War Ethics: A Framework for Analyzing Videogames

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ABSTRACT

While much has been done exploring how ethics and videogames can overlap in interesting ways, there is little work examining the philosophy of war and its relation to videogames. This seems unusual since videogames have a long tradition of engaging with war as its subject matter. We provide a framework for analyzing and articulating ethical issues and concerns in videogames that feature representations of war. This framework is based in traditional war ethics, more specifically the notion of the "just war" and considers the ethical concerns that include when engaging in a war is morally justified (jus ad bellum), how to wage a war ethically (jus in bello) and the ethical responsibilities of the aftermath of a war (jus post bellum). Our framework consists of five lenses consisting of the perspective offered to players, the scale and scope of war represented, the centrality of war to the game experience, the type of military that appear in the game, and the authenticity of a game's representation. For each lens we also provide a list of questions that can be used to examine the subtleties and nuances of how war is represented in the game that hopefully lead to deeper and more insightful analyses. We conclude with thoughts on how this approach could be productive as well as outline some additional areas worth considering for future work.

Keywords

wargames, game analysis, war, war ethics, ethics, representation, jus ad bellum, jus in bello, jus post bellum

INTRODUCTION

In 2012 the Red Cross published an attention-grabbing article arguing that videogames did a poor job representing the dilemmas that soldiers and combatants face on real, rather than virtual, battlefields (Clarke, Rouffaer, and Sénéchaud 2012). Their argument was that because International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and International Human Rights Law (IHRL) were not present in videogames about war, players were getting a misleading representation of armed conflict. This article, together with Castillo's (2009) analysis of the representation (or lack) of IHL and IHRL in 19 videogame titles, underscores what is arguably an unexplored area in videogames: the intersection of ethics, war, and videogames.

While much has been done exploring how ethics and videogames can overlap in interesting ways (e.g. Sicart 2009; Zagal 2009; Schrier and Gibson 2010; Young 2013), there is little work examining the philosophy of war and its relation to videogames. This seems unusual since videogames have a long tradition of engaging with war as its subject

matter. Most work that could be considered related to war has focused on questions regarding violence and media effects (see Ferguson 2010 for an overview) such as: Does playing a violent first-person shooter game propel adolescent teens towards real-world violence? Similarly, scholars have also asked if (or how) videogames with military elements might glorify the military (e.g. Schulzke 2013; Demers 2014). As Clarke and colleagues (2012) ask in their Red Cross report, can misleading representations of war in videogames negatively influence how combatants behave in real world armed conflicts? Does re-enacting unethical wartime behavior in a videogame lead to similar behavior on a field of battle?

Thinking about the ethical issues for players of games that represent or enact war is complicated for two reasons. First, the ethics of war (or military ethics) is an area of philosophical inquiry that is perhaps less familiar to the average player. While most people might be familiar with some "big picture" concerns (e.g. war crimes are wrong), they may be less familiar with other important issues that are rarely discussed in public or the media (e.g. regulations regarding choice of weaponry or how to deal with prisoners). This can complicate our understanding of how players perceive and make sense of war-like situations they witness and perhaps participate of in videogames. Second, and perhaps more importantly, there is a variety of ways that war is represented and portrayed in videogames and these representations can each carry multiple and different ethical considerations and questions.

In this article we focus our attention on the second issue: what are some of the different ways that war is represented and portrayed in videogames and what implications can these have for the ethical analysis of games (and how they are played). We argue that these perspectives provide a preliminary framework that can be used to guide further analysis of war ethics in the context of videogames. Before we do that, however, it is necessary to lay some groundwork by discussing the ethics of war.

ETHICS OF WAR

There is a long tradition of considering the moral and ethical issues surrounding war and warfare. Historically, pacifism, or the notion that all wars are morally wrong, has long been a minority view in moral philosophy (Farmer 2011). The more commonly held belief is that some wars are morally justified. Thus, questions of ethics of war have primarily emphasized how we can distinguish between those wars that are morally justified and those that are not, rather than whether war is unethical per se.

