Ethical Issues Of Video Games And Violence Philosophy Essay

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An Australian TV report on violent games and their impact on the country’s youth quote from a psychologist to claim that the link between violent videogames and youth crime is greater than the connection between smoking and lung cancer: Videogames & Violence Go Together like Cigarettes & Lung Cancer.

The purpose of this assignment is to identify the ethical issues underlying the link between videogames and violence and highlight what makes the problem difficult to solve. Two different theoretical approaches were chosen in order to analyze the ethical issues to derive the answer to the question “What shall I do?” The final stage of the assignment is to reconsider the initial response and highlight similarities and limitations of the two approaches to ethical problems.

Identify the issues

The evidence shows that these games are contributing to a culture of violence, aggressiveness, and anti-social behavior (insert reference). If I chose to use violent computer and video games I become complicit in an industry which is harming our society and if I participate and contribute to this culture am I morally irresponsible?

My initial response

The research I have done regarding possible effects of the violent video games on the children’s behaviors has shaped my opinion regarding the issue identified in the assignment. My initial response to the issue is that “whether to participate in playing violent video games depends on many aspects, one of which is the character of the participants. With the fast development in technology, young adults can easily see violence everywhere, even before they are able to play video games. In my opinion, the fact that young adults play violent video games more reflects how kids are influenced by violence, rather than facilitates or engineers the promotion of violence. Part of the domestic reasons includes the irresponsibility of parents to take care of their children and limit their access to internet. Hence, I think the action to participate in the violent video games is not morally irresponsible.

Analysis of the ethical issue

Two relevant approaches: utilitarianism and Kantianism approaches have been adopted to analyze the ethical issue in this case.

3.1 Utilitarianism

Parties affected

The first step of applying utilitarianism is to identify various parties who will be affected by the actual and foreseeable consequences of the ethical decision. For this case, most of video games operates by the distribution channel; hence the various parties affected are: myself; companies producing video games; suppliers of those companies; retailers of violent video games; shareholders of the whole distribution channel of video games industry, employees of the distribution channel of the industry, all consumers to whom the video games are sold or rented; whole society in which violent video games are played; countries where violent video games producers are based.

Consequences

The second step is to consider another feature of utilitarianism, which is consequentialism, “”as holding that the moral rightness of an action is to be judge by the welfare that results from it.” (Geoffrey, 1993, p.69). Analysis of the case must be based on the evaluation of consequences and not the action itself.

There are two elements of utilitarianism: hedonistic element and impartiality element. Hedonistic element is reflected in choosing the act which would bring the greatest amount of positive consequences and least amount of negative consequences. Impartiality element is reflected in choosing decision which calculates the pleasure and unhappiness of myself equally important as the pleasure and unhappiness of others. (Ermann, & Shauf, 2003).

Two Measurement Methods of consequences

The third step is to decide on which measurement method of consequences to evaluate and measure happiness and unhappiness. There are two methods: qualitative method by John Stuart Mill which suggests that actions are “right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness” (Gary Chan & George TL Sheony, 2009) and quantitative method by Jeremy Bentham which suggests that pleasure and pain are the quantitative and can be expressed quantitatively. For example, intensity of a happiness, its duration, its probability, chance to create further outcome, number of people affected by it (Martineau, 1901).

In this case, because of the difficulty in determining consequences for others, I have made some reasonable assumptions and will use qualitative theory in order to assess the situation.

Consequences of option 1: to participate

Positive consequences include:

To me and other players, we gain personal enjoyment through having the opportunity to buy or rent these games. To employees of that industry, they feel appreciated psychologically and gain benefits financially. To shareholders of those companies, they gain long term profits. To countries where those industries are concentrated, they will benefit from increases in taxes gathered as a consequence of stable and increase profits.

Negative consequences include:

As a result of me being complicit in video game industry with violent content and with consideration of the harmful consequences for everyone concerned, the only negative consequence seems to be violence towards society caused by aggressive behaviors.

Consequences of option 2: not to participate

The second scenario we need to consider is the consequences of not participating in the games industry with violent content.

