Solano Center for Human Flourishing Companion Book

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Contents

What is centrifugal force? What are G forces? If G forces have to do with gravity, then would someone not experience G forces in space since there is no gravity in space? What benefit is there to learning about whether there are g forces in space that one can experience, while experiencing those g-forces in space? Well, apparently, because of centrifugal force, one can experience gravity, and therefore g-forces in space. I recently learned this while also learning how to dogfight in the Space Sim Star Citizen. It seems that while I might never need the skill of dogfighting, knowing whether or not centrifugal force can contribute to one's experience of g-force seems like it might be helpful, provided that I learned it while young enough to become a pilot, or have any hope of working in space aviation.

Although the Star Citizen project is still under development, it is playable and has a large world-wide following and many supporters. Being under development means that there are features that are under developed, missing, being planned,

waiting to be implemented, or just outright broken. Which is which changes with regular frequency.

It is my belief that the unfinished nature of the project is what makes it valuable as a sociological study of online communities. More importantly however, CIG's stated goals for the completion of the game, also make it valuable for how human societies correlate with one another and how pedagogy is central to this. The fact that features of the game are still under development means that much about the game is unpredictable. But all this means is that players keep up a network of communication comprising one another about what works and what doesn't. Although there are playable missions, it is not clear which missions work and which do not. Players share information in real time with one another to try to add some predictability, but like real life, experience plus a network of communication is the best judge. In other words, Star Citizen is a Massive Multiplayer Online that though playable, is currently under development by Cloud Imperium Games, CIG. It is my view that the unfinished and unpredictable nature of Star Citizen's environment makes it most suitable for the following theoretical usage.

Imagination plays a central role in the activities of everyday life. These activities can include pretending to be a princess in a faraway land, to pretending that a foreign threat has infiltrated your national defenses through a critical security gap.

Noticeably, these are two very different uses for imagining, philosophers call the first transcendent and the latter instructive.

> When we think about the imagination, examples like the following naturally come to mind: Fred finds himself, in an idle moment, alone with his thoughts. Feeling unsuccessful and unappreciated, he embarks on a daydream in which he is rich and famous. He calls up images of applauding constituents, visiting dignitaries, a huge mansion, doting women, and fancy cars. But alas, reality eventually reasserts itself and Fred gets back to selling shoes. (Walton 1990, 13)

The former affords us the opportunity to transcend reality while the latter teaches us something about reality. Philosophers argue that this presents us a puzzle, namely how one mental activity can be both transcendent and instructive at the same time? This project exploits the ability of imaginative use to explore and examine philosophically theoretical concepts using the MMO/Space Sim Star Citizen. Star Citizen is a Massive Multiplayer Online that though playable, is currently under development by Cloud Imperium Games, CIG. It is my view that the unfinished and unpredictable nature of Star Citizen's environment makes it most suitable for this theoretical usage.

The best way to understand this puzzle, is to start somewhere close enough to the beginning. Our focus is the imagination. Are starting point is art. Why art you ask? Art stimulates our imagination. What is art you ask?

- paintings
- novels
- stories
- plays
- films

And of course games. Some games or all games? Video Games certainly fit this category. What about board games?

What do each of these have in common? They are all representational. They are representative of something about our experiences. One way to determine whether something fits an "art" category, is to ask ourselves whether it is representative. But what about flow charts as these represent processes? Diagrams can represent data, are diagrams, spreadsheets, charts and graphs art?

One way to delineate between representative art and representative non-art is considering whether one is fictional or not. This once again according to Kendall Walton.

> I will carve out a new category, one we might think of as a principled modification—not just a clarification or refinement—of an ordinary notion of representational art. I will call its members simply "representation," preempting this expression for my own purposes and assigning it an extension both broader and narrower than it is usually understood to possess. . . . The works of "representational art" most likely to spring to mind are, like our initial examples, works of *fiction*—novels, stories, and tales, for instance, among literary works, rather than biographies, histories, and textbooks. (Walton 1990, 3)

The fact that something is fiction means that it is made-up, or make-believe. There are various cognitive faculties that each perform a particular role in mental activity. Belief is a faculty that deals with things that are either true or false. We can either have true beliefs say when we believe that we will be late to the opera. Or false beliefs, say that we are wrong that we will be late to the opera.