Most modern perspectives on the ethics of war are based on the notions of "Just War" as initially described by St. Augustine and later expanded by St. Thomas Aquinas (Moseley 2016). Broadly speaking, just war theory holds that a war is just (i.e. moral) if (1) it is declared by a legitimate authority, (2) it is being waged over a just cause, and (3) it is being fought using just means.

The notion of the legitimate authority here refers to a government or a similar public authority (e.g. head of state, ruler, etc.). This limitation restricts the use of force by private persons arguing that such actions would be immoral because any use of force must be sanctioned by public authorities. Thus, a soldier who engages in war is legitimized because he or she is part of an organized chain of command under the control of public authorities (i.e. the state). As an example, the notion of legitimate authority is what separated the pirate from the privateer. While they both often performed the same actions, it was the privateer, who, thanks to a license granted by a sovereign (e.g. a letter

of marque) could morally (and legally) capture and loot ships belonging to enemies of said sovereign.

The moral use of force also requires a just cause. Karl von Clausewitz (1873) noted that any use of force should be directed towards an identifiable political result. This would include things such as changing government policy or altering a form of government. Historically unacceptable causes for war include plunder, genocide, and religious conversion (thus, holy wars are not just wars). The modern standard for *jus ad bellum*, or the right to war, generally only accepts self-defense as a just cause for going to war. So, the characteristics of potential enemies do not provide a just cause for war. Thus, both Aristotle's notion that war can be justified to enslave those who naturally deserve to be slaves (Schlaifer 1936) and John Stuart Mill's explanation that war is justified when it grants the benefits of Western civilization on less advanced peoples (Mill 1859) are not currently accepted as valid. Similarly, anticipation does not provide just cause: attacking simply because one fears they will be attacked is also not considered moral.

A just cause does not necessarily lead to a just war. There are additional considerations that must be taken into account. If just cause can be achieved some other way, war is not morally acceptable (rule of necessity or last resort). Also, if the cause is just but cannot be achieved by war (no chance of victory), then the war is unjust. One of the guiding principles at play here is that the evil resulting from the war should be less than the evil from not having a war at all.

If a war is just, that does not imply it can be fought in any way deemed necessary. There are also moral guidelines for acceptable wartime conduct. *Jus in bello*, or how to fight justly, considers several additional principles. For example, a war should cause no more destruction that is strictly necessary (principle of necessity), the scale of the destruction in the pursuit of an objective should also be proportional to the importance of the objective (principle of proportionality), and military force must be directed at military objectives or targets rather than civilian (principle of discrimination). In modern times these notions have been detailed and encoded in international laws including, but not limited to, international humanitarian law (IHL) and international human rights law (IHRL).

Finally, once a war has concluded, it is important to ensure that the just war leads to a just peace or *jus post bellum*. While the winner of a war should obtain justice for itself, it is not acceptable for that justice to be obtained by violating the rights of others, notably those on the losing side. The overarching principle is that a just peace should vindicate the rights of everyone who was involved in the conflict and that the victor must restore order and sovereignty (self-determination) of the vanquished. (R. E. Williams and Caldwell 2006).

To summarize, the ethics of war focus on the following:

1. Before: The ethics of starting a war (*jus ad bellum*)

2. During: The ethics of fighting a war (*jus in bello*)

3. After: The ethics of the aftermath of a war (*jus post bellum*)

Thus, a just or ethical war, is one in which the ethical obligations of each phase of the war are upheld.

WAR GAMES, WAR IN GAMES, GAMES OF WAR

Having briefly discussed war ethics, or the intersection of ethics and war, we now turn to the intersection of games and war. Specifically, what does the intersection of videogames and war look like for the purposes of potential productive discussions and analyses that include war ethics.

Traditionally, a wargame is a game that simulates or represents a military operation. Wargames, in addition to entertainment, are commonly used as tools for training or education. "The object of any wargame (historical or otherwise) is to enable the player to re-create a specific event and, more important[ly], to be able to explore what might have been if the player decides to do things differently" (Dunnigan 1992, 13). As Dunnigan notes, realism is one of the critical characteristics that defines traditional wargames. However, what does realism mean in this context or how is it often interpreted? Sabin describes the importance of the "underlying mathematical model of reality, that seeks to simulate the terrain of the battle area, the deployment and capabilities of the military forces, and the passage of time during the engagement" (Sabin 2014, 4). So, should an unrealistic traditional wargame not be considered for the purposes of discussing the ethics of wargames?

