universal throughout the game, but the infamy only relates to that one faction and does not affect other factions' opinions of the character. The only exception to this rule is when one faction approves of the destruction of the other, in such cases gaining infamy with one usually means gaining fame with the other. For example, the NCR approves the killing of Fiends, a primitive tribe living near the New Vegas Strip, and player-characters will earn good karma as well as NCR fame for eliminating these enemies, while gaining infamy with the Fiends. As such, morality is more nuanced in *Fallout NV* and it is often difficult to determine whether a choice is right or wrong as the player is not given direct morality point feedback. Interestingly, none of the main story quests give karma points as a reward. However, the player-character must choose which major faction to side with by the third main quest. Faction choice, and subsequent missions for that faction, will then influence the character's moral alignment by gaining fame through completing approved actions for the specific faction. The various endings that are possible in the game depend on this choice as well as choices made during side quests. In essence, universal morality is determined by the gamer's playstyle, i.e. whether they perform crimes such as stealing and murdering innocents.

Due to the complexity of the karma and reputation mechanics in *Fallout NV*, the next section provides an overarching discussion of the possible outcomes of the game based on the ethico-moral behaviour of the player. Thereafter, changes in gameplay due to karma and reputation are discussed. The *Fallout NV* analysis is then concluded by discussing the relevance of ethico-moral dilemmas in the game context.

### **3.4.2. *Fallout New Vegas Narrative***

After waking in Doc Mitchell's house in Goodsprings, the Courier is given some supplies and sent out into the wasteland to track down the man who shot him / her. On this journey, the Courier learns of the various factions vying for power in the wasteland and particularly New Vegas. Once the Courier reaches New Vegas, he / she discovers that a man named Benny is responsible for shooting him / her and that Benny stole the platinum chip, which belongs to Mr. House, the Courier was meant to deliver. This gambling chip is in fact a data storage device with the power to take control of New Vegas. The data on the chip allows the user access to the security robots in New Vegas and therefore gives the user control of New Vegas and its people. The courier learns about the chip from Yes Man, a robot who has been helping Benny to take control of New Vegas. True to his name, Yes Man is unable to say no to anyone and as such agrees to help the Courier instead of Benny ("Fallout New Vegas Walkthrough" s.a.:s.p.). This opens up four main quest options which lead to different endings. The four factions which the Courier can choose to assist in obtaining control of New Vegas are: the New California Republic, Caesar's Legion, Mr. House or an Independent New Vegas.

The first steps toward assisting the NCR in taking control of New Vegas is to recruit the Boomers to their cause as well as settle the violence in Freeside, a poverty-stricken area of New Vegas. The Courier can choose whether to solve this latter problem diplomatically or simply to assassinate Pacer, the gang member responsible for the violence. Whichever method is chosen, peace is restored to the neighbourhood and some stability begins to take shape in New Vegas. The NCR then requires the Courier to remove Mr. House from power. This can either be done by killing him or by disabling his cerebral interface<sup>21</sup>. Next, the Courier is sent as bodyguard to protect NCR President Kimball during a speech. The Courier must foil

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<sup>21</sup> Mr. House must remain inside a preservation chamber in order to survive due to his debilitating health. His interactions with the outside world are through a virtual presence within his casino ("Robert House" s.a.:s.p.).

several assassination attempts during the speech in order to complete the quest. Shortly after, Hoover Dam, a key strategic location, is attacked by the Legion. The Courier fights alongside the NCR to defend the dam and then move on to the Legion Camp in order to destroy them ("Fallout New Vegas Walkthrough" s.a.:s.p.). Returning to NCR General Oliver to inform him of the victory will end the game. This course of action results in the NCR taking control of New Vegas and the smaller, surrounding communities uniting the Mojave wasteland under the banner of the NCR. If the Courier has a good karma rating, the NCR will award him / her with the Golden Branch, the highest award given to civilians, for supporting the NCR military. Negative karma will result in the same honour, however reference will be made to the Courier's brutality and extreme actions, of which the NCR does not approve.



Figure 6: The Courier attacks Mr House's securitrons (Obsidian Entertainment 2010).

