Discuss whether you believe that the use of loot boxes purchasable by microtransactions is ethical.

Kantianism

Kantianism states that if something is moral it must be expressed as a universal law while still being logical. So what would the universal law be for loot boxes, the basic one would be all loot boxes in game that are purchased using real money is ethical. What would this lead to? Since we assume everyone acts ethically in this scenario we could assume that all game that could have loot boxes will have loot boxes. What would be those consequences?

Admittedly those consequences are very hard to imagine. It is not a simple action and thus it is not immediately obvious what the consequences would be. One consequence that is easier to determine is that since all games that can possibly have loot boxes do and loot boxes are a something that can be put in lots of different game; people that do not like loot boxes would find it very difficult to find games to play that don’t have them. Other consequences would be more speculative in nature because these things are hard to predict.

One thing that could happen is lots of games could rely on the income from these loot boxes. This could lead to more games being developed to support the implementation of loot boxes instead of different ways to fund games. Which would cause a cycle of more money being made from loot boxes and less game not having them, leaving players that don’t enjoy loot boxes having nothing to play.

Apply loot boxes to everything in life.

Since loot boxes are ethical you can also

Talk about the logic of the universal statement loot boxes should be used in games.

If it is morally OK to have loot boxes in game we assume all games will have paid loot boxes in them where possible. What would this cause?

That most games would be funded through the purchasing of loot boxes. Or at least some of their funding would be from this source.

Utilitarianism

As usual how should we calculate happiness or utility when considering the ethic of rule utilitarianism is the most difficult part. Because loot boxes generate a lot of money “quote about how much the make” now does this money increase the utility by enough to off set the harm they do?

It was said that “About 48% of the participants who bought loot boxes said that loot boxes increased their gaming experience, while 18% said loot boxes decreased their experience” . ( <https://www.greo.ca/Modules/EvidenceCentre/files/Li%20et%20al%20(2019)%20The%20relationship%20of%20loot%20box%20purchases_Final.pdf> )This would suggest that loot boxes increase the overall happiness of the people that use them. But of course this is not the whole story. “In one survey that allowed for open-ended answers, only 16% of purchasers reported opening loot boxes for the fun, excitement and thrills of opening the box itself”( <https://reason.org/wp-content/uploads/video-game-loot-boxes-moral-panic.pdf> ) All the rest of the people that bought loot boxes could have had fun without the loot boxes part, if the rewards were distributed differently even if they were paid rewards.

So currently loot boxes add utils to about 16% of people and loose utils on 18% how much of each is impossible for me to say, but overall they don’t seems to add or hurt much. So lets look from another perspective. Money the nice tangible thing that we can evaluate. A lot of people spend money on loot boxes. The question is does this money changing hands help or hurt? Well, it funds people making games and games give a lot of happiness to a lot of people so I would argue that if it helps make more games I think it adds utils to society.

This bring the next very complex point that will need assumptions, if loot boxes let game companies make more money does that increase utils? The assumption, happiness or utils goes down per dollar the more money you have, so giving lots of money to a single person is less effective happiness wise than splitting that same money to multiple parties. First situation, small companies or just single people making games and the game doesn’t make much money from loot boxes. Does the increase in money for the developer increase or decrease overall utils? I would say it is a net zero some people lost money some gain money, not much difference in utils. Second situation a private company but it is quiet large. In this scenario it really makes a difference how the money gets distributed. The more the money is split evenly the more net zero the change from money gained through loot boxes is net zero. The last scenario is a public company, a public company need to make money for it’s share holders, this make the money gained from loot boxes automatically be given, after paying employees, to people that can afford to buy shares. Since someone who can afford to buy shares are generally better off than a person playing a game I would say this is a net negative in utils.

To contradict my previous sentence, I think loot boxes don’t help fund games, games have been making money for as long as people have been making them, and game developers have not been making more money since the introduction of loot boxes. Game companies might be making more money but the people that work there aren’t “some stat

Calculations, try to find happiness of people that play game with loot boxes.

There has been some quantitative work to date to investigate more complex motivations

for loot box engagement. In one survey that allowed for open-ended answers, only 16% of

purchasers reported opening loot boxes for “the fun, excitement and thrills of opening the

box itself.”39 In the study, this was the category used to describe motivations connected to

gambling or addiction, as for example in one player’s confession that opening loot boxes

“scratches my gambling itch.” However, even combined with the answers that were not

related to gambling as such, this category of motivations was only the third most common

one in this sample. Out of the other seven motivation categories reported, most involved

personal or practical reasons like wanting to gain competitive advantages from loot (21.9%)

or wanting to collect all of the prizes (19.2%). Ranked fourth were “cosmetic reasons,” at

15.3%. These results are exactly what we should expect given that these goals can often

only be accomplished by finding unique loot in a loot box. At the same time, 10.7% of

respondents reported buying loot boxes as a way to support the developers of free-to-play

*38 See, for instance, A. Drummond, J.D. Sauer, C.J. Ferguson, and L.C. Hall, “The Relationship between*

*Problem Gambling, Excessive Gaming, Psychological Distress and Spending on Loot Boxes in Aotearoa*

*New Zealand, Australia, and the United States—A Cross-National Survey,” PloS ONE 15, 3 (2020),*

*e0230378, pp. 11-12.*

*39 Zendle, Meyer, and Over, “Adolescents and Loot Boxes,” p. 13.*

games.40 And around 9.8% believed loot box rewards provided good value for their money.41

These results cut against the idea that gambling-like features of loot boxes are consciously

the main reason for their popularity. In fact, similar studies suggest that problem gamblers

are bigger spenders on a variety of content, not necessarily on loot boxes specifically.42

40 See also J. Macey and M. Bujić, “The Talk of the Town: Community Perspectives on Loot Boxes,” In Modes

of Esports Engagement in Overwatch, eds. Maria Ruotsalainen, Maria Törhönen, and Veli-Matti Karhulahti.

Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 199-223, pp. 205-207.

41 Zendle, Meyer, and Over, “Adolescents and Loot Boxes,” pp. 13-14.

42 Drummond et al., “The Relationship between Problem Gambling, Excessive Gaming, Psychological

Distress and Spending on Loot Boxes in Aotearoa New Zealand, Australia, and the United States.”

Social Contract Theory

Strangely social contract theory creates a perfect situation to talk about how loot boxes are gambling. Loot boxes are very much like gambling. They have highs and lows like gambling. You pay money to potentially receive a reward like gambling. They create the same feeling in people as gambling. There is a lot of legal arguments about how loot boxes aren’t gambling, some of them hinge on since you are not getting real world value from the loot boxes you are gambling