For the purposes of this article, the traditional definition of "wargame" is too narrow. It excludes most of the games where war is represented but whose focus or emphasis is broader than a specific military operation. It also ignores games where realism or factual accuracy are not the goal as well as games in which war is not the central focus. In this sense, the overlap of war and games transcends traditional genre distinctions; a computer role-playing game can be "about war" as much as a combat-focused first person shooter game (Kline, Dyer-Witheford, and de Peuter 2003, 255–56).

We will consider a "wargame" any game that includes direct or indirect representations of war where "war" is a state or period of open and armed hostility between organized groups. For us, a wargame is a game with war "in" it.

The above is, admittedly, a loose definition. It includes traditional military simulation games that recreate historical battles both modern and ancient, but also modern fictionalized first person shooters such as games in the *Call of Duty* (e.g. Infinity Ward 2009), *Battlefield* (e.g. EA DICE 2013), and *Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six* series (e.g. Ubisoft Montreal 2006). Games that focus on civilians surviving in a warzone and refugee camp, like *This War of Mine* (11 bit studios 2014) and *Darfur is Dying* (mtvU 2006) respectively, also fall under the scope of these criteria. This definition also includes fantastic and science fiction games such as those set in the *Warcraft* (e.g. Blizzard 2004), *Star Wars* (e.g. LucasArts 1997), or *Mass Effect* series/fictional universes (e.g. BioWare 2012). While this may seem odd, we think that, like other media, game creators often use fantasy and science-fiction as a guise under which meaningful issues can be examined and expressed. Given that war is a significant part of human existence, it seems entirely plausible that important questions about war might be examined in fictional contexts no matter how fantastical. When it comes to war we only wish to exclude instances where the term war is used metaphorically; e.g. "war on poverty" or "war on drugs" (Hartmann-Mahmud 2002).

To be clear, we are choosing to emphasize, or focus on, representational aspects. This means that games without such elements are excluded from our definition even though they may be interesting to examine for their systemic, cultural, or historical associations

to war. For example, Sun Tzu's ideas on military strategy are reflected in the ancient Chinese boardgame *Go* (*Weiqi*) and knowledge of the game can be used to understand how China approaches war and diplomacy (Lai 2004). Similarly, if we consider Caillois' fundamental categories of games (Caillois 2006), all games of agôn or competition are war-like because, fundamentally, war is about conflict and opposition. In the sense that games are culture, Lai's observation on chess, poker, boxing, and American football seems almost self-evident: "These games to a large extent reflect and in turn influence American culture, strategic thinking, and the American way of war." (Lai 2004, 26–27) However, these relationships are broader than the scope of this paper. Our aim is merely to provide guidance for examining games with representational elements of war through the lens of war ethics rather examine the rich history and interactions that games have broadly had with war as essential parts of human culture.

Finally, we are not arguing that our definition of wargame is the "correct" or "best" one. Rather, it is a definition we have found useful for the purposes of helping us articulate a framework for analyzing and discussing ethical issues and concerns in games that deal with war. In other contexts, our definition is too broad to be useful (e.g. if only interested in games that attempt to simulate military conflicts) or, as noted earlier, too constraining (e.g. the abstract game of Chess as a wargame).

WAR AND VIDEOGAMES
Our broad definition highlights one of the main challenges in discussing representations of war in games: the breadth of ways that war is simulated, represented, described, and experienced by videogame players is significant. Thus, our contribution to these discussions is the articulation of a framework of perspectives and questions that can be used to articulate and distinguish differing representations of war in games. This framework should thus foreground notions that are particular to certain games allowing for more nuanced analyses.

This framework, as a tool for guiding analysis, discussion and helping articulate both commonalities and differences in representations and inclusions of war in videogames, consists of five questions that will be detailed in the following subsections:

1. PERSPECTIVE
    a. Who is involved and how distant is the player from the experience of war?
2. SCALE and SCOPE
    a. What scale and scope of war is represented in the game?
3. CENTRALITY
    a. How central to the game is war?
4. TYPE OF MILITARY
    a. What type of military is represented?
5. AUTHENTICITY
    a. How authentic are the representations of war?