Supporting Caesar's Legion also requires the Courier to kill Mr. House. Similarly as before, the Courier can choose to kill or simply disable him, however, the latter will result in a slower death. Once Mr. House has been removed, the Courier must choose either to save Caesar's life by curing his brain tumour or whether to let him die during surgery. Letting Caesar die has some impact on the narrative as he is replaced by Lanius as the leader of the Legion, but the overall plot is not greatly affected. The next step in supporting the Legion's plan to take control of New Vegas is to assassinate NCR President Kimball ("Fallout New Vegas Walkthrough" s.a.:s.p.). Once the Courier has successfully assassinated Kimball, he / she must also remove the NCR Army's highest ranking officer, General Oliver. Reporting the success of this assassination to Caesar / Lanius will end the game. This course of action will result in the Legion taking control of most parts of the Mojave wasteland and a large part of the population is enslaved. If Lanius is leading the Legion, he will become the new Caesar and is brutal in seizing New Vegas, destroying everyone who resists and enslaving the rest. If the

Courier has high karma, the ending will state that despite his / her justness he / she chose to support the Legion. With a low karma, the Courier is described as being "as brutal and merciless as the worst of them" and is honoured by the Legion (Obsidian Entertainment, 2010).

The Courier can also choose to aid Mr. House in keeping control of New Vegas and expanding his influence. First, the Courier must retrieve the platinum chip from Benny. Once the chip is returned to Mr. House, he is able to upgrade his security robots which will aid in keeping the peace as well as overthrow the Legion and the NCR ("Fallout New Vegas Walkthrough" s.a.:s.p.). The courier must also enlist the help of several smaller factions in order to build an army to take part in the Battle for Hoover Dam. Once all preparations are made, the Courier will have the opportunity to treat with both the Legion Commander and General Oliver of the NCR. At these moments, the Courier can decide whether to kill the leader or convince both parties to surrender. Reporting the outcome of these interactions to Mr. House will end the game. A good Courier supporting Mr. House will result in a peace at the New Vegas Strip which becomes stable and secure due to the Courier's kind-heartedness. If the Courier has evil Karma, Mr. House remains in charge of the Strip and the inhabitants are kept under his complete control.

The final way of completing the main quest is for the Courier to remain independent. This is done with the aid of Yes Man, the robot who up until this point had been helping Benny. The Courier must again regain possession of the platinum chip from Benny and use it to disable or kill Mr. House. The Courier is then free to seize control of House's security robots and must use the chip to upgrade them. Yes Man also informs the Courier of all the other smaller factions within the New Vegas region and encourages the Courier to find allies amongst them. After expanding Yes Man's broadcasting range, which gains him remote access to the Hoover Dam control room, he is able to take control of the Dam and remove it from NCR power. When confronting the leaders of the two main factions, the Courier must either eliminate them or convince them to surrender ("Fallout New Vegas Walkthrough" s.a.:s.p.). Returning to Yes Man will end the game. Choosing to be independent results in neither the NCR nor the Legion taking control of the Strip. With Mr. House removed from power, New Vegas becomes free and independent. A good Courier is described as freeing the Strip from Mr. House's tyranny while an evil Courier "ensured the fall of Mr. House" (Obsidian Entertainment, 2010).

The next section provides a brief overview of how the karma and reputation mechanics affect gameplay followed by a discussion on the ethico-moral concepts raised within the game.

### ***3.4.2. Fallout New Vegas Gameplay***

As stated in the overview section above, the game rarely awards karma points for completing quests. Rather, karma is gained through 'everyday actions' in the game and through the general behaviour of the player-character within the game world. Furthermore, karma is informed to some degree by which factions the player-character supports through its link with the reputation mechanic. The general experience of the game is not greatly affected by changes in karma, however, because karma is linked to the reputation mechanic which informs the Courier's relationship with specific communities, it can indirectly have an effect on certain aspects of gameplay. This includes factors such as some companions leaving after the Courier's karma decreases too much, some shops refusing to trade with evil characters, being hunted by karmic-opposite factions (e.g. an evil Courier will be attacked by good factions), as well as receiving gifts from factions who approve of the Courier's actions.

With regards to main quest choices, if the Courier chooses to aid the NCR many of the actions the Courier has to perform will cause infamy to be gained with the Legion. This means that while travelling throughout the wasteland, it is highly likely that the Courier may be randomly attacked by Legion members. Furthermore, entering any Legion controlled settlements will result in hostilities. This works in converse when aiding Caesar's Legion, with NCR soldiers reacting with force against the Courier.

Interestingly enough, killing or disabling Mr. House is one of the few quests which does have a karmic consequence ("Fallout New Vegas Walkthrough" s.a.:s.p.). For both actions the Courier will earn negative karma, reducing their overall moral alignment. This might be due to the fact that Mr. House is considered the neutral option, standing between the NCR and the Legion.