The positive consequences would be only for society in terms of appreciation for understanding their worries. The only negative consequence would be the whole distribution channel and the industry losing customers who quit playing because of moral principles and changing attitude. There will not be consequences for other parties involved.

Final conclusion

The last step by using utilitarian approach is to sum up all the pleasures and pain identified above. As can be seen, “to participate” causes larger amount of positive consequences and only one negative consequence. “Not to participate” has more negative consequences than positive consequences. In conclusion, the act “to participate” is ethical from a utilitarian point of view.

Kantian

Kant’s theory is a form of Deontological theory, which holds that actions are right or wrong themselves regardless of consequences. Kant’s theories focus on pure reason, good will and freedom or autonomy, the concepts which are detached from the sensory perceptions and hard facts of the world. In the concept of ‘good will”, Kant mentions the concept of “duty”, highlighting that if people act out of duty only then the actions have moral worth and on the contrary, if a person acts out of his pursuit of happiness alone, then the actions will not be considered as ethical. Therefore, according to Kant’s theory, the act of playing violent video does not possess any moral worth because I do not act from duty but my desire to get a pleasure.

Application of Categorical Imperative

Principle of Universality

The principle of universality states that “act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law”. (Kant, 1785 , cited in Ermann & Sahouf, 2003, p.13). According to Pojman (1990) “maxim” is a rule a person has to follow if he/ she want to do particular action. “Universal law” seems to be a test which asks you whether you want this rule be accepted and followed by everyone all the time.

The act is morally acceptable if you wish that everyone would do exactly the same action; On the other hand, the act is considered morally wrong if you do not will for everyone to follow this then you could not exercise this action as well.

In order to apply categorical imperative principle I have created the maxim of my act.

Maxim will be: if I want to buy and play violent video games, I should buy and play them. Applying “Universal low” test to maxim I created: If anyone wants to buy and play violent video games, she/he should buy and play them. Further, if all people would play violent video games then level of violence, aggression, and anti-social behaviour would increase dramatically and finally I would be involved in the created situation and suffer from it. It seems that if I universalized the maxim, it would be chaos and extreme violence. The result would be self explanatory to the lack of moral worth in the act, as no rational agent would like to live in such place and become a victim of the violence and aggression. Hence, maxim fails to get through “universal low” criteria, it would be immoral.

Principle of humanity

Principle of humanity expresses that we should respect ourselves and all human being equally and treat them as ends and not as means. I have not found logical application of this formulation to the case, because buying and playing violent video games by me does not manipulate or use anyone as means and there is nobody to be treated as ends.

Summarizing above mentioned arguments, it is concluded that according to Kant’s theory playing violent video games in this case would be unethical.

Reconsideration of initial response

Before going through the ethical decision making process, my initial response was defensive. The reason is I overlooked some factors and made my decision based on intuition rather than concentrating on the ethical decision making.

By applying these two approaches, there was not a drastic change in my final position regarding the issue but beneficial change for me on how to process and analyze information and approach the ethical issue systematically. For example, by applying Utilitarianism, it enlightened me look at issue wisely by stressing on future consequences rather than actual ones and looking at the whole picture rather than focusing on individuals alone.

Comparison between Utilitarianism and Kantianism

By applying both Utilitarianism and Kantianism, I realized both theories talk about fairness or equity. ” In utilitarian theory it is reflected in principle of impartiality. In Kant’s theory it is mentioned in second formulation of “categorical imperative”.

Limitations to the approaches

However, both Kant’s and Utilitarianism theories have some doubtful aspects. For instance, both theories are contradicting to common sense in some occasions. Specifically, utilitarian approach will be absurd if every party affected by the decision making evenly splits up the world’s population, then it will be unlikely to assess consequences.

In particular, Utilitarian aggregative aspect seems to be absurd if “everyone involves” number is approximately half of the world, because it would be next to impossible to calculate consequences. These aspects did not allow me to accept these theories in whole, therefore change my views dramatically.