The above questions should not be assumed as comprehensive. Rather, they highlight those characteristics we feel are most salient. People wishing to analyze a narrower range of wargames might find it necessary to focus on features we are not explicitly addressing.

Perspective Presented to the Player

Perhaps one of the first issues to consider is the perspective on war that the player is presented with while playing a war game. The primary question to consider here is through whose eyes (if any) the player perceives war in the game and how distanced is that perception from the experience of war. There are plenty of war games where the player directly assumes the role of an armed combatant. Oftentimes this is conveyed to the player via a first person camera view where what the player sees on the screen is designed as a representation of what the character being controlled sees with their own eyes. This camera perspective places the player in situations that are up close and personal and often result in play experiences that are spectacular, visceral and dramatic (Bryce and Rutter 2002). There are other games, however, where the player is presented with war scenarios that are removed from the "boots on the ground" seen in other games. This may be, for example, in the case of games where players directly control vehicles such as submarines or tanks. In these cases, the experience is somewhat distanced or disassociated from the close and personal cost of warfare – ships may sink or tanks may be destroyed, but the player doesn't necessarily see the occupants or crew. At a higher level still, the player may face abstract visual representations where individual combatants are subsumed under units that are moved or manipulated around a game space. The player's role here may be that of a commander or chief-of-state who is making decisions for an entire nation rather than an individual combatant or a leader of a small group of soldiers.

So, some key questions to consider in terms of perspective include:

- Through whose eyes (if any) does the player perceive the game?
- How removed is the player's perspective from the experience?
- What does this point of view allow the player to witness and experience?
- What does this point of view obscure or downplay to the player?

Describing the granularity of the player's experience, and what they see on the screen in these terms helps foreground different ethical concerns. For example, from a war ethics perspective a commander's ethical concerns are different than that of the soldier in the ground and a critical analysis should take these into consideration. So, choosing what kinds of weapons to make available to the troops you will command is a different value-laden decision than whether or not, when playing as a soldier, to use certain weapons in a given situation. Brendan Keogh's critical reading of first-person shooter *Spec Ops: The Line* (Yager Development 2012) examines how the use of inhumane weapons (in this case white phosphorous) is depicted in the game, the emotional impact it has on its characters, and ultimately the questions it raises for the player when they use it to attack a camp (Keogh 2012). It's a powerful and effective moment in the game because it is presented from a perspective that is so close to the events: "the real choice the player has is to not play a military shooter that asks you to drop white phosphorous on people" (Keogh 2012). The game, in this sense, is guiding the player towards a specific reaction regarding the unethical use of inhumane weapons on war. However, the player offered this perspective is not really afforded the opportunity to reflect on why the soldiers in this situation even had white phosphorous available to them in the first place. Those questions might be more easily raised and examined in a different game – one in which the player, perhaps in the role of a commander, not only decides where to send their troops but also what equipment they should have available. Choosing to provide or equip soldiers with white phosphorous is a different type of decision than choosing to use it when it is available. We should consider the potential war ethics concerns in a game in a similar

way to how scholars have discussed the responsibilities that different actors have regarding their war time actions (e.g. Crawford 2007; Martinez 2007; Parks 1973): e.g. who is morally (and legally) responsible, and why, for war crimes committed in the field of battle?

Of course, examining the "who" is a broader question than just different levels of the military chain of command. For instance, *This War of Mine* (11 bit studios 2014) is a strategy game where the player controls a group of civilians who live in a war-torn city trying to survive until the end of the war. As a game, it provides players with decisions "in stark contrast to the 'run and gun' mentality of most mainstream war games" and insights into what it means to survive in a warzone as a non-combatant civilian (Ecenbarger 2016). In terms of its perspective on war, *This War of Mine* can be analyzed on at least two levels: it provides a rhetorical perspective that is anti-war (Toma 2015) while also providing a perspective on the kinds of ethical decisions that civilians have to confront due to the realities of living in a warzone; e.g. should I steal from the weak to improve my own chances of survival?