Choosing to side with either Mr. House or Yes Man will result in the gain of infamy for some of the smaller factions as well as the NCR and the Legion. This is due to the fact that many of these quests are related to causing harm to these factions. However, because Mr. House and Yes Man are not officially recognised by the game as factions (and are considered independent) there is no increase in fame when completing quests for them.

The next section discusses *Fallout NV* with regards to ethico-moral dilemmas and specifically whether the game promotes ethical egoism.

### **3.4.3. *Fallout New Vegas Ethico-Moral Discussion***

*Fallout NV* presents the gamer with an extremely gray moral code. Despite the fact that gamers can earn karma for their general behaviour in-game, the overarching decisions that must be made along the main quest do not have clear good or evil immediate consequences. It is only at the end of the game where the impact of all the choices made in the main quest becomes clear and how these actions affect some of the characters the Courier met in the wasteland. This obscure treatment of the game's ethico-moral mechanic, which is never clearly revealed, means that gamers have to apply their own moral reasoning to the game and must decide which main faction to side with based on this reasoning.

The game raises several ethico-moral dilemmas surrounding factors such as slavery, oppression, human rights, the fight for survival, murder, drug abuse, and many more. How the player interacts with these becomes a very personal experience due to the fact that gamers are not always given feedback as to whether an action is good or evil. Even when gamers are rewarded for certain good or evil behaviours, these are usually within the context of the reputation mechanic and as such only pertain to one faction.

From a narrative point of view, the game's main storyline does not appear to promote ethical egoism. Very little is known about the Courier, he / she is a *tabula rasa* at the beginning of the game with no narrative context which can provide clues as to how he / she would act. Progressing through the story does not reveal any more information about the Courier, but instead provides information about the game world and its conflicts. This makes the game's morality exceedingly nuanced. As a gamer and game studies scholar, Marcus Schulzke (2009:s.p.) explains:

We only have limited information from which to make moral choices. This information is often woefully inadequate and stops us from making a truly rational calculation. Good and evil are not chosen based on a careful analysis of all the fact [sic] and it is rare that we can even see that one side is good and the other bad at the moment of action.

Therefore, making decisions in *Fallout NV* is at the discretion of the player who must immerse themselves in the game world in order to apply their own moral reasoning within the game context.

Ludologically, the game does not reward specific kinds of moral choices with enough frequency to be able to pinpoint a precise moral code. Schulzke (2009) believes that the *Fallout* series affords players the opportunity to make "genuine moral choices. Moral dilemmas are not presented for passive contemplation - they are an integral part of gameplay" (Schulzke 2009:s.p.). However, due to the complex morality mechanic these moral dilemmas can often be resolved in various ways and without affecting the character's overall karma.

Schulzke also points out that non-player characters "have their own moral preferences. Some are good, some neutral and some evil. Each responds to the player in a way befitting their personality" (Schulzke 2009:s.p.). This is where the reputation mechanic meets the morality mechanic. Behaviour such as stealing from a specific faction or killing one of their members causes a reduced karma level and is considered evil. Killing Fiends or ghouls, both considered a nuisance in the wasteland, will increase karma and as such is considered good. However, these behaviours do not relate to the main story progression and take place during freeplay.

*Fallout NV* employs a complex morality mechanic which challenges players because what is right and what is wrong in any given situation is not always clear. As Schulzke points out, the "*Fallout* series is among the video games best suited for ethical instruction because it is set in an open world that grants the player freedom of action - including the freedom to be moral or immoral" (Schulzke 2009:s.p.). The combination of morality and reputation in *Fallout NV* differentiates it from most other RPGs where "[t]here is either no element of moral reasoning or it is presented in a shallow form of needing to avoid punishment..." which is "markedly different from the *Fallout* world in which every action is judged and becomes part of a permanent reputation" (Schulzke 2009:s.p.). Schulzke further argues that 'evil' player-characters are "making the same calculations as the consistently good player, going through the same judgments of the consequences of the action, and just choosing to act in a way that will lose karma" (Schulzke 2009:s.p.). In other words, no matter which choices gamers make, they will be exposed to the same ethico-moral concepts whether they play 'good' or 'evil'. Providing players with choice "adds to the enjoyment of play... It gives games more depth and creates multiple routes through the story for better replayability and a customized experience" (Schulzke 2009:s.p.). Employing a more complex morality mechanic, such as in *Fallout NV*, allows for a morally nuanced gameplay experience which is not the case in binary morality mechanics employing the traditional view of good vs evil which is found in most games. This

is a positive step for game design within the RPG genre as it provides a more life-like gaming experience which encourages gamers to make decisions more naturally, i.e. using their own moral reasoning within the game world.