Other mental faculties, like imagination, or desire, deal with things that are neither true nor false. We might desire to eat chocolate cake. Unlike belief, desire is not an apprehension of the way the world is, but of the way we want the world to be and imagination is not about how we want the world to be, but how the world might be.

Chapter 1

Equivocation and Imagination

It may not be initially clear, but this is a video about philosophy . . . well that and the Space MMO Star Citizen. What does the one have to do with the other? In my previous video, I briefly expressed the hope that virtual game worlds can be used to teach us about our philosophical intuitions, including moral, ethical, metaphysical pre-judgments. However, many may justifiably think that this is a fools errand. They are going to say that philosophical exploration and analysis requires that we leave the extra curricular behind.

That the virtue of the philosophical method is its semantic precision. Each word choosen for a specific purpose, that only that word could fulfill in that context. This philosophical insight requires that we directly articulate the nature of a given problem, and clearly and concisely explain counter examples, expressing our reasons in a way they can be understood by anyone, and that there force is immediately recognized, it enables a special kind of insight. The narrative arts, movies, fiction, etc., complicate such explications.

Welcome to the next episode. If you recall, previously, which you will see a link for here; we discussed the puzzle of imaginative use, which is a question about how a game's transcendent properties help us to learn something about the real world.

As I alluded to in that video, Star Citizen is an ambitious Space MMO, which makes it something like a communally played game. But you don't have to *play* the game, and that, in my opinion is what makes it special. So what game will we play instead?

When I was younger, there were games like Mario World, The Legend of Zelda, Pong. These games gave you a well defined goal, and specific constraints that

were placed on you in completing a goal. In order to participate, you had to play the game.

You could not harvest the plants in Zelda, or cut down the flag pole at the end of the first level in Mario, build a home in Pong, etc. You could play other games, for instance performing a speed run where the object is not to kill the npcs, but to get to the end as quickly as possible. You could kill only blue targets, or avoid leveling up for as long as possible.

Many games coming out now, attempt to give the player as many choices as possible, many more than these other player defined choices. More importantly, by doing so, we are not running afoul of the aims of the developer. The developer wants us to define our own objectives. So *these* choices aren't just choices about how to progress through the game, they include choices about what progression through game means for the player.

Star Citizen is like this. I might have a goal to fly to Microtech, sit on the bank of a stream and eat lunch. I've experienced watching the sun rise on the surface of a moon and taken note of the difference in build quality for a ship like the 890 Jump and Drake Cutter. Some of my more memorable moments in the game have consisted of reflecting on and admiring the wood paneling embedded seamlessly in the floor running along the edge of the carpet in the former, in contrast to the riveted paneling in the latter. But what do such experiences, experiences of trancendence, have for learning facts about the real world? This is a puzzle, hum.

Philosophy is filled with puzzles, from Meno's paradox, to the problem of other minds and the experience machine to mention a few. The puzzle of imaginative use questions why one mental faculty, namely imagination, can be used for both transcendence, play, absorption, entertainment, and instruction, planning, discovery.

Does a game like Star Citizen offer a better chance at teaching me something since it does afford me more opportunities to engage my imagination than Mario Kart Racing.

In Star Citizen, I could race, say for instance if I decided to participate in one of the yearly races on Daymar, or I could refrain from doing so and lay down in the grass and gaze up at the sky through the leaves of a forest on Micro Tech.

More importantly, how can a mental faculty that seems primarily dedicated to pleasure, experiencing my reflection on a simulated pool of water, and entertainment for instance flying a Terrapin with my friends, and absorption grinding a mining loop so that I can save up for the Origin 325i, uses which are transcendent, also be used for instruction, such as when planning for the future. What can Star Citizen teach me about the real world? The hear and now? The twenty-first century? While I might learn what ship to purchase, or discover what I should take with me when embarking on a mission in Star Citizen, say food and water, do I also learn what car I might purchase when considering a new business

endeavor, or what to take with me when driving cross-country to visit in-laws in the real-world?