To be clear, we are not arguing that perspectives that are "close" are better or worse than those that may be "further" from war situations. We argue that articulating the perspective presented to the player can help draw attention to ethical issues or concerns that may vary across games (as they might vary across perspectives). So, an analysis of the highly abstract nuclear war game *Defcon* provides plenty of room for certain kinds of war ethics concerns because the abstracted and distanced perspective affords them (Sicart 2008) while simultaneously downplaying other ethical issues.

Scale and Scope

A second area for analysis has to do with the scope and scale of war in the player's experience of the game. By scale we refer to the general idea of size. So, a game that is narrow/small in terms of scale might feature small squad-level war interactions (e.g. 4-5 soldiers infiltrating an enemy base) which would contrast with a game where the player controls a heroic soldier who is part of an army of thousands fighting a similar army. In terms of scope we refer to the breadth of the (in terms of time and place) representations of war. So, a game like those in the *Commandos* series where the player controls a small-group of commandos might feature small-scale military interactions (e.g. Pyro Studios 1998), but the scope could be broader if the player must play through multiple historically-based missions that took place in different locations across several years. The opposite example might be a game in the *Dynasty Warrior* series (e.g. Omega Force 2013) where the player controls a single warrior in an army of thousands (larger scale), but imagine that the entire game represents a single battle that took place (narrow scope).

Some key questions to consider in terms of scale and scope include:

- How would you describe the scope and scale of war as represented in the game?
- What perceptions of the scale and scope of war does the player experience?
- What role does the player have in terms of the scope and scale of the war game experience?
- In what ways do player decisions have an effect on the scope and scale of war?

Most wargames limit their scope to those events that occur during war (*jus in bello*) rather than the situations leading up to war or the aftermath. This can help highlight certain issues as well as make some war ethics concerns more salient to the player's

experience. Does the player know if the war they are participating in is just? Similarly, do they have insights into the ethical concerns that have to be articulated after the war is over? Sicart's (2008) examination of Defcon shows how the game's scale – "[k]illing millions (of units) is a matter of a mouse click in Defcon" – highlights the kinds of war ethics concerns that deal with state-level actors (e.g. state-led genocide) whose decisions have significant impact on large populations of people. We could also argue that *Defcon*'s scope, while technically covering moments before and during war – is curious in its limitations (war is inevitable) and process. Game sessions begin with players at an alert level called DEFCON 5[1] and the levels inevitably decrease after pre-determined time limits have been reached. While playing during DEFCON 5, players are not allowed to engage in hostilities. DEFCON 4 is reached after 6 minutes and allows players to receive information on other player's units within range of their radar installations. Naval and air combat are allowed after 12 minutes of gameplay when DEFCON 3 is reached. It is not until DEFCON 1, after 30 minutes of play, that use of nuclear weapons is permitted. The game's multiplayer design, in terms of its scope, provides an interesting (albeit arbitrary) perspective on the rising tensions and escalation of hostilities that can lead to war. Lead developer Chris Delay describes how this is part of the core experience they desired: "We've seen alliance members shooting overhead friendly planes down because they believed the planes were scouting the area for targets in preparation for a strike. This results in arguments in the chat channels, followed by skirmishes at sea, followed by retaliation, before finally the whole alliance collapses and everyone starts nuking the hell out of each other. It's awesome" (as quoted in G. Williams 2006). While every game of *Defcon* results in an unjust war, the scope of the game provides room for reflection on how (and why) states might decide to start a war in the first place – even when it is a "very difficult [game] to win convincingly, and everybody loses" (Delay as quoted in G. Williams 2006).

In fact, Kempshall (2015, chapter 4) shows in his analysis of different games based on World War I, that the experience of the war ending can vary significantly from the way the end of the war is understood. Our narratives and understanding of WWI are not usually triumphalist – it is viewed as a tragedy – yet many videogames "provide the player with a chance of triumphant victory" (Kempshall 2015, 82). Other games, such as *Valiant Hearts* (Ubisoft Montpellier 2014), present more nuanced endings that engage with the games' small scale, but broader scope (you control a few named protagonists in a variety of scenarios that span the duration of the war) – while the game ends a year before the end of hostilities, "the 'enemy' or opponent in Valiant Hears is neither the Germans, the British nor the French. It is the war itself. […] Whilst Karl [one of the protagonists] and his family survive the conflict the implication is clear; there are many other families like his that will not. The player has neither won nor lost in any traditional sense. They lost by participating in the war in the first place, […] They succeeded by bringing all those who could survive the war out of it at the end" (Kempshall 2015, 93–94).