This chapter has aimed at providing analyses of *Mass Effect*, *Fable III* and *Fallout New Vegas* through the hybrid approach of discussing both the narrative and gameplay. Key ethico-moral decisions within the games were highlighted and discussed with regard to the promotion of ethical egoism. Chapter 4 concludes the discussion and provides suggestions for further study.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### 4.1. Conclusion

From the above analyses, it can be argued that the narratives of both *Mass Effect* and *Fable III* frame the main character in such a way that the games promote an altruistic view of the game world. However, due to the incorporation of the morality mechanic, players have the option to play as an ethical egoist by choosing the 'evil' path. From a ludological perspective, both paths are rewarded in similar ways and as such it can then be argued that, through operant conditioning, players are encouraged to play in whichever manner is more pleasing. In the case of *Fable III*, choosing to play as a good, altruistic Hero results in a much harder game. According to Suits' (1978) definition of the term game discussed in Chapter 1, it can be argued that playing good in *Fable III* provides a satisfying gaming experience due to the fact that it is more challenging than choosing to play as an evil Hero. Similarly, *Mass Effect* is often slightly more challenging when playing as a paragon. Paragons often have additional restrictions (contingencies of success) placed upon them that Renegades could choose to ignore (e.g. dealing with the colonists at Zhu's Hope). As with *Fable III*, *Mass Effect's* paragon storyline can be considered a good quality game. However, due to narrative changes and gameplay only being affected slightly by choosing to play Renegade, this study would argue that both the paragon and renegade playthroughs would provide a satisfying gaming experience, as defined by Suits (1978). *Fallout New Vegas*, with its complex morality mechanic and a storyline that does not provide context to the main character, provides the player with the freedom to choose their own moral code, to some degree. *Fallout NV* encourages players to explore the game world and the choices provided by gameplay and the narrative through the gamer's personal playstyle and moral code. Through interactions with the various factions in *Fallout NV*, the gamer learns which actions are acceptable and which are not to each specific group. Based on the ethico-moral knowledge gained through interactions within the game, the gamer must decide which faction should rule New Vegas.

*Mass Effect* and *Fable III* treat morality in a binary way: paragon vs renegade and good vs evil. Whilst this is prevalent in many RPGs, some employ more subtle means to raise questions of right and wrong and do not offer choices to the player. One such game is *The Last of Us* (Sony Computer Entertainment, 2013) which is set during a zombie outbreak. Joel, a smuggler, must escort a young girl named Ellie to the Fireflies, a research group attempting to cure the pandemic. Joel recently lost his daughter and forms a strong attachment to Ellie.

The two travel together, surviving several attacks by both zombies and humans, to Saint Mary's Hospital where they find the Fireflies. Joel learns that they intend to dissect Ellie's brain in order to ascertain why she alone is immune to the infection, a surgery which would kill her. Outraged by this, Joel kills a multitude of people in order to save Ellie's life and in so doing endangers the fate of humanity. The gamer, however, has no choice in their character's behaviour and can merely watch as the two characters continue their attempt to survive the pandemic. *The Last of Us* also raises the question of sacrificing one for the sake of many, as did *Fable III*, but here the gamer has no choice as it is made for them by the narrative. Furthermore, the narrative gives the impression that perhaps humanity is not worth saving. Morality is explored through the narrative and has no impact on gameplay as gamers do not have to make ethico-moral decisions in the game. Another example of a game that investigates morality without measurable morality points is *BioShock* (2K Games, 2007). The game is set in an underwater city called Rapture which was intended as an isolated utopia until the discovery of ADAM, a type of genetic material which grants the user superhuman powers. The player-character's objective is to escape Rapture and the player must decide whether to harvest ADAM from children, called Little Sisters, or whether to save them. Killing Little Sisters provides a large amount of ADAM while rescuing them only yields a small amount. The player's choice has an effect on the ending of the game but no moral points are awarded for either choice. *BioShock* asks the gamer the question: "Are you willing to end the lives of these children for your own gain, or be the hero and risk your own progression?" (Russel 2014:s.p.). Both these games raise ethico-moral principles but do not directly reward the gamer for making moral judgements by awarding morality points, which can condition behaviour, based on the game's view of morality.