In a collection of views about the potential for the instructive uses of the imagination, Amy Kind and Peter Kung in *Knowledge Through Imagination*, argue that the way forward, explaining the instructive use of the imagination, requires being able to recognize when constraints are placed on imagination.[1] When the proper constraints are put into place, then imagination can help us "discover truths about the real world". It is not initially clear what these constraints might be at the outset however, but if this is true, then Star Citizen should have restrictions in place to satisfy the epistemological aims of man-kind.

Fortunately however, I think that their solution does appear to be what Star Citizen is aiming for in its game-play. Namely modeling the real-world where choices are not forced and outcomes are not indefinitely fixed. Initially then, it might be difficult to square this with the solution suggested earlier, that to explain the instructive use of the imagination, we have to first be able to recognize what constraints exist in the game. Only when we understand what is metaphysically impossible, do we begin to understand what is metaphsyically possible and thereby discover through imagination, something true about the real-world.

Continuing on, in future videos, I will explore other attempts at solving the puzzle. These include the equivocation view, three historical treatments including Descartes, Hume, and Kant. Three contemporary views, including Kendall Walton, some Modalist views, and mind-reading, or knowledge or other minds, whichever locution you prefer. Finally, we will look at Kind and Kung's own suggested constraints and ask ourselves how these views are exemplified in the Star Citizen universe.

1.1 Taxonomies of Philosophies

For those are stumbling on this video for the first time, this is a discussion about the philosophical puzzle of how a single mental activity can be both transcendent and instructive at the same time. If this is your first time with us, I will recommend that you go back and watch *Part I of Imagining a Philosophy of Star Citizen*. In this video, we will be covering with more depth the equivocation solution to the puzzle of imaginative use. According to it, the way we explain how the one mental state of imagination can be used for both instructive and transcendent uses is because philosophers equivocate between different senses of imagination.

One helpful way to understand the philosophical discipline, is to first recognize how enduring philosophical questions have been divided up into subdisciplines. These often are presented as puzzles.

[1] Kind and Kung (2016)

They include Metaphysics, questions about the nature of reality, time etc. Well known questions in this genre include Saint Anselm's Ontological argument. God is a being greater than any being that can be conceived. If you imagine a being that is omniscient, omnipotent, omni-benevolent, then this is by definition God. However, the second premise asks you to consider the non-existence of such a being. Here is where we run into a conceptual contradiction. Existence is greater than non-existence, and therefore a being that is omnipotent, omniscient, omni-benevolent, but does not exist cannot be God. Therefore, it is impossible to imagine such a being that does not exist without contradiction.

Questions in epistemology include questions about the nature of knowledge, Value theory, questions about the nature of what we value, or what is valuable. Included in these questions are those about ethics, right, good, etc., aesthetics, beauty, etc., etc. and so on. For a helpful outline, you can peruse PhilPapers.

Given that we are talking about games, we might be asking questions about art, the beautiful, and representation. But while this is plausible, and there are very good discussions about video games and video game properties (including one that I hope to do a video in the near future on the in universe work of art *Tears of Fire*) among other discussions about the nature of the beautiful, this is not that.

Within the disciplines of metaphsyics and epistemology, there are questions about the nature of internal mental states. I guess a question about metaphysics can include questions about the correlation of mental states with brain states. Does one directly infer, or is entailed by the other? Are mental states distinct from brain states or are they identical? While it might be appropriate to correlate brain states with mental ones, within the domain of philosophy, we still treat the two as distinct from one another. But those are questions for another day, in fact however, we are getting closer to our original topic. I apologize for the digression.

When speaking of the metaphysics of mental states, it would be helpful to talk about what we mean by mental states. Perhaps you will have already guessed what we mean by mental states, but it is important to be precise and specific. So in the interests of clarity, I will first give some examples, these include desire, belief, and attention to name but a few. Why is attention a mental state? Well, imagine that your wife is telling you how her day went, which bills are coming due, the friend she met at the gun range etc. She ends the dialogue with a question, what's for dinner? and you respond: that's nice. Well, you were not paying attention and now you've been caught and she calls you out on this. Further, she now *has* your attention. What was your state of mind before, and what is your state of mind now? What distinguishes one from the other? Further, there are two mental states of concern here, attention and in-attention. What does each look like and what are their natures?