Centrality of War
How central is war in the game being analyzed? In most games, the practice of war is the whole point – it's the core of the experience of the game. However, this isn't always the case. For some games, war might be a backdrop that sets the context for the player's experiences in the game, that motivate a game's character's, and might even provide a rationale for situations that happen in the game. For example, *Assassin's Creed* (Ubisoft Montreal 2007) is set in the context of the Third Crusade while *Assassin's Creed III* includes the American Revolutionary War as part of its background context (Ubisoft Montreal 2012). In both games war serves as a background context whose events and

characters are sometimes woven into specific game objectives. However, both wars are not a fundamental part of the game's experience in the sense that neither game is primarily "about" the war that is going on around the player character. We would argue that in these games, war is not central to the experience.

Similarly, we can examine the relationship between what the player does, i.e. a game's gameplay, and war. So, a game in which the player's objectives are war-related and are achieved militarily or by use of force (e.g. shoot all enemies until an enemy base is captured), arguably features war in a more central role than a game in which a player harvests flowers while avoiding hostile soldiers who are patrolling the area because there's a war going on.

The peripherality of war to the core experience of the game should not be interpreted as a sign that there are no war-ethical issues deserving of examination. For example, in many games "war" is an event, a milestone of sorts, that happens, is resolved and then players move on. Consider *Sid Meier's Civilization* (*Civ*) where over the course of a game a player might participate in numerous wars spanning thousands of in-game years (Microprose 1992). *Civ* is perhaps one of the few games where the act of going to war is a choice that players get to make and have to deal with the aftermath. So, questions regarding the justifications for war can be examined more closely together with the post-bellum circumstances. As another example, consider Apperley's analysis of *Europa Universalis II* (Paradox 2001). The game's focus is "the expansion of the European powers to dominate trade and create colonies around the globe. While technology, budgeting, diplomacy and military concerns are all important in the game, they are ancillary to the concern of colonialism" (Apperley 2006). Apperley (2006) points out that Australia is a popular destination for colonization due to "the ease with which the 'natives' may be either exterminated or assimilated". The game, in fact, provides an explicit option "exterminate natives" when troops enter an area with a native population and, for aggressive natives. While war is not a central aspect of this game, there are undoubtedly war-ethical issues to consider, i.e. the relationship between the victors (colonizers) and the losers (the colonized) (Apperley 2006).

Examining the centrality of war in a game can also serve to identify potential ideological biases as illustrated by things that are implied, assumed, or taken for granted. For instance *Civilization II* includes representations of different government types each providing different benefits and drawbacks: "Despotism and Fundamentalism, have penalties associated with technological development, but bonuses to military production." (Caldwell 2004). More generally, we can examine the ways that war, and its representations, permeate non-war contexts or situations, and the ethical ramifications of that.

So, some key questions to consider in terms of the centrality of war:

- In what ways are war-related objectives integrated into the game?
- Do the player's decisions play a role in the outcome of the war?
- How would the game change is there was no war in the game?
- What is the relationship between the game's gameplay and war?

Type of Military

Most wargames involve representations of some sort of military. Players might play the role of generals or soldiers or control regular military equipment and materiel: warships, tanks, and so on. However there are games that involve other kinds of armed forces that fall out of the standard definitions of regular military. These might include irregular military (e.g. militias, resistance fighters, paramilitary groups) such as in *Homefront* (Kaos Studios 2011) and *Freedom Fighters* (IO Interactive 2003) where the player controls resistance/insurgent fighters working to liberate their home country. Another example are games featuring law enforcement or security forces such as games in the *Counterstrike* (e.g. Hidden Path Entertainment 2012) and *Rainbow Six* series (e.g. Ubisoft Montreal 2006) where the player plays the role of militarized law enforcement (and armed terrorists). We should also consider military personnel in irregular or extra-official roles such as covert operatives in games such as those in the *Black Ops* and *Splinter Cell* series (e.g. Treyarch 2012; Ubisoft Toronto 2013).