Despite the prevalence of several moral concepts and the apparent favouring of altruism through narrative, this study would argue that, ultimately, gamers are ethical egoists during gameplay. Gameplay is the interaction between a player and a video game's rules, objects and activities, the ultimate goal of which is to complete the game in a successful manner (Liestol 2004 cited in Dovey & Kennedy 2006). Due to this fact, gamers will always choose to play a game in such a way as to promote their own self-interest within the game space to ensure victory. As ethical egoists, gamers choose to engage with the game's moral code as per 2) of Section 2.2.4. in order to take part in gameplay for as long as this remains beneficial (enjoyable). Gamers may choose to remove themselves from this secondary system when this benefit of enjoyment no longer exists, as per 3). Furthermore, as defined by point 4), gamers

are not obligated to satisfy the needs of others within this system, but may choose to do so under the premises of 1) and 2). In other words, gamers may choose to act altruistically within the narrative due to this behaviour being beneficial to the player-character and as such the secondary moral behaviour of altruism is informed by the primary ethical egoistic decision to engage in such behaviour. Point 5) is particularly significant during gameplay due to the fact that, with most role-playing games, the player-character is attempting to survive and as such must employ rational thinking. *Fallout NV* does this particularly well as this game has a hardcore setting in which players must not only survive battles but also thirst, starvation and sleep deprivation, forcing the player to think rationally about travelling through the game world. As understood under point 6), ethical egoists must make allowance for the fact that others may also be acting in self-interest. When entering into gameplay, players are aware of the fact that some conflicts will arise due to common interests between the player-character and non-player characters within the game. It is clear then, that according to the definition of ethical egoism as stated under Section 2.2.4., gamers subscribe to ethical egoism when engaged in gameplay.

However, according to Sicart (2009a), gamers are moral agents and are capable of moral reasoning and critical reflection regarding ethico-moral ideals encountered during gameplay. Gamers develop *ludic phronesis*, practical wisdom, through moral reasoning in gameplay, which can be transferred to real world situations. In other words, video games can provide a safe medium for gamers to practice moral reasoning, without having real world consequence (Sicart 2009a, Aardse 2014). Engagement with ethical egoism through gameplay does not necessarily mean that this ethico-moral code will be adopted by gamers in real life. Gameplay inherently consists of traditionally masculine ideals, such as competition and aggression, which, combined with ethical egoism (especially successful egoism during gameplay) can be damaging if not kept in check. Therefore, it is important for gamers to engage in moral management (Klimmt et al. 2008) in order to distinguish between the moral code of a virtual environment and real world situations, where right and wrong may be very different. Sicart (2009a) argues that moral reasoning should occur both within and outside of the game at all times, in order to put game morality into real world perspective. Being able to gain moral practical wisdom through gameplay but simultaneously maintaining a strict divide between video game and reality is imperative.

#### ***4.2. Suggestions for Further Research***

Due to the relatively recent emergence of video games studies, further research of any scope is imperative. With specific regard to morality, a further study could include research into gamer behaviour regarding moral choices in games. Analyses including how gamers make moral decisions and whether they choose the easiest option or more challenging ones would provide interesting insight into gamers' thought processes. Furthermore, it would be beneficial to analyse to what degree gamers role-play, i.e. whether they make choices based on how they think their character would act. Through conducting interviews and focus groups with gamers some understanding may be gained into how moral reasoning affects their personal playstyle.

A quantitative study of gamer behaviour could employ the statistics feedback system prevalent in most games to determine which types of actions are performed more frequently. For example, how many crimes the player-character committed or how many 'good' actions were completed. Furthermore, this study could include a quantitative indication of which enemies, human or non-human, are killed more frequently during gameplay and whether this is due to narrative constraints or the gamer's choice.

Further studies with regards to ethical egoism could include a comparison between egoism and altruism and whether female gamers respond differently to male gamers to these two ethico-moral codes. As mentioned, gameplay calls on predominantly masculine actions and traditions of behaviour. How female gamers react to these necessities may be of value in terms of gender approaches to video games.

The prevalence of violence in video games is one of the most discussed subjects in both the media and game studies. Most games employ a combat system and eliminating targets has almost become synonymous with playing games. Due to the predominance of studying violent video games, a study which researched non-violent games would be beneficial to the field of game studies. Games which allow the player to explore the game world freely, similarly to open-world RPGs, but without requiring the player to kill enemies should be considered for such a study. *Journey* (Thatgamecompany, 2012) is one such game in which the player must explore a desert-like world to reach a mountain. Characters can only perform three actions, walk, fly and speak and must use these to navigate different levels and solve

puzzles along the way. This would provide an interesting new angle to researching gamer behaviour in which violence does not form part of the necessary gameplay.



Figure 7: Gameplay screenshot of Journey (Thatgamecompany, 2012).

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