This is an interesting question for Star Citizen. How many times have we failed to pay attention and lost cargo and other valuable loot because of a mental

distraction or other? How many of us have run full speed into the salvage vehicle we were navigating towards and failed to pay attention as we got closer to it? But this question does finally get us closer to the original, I recognize that this video is taking longer than it needs to, I apologize.

I digress yet again.

Ultimately, what is it like to fail to pay attention to an imagined scene? Isn't that what we are doing? Imagining that we've just traded valuable currency for an imagined wreck, from which we can derive valuable cargo and imaginatively sell this cargo for more valuable currency? While I am not in a position to answer that question, a question more near our initial one is what can our imagining in Star Citizen teach us about the nature of our various mental states? Including attention, inattention, and imagination itself? Therefore, perhaps by engaging in imaginative exercises, for instance those afforded to us in games like Star Citizen, we can better understand important truths about the real world such as the nature of mental states like imagination, attention, desire, etc. Of course, in looking at questions regarding the nature of a single given mental state like imagination, we can make our job of analyzing such a state easier by once again breaking it up into smaller questions, such as what are some of the functions of imagination. Here we see two. These include transcendent uses and instructive ones. And here we've come around full circle back to our initial question, namely how can we have the one without the other? From here then, we will look at our first proposed solution.

1.1.1 Equivocating Solutions to the Puzzle

What is imagination? Notice how we skipped over the question about what are mental states? A reason why we've done this is because sometimes it is helpful to break up larger questions into more manageable ones. When we asked what mental states were, the best answers we could give are examples of things we think are mental states, for instance desire, belief, imagination, attention and so on. So since the best we could do was give examples of things we think are mental states, it becomes obvious that one way to understand the bigger question about mental states, is to explore things that are mental states. That brings us here, to the mental state of imagination.

What is imagination, what counts as imagination? Perhaps transcendent uses of the imagination rely on one concept of the imagination while instructive uses another.

> If there are different senses of imagination in play in philosophical discussion, then perhaps it is imagination in one sense that is responsible for the transcendent use of imagination, while imagination in some other sense is responsible for the instructive use of imagination.

Well, we know that it is a mental state, but what is its nature or essence? Here there are many possibilities available to us. This is because many different

philosophers have given different answers to this question. This fact about historical treatments of the imagination has been cited as a reason why the puzzle of imaginative use persists. This is called the equivocation solution. According to it, when we focus on the transcendent uses of the imagination, we are talking about one set of proposed natures, while talking about another, we are focusing on the instructive uses.

Lets begin with an example. What if history extended beyond earth history? For instance, Star Wars is said to begin eons before human civilization on earth. The lore regarding the Star Citizen timeline models a similar history. According to it, the recorded history of the Xi'an empire begins during the earth year 300,000 BCE. However, the in-game events take place in the earth year 2954 and the player does not play from the perspective of the Xi'an, but rather from that of human society in the current earth year 2954. In consequence, those individuals participating in the imaginative enterprise that is Star Citizen are being asked to imagine that 930 years have elapsed from the time they first opened the RSI Launcher until the loading screen has finished its cycle and the player presses *F* and "gets out of bed".

There is also extensive documentation detailing many of the other imaginative requirements for successful participation in the game. These include the immediate experience of thirst and hunger upon opening their eyes. Perhaps developing a plan for "that day in the verse" which might include looking for lucrative bounties or cargo missions. Perhaps they have been saving their UEC credits for a particular ship and now they finally have enough. Maybe they have been saving the coordinates of a scenic mountain range on Microtech and they now finally have the real-world time available to visit this mountain range.