From a war ethics perspectives, different kinds of military (or militarized) units often have different ethical concerns. For example, there is discussion as to the relationship that substate actors, that is armed forces that are not acting on behalf of a government or state such as a paramilitary group, have (or should have) with the traditional notion of the just war (Heinze and Steele 2009). Or, the fact that members of law enforcement are subject to ethical considerations that can be in tension with those faced by a regular military (Brown 2011). In the case of covert operations the moral concerns can also be more complicated (Perry 2009), such as the relation they might have with the state actors that are abetting those activities (Linn 2005). In fact, the notion that traditional law enforcement (i.e. police) are becoming increasingly militarized in the United States has also been the subject of ethical debate and concerns (Jefferis 2012) and we can wonder on the relationship that videogames featuring militarized law enforcement have with those discussions.

So, some key questions to consider in terms of the type of military:

- What kind of military does the player control or engage with?
- Is the player part of a chain of command and how does it operate?
- What sense does the player have of the military structures they are engaged with?

Realism/Authenticity

Many wargames recreate and simulate military interventions, current, recent, and historical. In this sense, most wargames aspire to a certain level of verisimilitude and accuracy. However, this desire for authenticity is limited in a variety of ways even as it is extolled in others. For example, "the marketing campaigns for post-9/11 military shooters are overwhelmingly concerned with selling only select elements of military realisticness: sophisticated enemy artificial intelligence, military weapons and vehicles that function and look like the real thing, and combat that unfolds in authentic theaters of war, both historic and those ''ripped from today's headlines'' (Payne 2012). As we noted earlier, there are many aspects often absent from these kinds of games – references to international humanitarian law (Castillo 2009) as well as elements that are not part of the simulation aspects of most wargames (e.g. soldiers eating and sleeping).

Schulzke (2014) warns us to be careful of claims of realism because they can mislead audiences in three ways: simulations of real events inevitably result in changes to

important details, "simulated events are embedded in narratives that help to construct those events and their political implications", and events are usually presented in a way that creates perspectival bias since they are only shown from one side of a conflict. For example, Crogan (2003) describes how Microsoft's *Combat Flight Simulator 2* campaign allows players to participate in historical WWII air battles, but they do so from the perspective of a fictional pilot who narrates his experiences via an illustrated journal.

There are other ways to think about realism. Galloway argues that "it is important to make a distinction between games that are modeled around real events and ones that actually claim to be an extension of real-life struggle (via virtual training sessions or politically utopian fantasies)" (Galloway 2006, 78). He discusses *America's Army* (United States Army 2002), a game developed by the US Army as a recruiting tool. While the game's goal, designed to model the experience of the American army, is of mimetic realism, it can also position its authenticity via its material authors: no other US military wargame can claim to have been made by the very military organization represented in the game (Galloway 2006). For most other games, it is common for their developers and publishers to hire former military personnel as consultants and advisors (Payne 2012). More recently, we have also seen game companies hire historians and historical experts to assist in the design of their games (e.g. Seif El-Nasr et al. 2008).

For more nuanced analyses of wargames, however, it becomes important to understand the aspects of realism a game may have as well as those it doesn't. What things have been included and which have been excluded? Are there certain ethical concerns that arise from those inclusions and exclusions? For instance, a game may not feature civilians – thus making it impossible for certain war atrocities to be committed in the game. How would this game be different from one where players can commit atrocities because there are civilians? Similarly, as noted in our earlier discussion of Keogh's analysis of *Spec Ops: The Line* (Keogh 2012), the game effectively forces the player to use white phosphorous because there is no other way to progress in the game. As such, the player's choice is whether or not to play the game, rather than if they should use that weapon. From a war ethics perspective, the inclusion and exclusion of certain elements of aspects can just as easily raise concerns as they can hide them.

What context should the game be considered in, such that certain moral issues are made more salient? Is the game historical or speculative? Does the game have a rhetorical goal that needs to be considered? For example, while ostensibly a militaristic first-person shooter, *Spec Ops: The Line* is more significant as a critique of the military (Payne 2014).

Going back to *America's Army*, there is an additional way it can claim to be authentic: it represents a particular social ideology. Galloway (2006) argues that this aspect of its realism is particularly evident when the game is compared to similar first-person shooters developed with opposite worldviews. For example, *Special Force* (Hezbollah 2003) has players assume the role of a warrior fighting against Israeli occupation and in *Under Ash* (Dar al-Fikr 2001) players control a Palestinian man during intifada. This comparison allows us to see all three games as propaganda – a form of discourse that is biased and being used to promote a political cause. As such, we can examine the ways that the games' procedural rhetoric might raise ethical questions.

So, some key questions to consider in terms of the games' realism and authenticity:

- What aspects of the game are its creators trying to establish as realistic?

- In what ways is that realism/authenticity supported (or not)?
- How is the player made aware of the games' purported realism or authenticity?
- What issues are made salient due to the games' realism or lack thereof?

Of course, establishing the "realism" or lack thereof of a game is a futile task due to the inherently subjectivity of the question: is this game realistic? However, the purpose of these questions is to provide a lens for distinguishing those aspects that may strive for authenticity from those that don't as well as for highlighting that attempts at realism can fail to live up to those expectations for a variety of reasons.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This work began as a response to the concerns raised regarding the fair critique that videogames poorly represented many of the moral issues faced by real-life soldiers on battlefields around the world (Castillo 2009; Clarke, Rouffaer, and Sénéchaud 2012). While the concerns raised were fair, the analysis seemed problematic because many of the games selected seemed fundamentally different from each other and similarly, there were plenty of other games for which their criticism could also be applied. Is it perhaps more worrisome that the ideas behind international humanitarian law are not also present in war games with science fiction themes? Fundamentally, we felt there was a need to better articulate the different ways that war was presented and a part of videogames such that these concerns could be better examined. To expand on Castillo and Clarke and colleagues' work, for example, we might want to examine whether many of the moral issues faced by real-life commanders on battlefields around the world are represented in videogames. Or how about the moral issues faced by civilians in battlefields? Answering questions such as these, low-hanging fruit to be sure, requires more nuanced discussions of those elements that are salient in their designs and representations such that meaningful analyses can be performed. This framework hopefully provides help towards that end. Also, that is also not to say that meaningful analyses of wargames have not been already been done. Far from it, as many of the referenced examples in this articles demonstrate.

The framework we have presented, consisting of examining wargames through the lens of the PERSPECTIVE the offer players, the SCALE and SCOPE of war represented, the CENTRALITY of war to the game experience, the TYPE OF MILITARY that appear in the game, and the AUTHENTICITY of a game's representations is but a first step. There are arguably other important factors that could be considered significant when analyzing the ethical issues in wargames. For example, the context in which a wargame is produced and the relationship between the military entertainment complex and our society and culture. Similarly, we might wonder about ethical issues surrounding the different modes of consumption and play of wargames as well as their marketing. How are different wargames sold, to whom, and for what reasons?

There is, however, another perspective that should also be considered: is it even appropriate to use philosophy of war and war ethics more broadly as a lens for examining games that represent aspects of war? Wargames are, obviously, not war and it would be disingenuous to propose that playing a game about war could be considered as equivalent to fighting in a war along some significant experiential dimension. Or perhaps not. While wargames are not war, there is a long history of their use to learn about and practice war (e.g. Von Hilgers 2012; Sabin 2014), so it seems reasonable to ask ourselves if we cannot also borrow from philosophy and war ethics to examine these cultural artifacts we call

wargames. While wargames are not war, an ethics of wargames would not be the same as an ethics of war. However, we hope that this framework provides a productive initial approach for deeper, richer, and more meaningful discussions surrounding the ethical issues in wargames that is also informed by the extensive thought and work in philosophy and war ethics more specifically.

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ENDNOTES

[1] *Defcon*'s game's alert levels are modelled on the homonymously named system used by US military forces to establish different levels of readiness for military intervention/response. The system's name stands for Defense Condition and establishes five levels of alert with the lowest alert status (DEFCON 5) used in normal peacetime (Sagan 1985).

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