But notice here that some imaginations are necessary for participation in the simulation while others are contingent on the aims of the player. Is the former a more pure case of imagination while the later is not? I cannot avoid imagining that I am experiencing hunger and thirst. There have been many times that I have wanted to. I might be excited about climbing aboard a new ship and traveling to a package location. But then I look to the lower left of my screen and my "mobiglass" is telling me that my hydration is at 13%. I try to ignore it because it takes time to source hydration and I would rather spend that time flying my new ship rather than sourcing hydration, especially given that there are real-world time constraints that place demands on me in addition to the imaginative ones. But if I ignore the image the game is forcing on me, I will be ejected from my desired imaginative state, flying my ship, into a new one, namely waking up in a hospital bed.

But does this forced imaginative activity differ from the following, waking up at Port Elisar and flying my new ship to New Babbage to meet up with some friends. Meeting up with my friends at New Babbage is not necessary to participate in the imaginative activity that is Star Citizen while "eating and drinking" is.

Some imaginative activities are contingently necessary. A contingently necessary

imaginative activity is an imaginative activity that is necessary for an additional imaginative activity. Notice how eating and drinking might qualify as such. In order to fly my Aurora, I need to first eat and drink. However there are better examples, for instance, earning UEC credits by doing various tasks in order to buy a cargo ship that further enables me to transport cargo from one location to another.

One way we might define such distinctions is through the philosophical literature on imagination. The distinction is between imagination from the inside and imagination from the outside. Kind and Kung ask us to imagine ourselves skiing versus imagining ourselves having frozen cheeks on account of skiing. But once again, I think that Star Citizen can present us with a better example.

We might focus on our internal states of desire here. Internally, I have a desire to race in a canyon on Delmar. But it seems that my character has an ulterior desire to eat and drink, don a helmet when in a low oxygen environment such as space or a non-terraformed planet etc. In part, there is a connection between my character's states of desire and my own. Namely they are contingent, for every internal state of desire that I experience, fly among the stars, dip my hands into a stream, meet friends in a bar on New Babbage, my character develops a contingent set of desires.

The way Kind and Kung articulate this development is by pointing out that an important distinction regarding imagination from the inside versus that from the outside plays a role in predicting how we react to given scenarios. My desire to witness first hand the corrosive effects of the ocean on Crusader will enable my friends to predict that I am likely to "fly" to Crusader. Therefore, it may at first seem that the equivocation view is highly plausible. The fact that I can make predictions about what one is likely to do given a particular imaginative activity, infers that the instructive uses of imagination rely on imagining from the inside.

But what happens when we consider that the point of the imaginative activity is to be able to pan the game camera out to the third person view and *see* what one *would* look like if he or she were to stand on the shoreline of a maximally polluted ocean? This is imagining from the outside and yet, it still might be instructive. Or lets consider the in-game feature that allows us to try on items such as armor and fashionable clothes prior to purchasing them with UEC credits. I might do so to learn what they look like on my character.

Each of these examples seem to suggest that both imagining from the inside and from the outside can be instructive, or transcendent or both. As such, the equivocation is not really helpful for solving the problem of explaining how one mental activity can be both instructive and transcendent.

Chapter 2

The Good Life

I have found it difficult to explain to a seven year old why he shouldn't kill mobs in minecraft. Although this particular seven year-old will refrain from killing mobs in minecraft because he trusts my judgement, and so that when I say "don't kill mobs", he will generally say "okay, I won't, but why?" This is where I find it difficult to come up with a reason that seems satisfying. Consider deontology: do not kill mobs in minecraft because doing so will be treating them as an object. Well, they are objects aren't they? Consequentialists might point out that we are not hurting anyone. A natural law theorist? Is there a law giver, evolution, natural selection or God that would care? Would God care? Why?

2.1 Virtue as a human excellence

1. The first concerns the role in the human good life of activities and relationships that are, in their nature, especially vulnerable to reversal.

- friendship
- love
- political activity
- attachments to property or possessions

What is the role of these items in a good life, if one can easily loose these because of chance?

2. The relationship among these external goods

- Do they exist harmoniously?
- Can they impair goodness of an agent's life?
- Can they generate conflicting requirements?
  - E.g., can love cause someone to betray a friendship?

3. Self-suffiency, what is the ethical value of our appetites, feelings, and emotions, passions and sexuality?

- Does the value of Self-suffiency outweigh the value of these other *irrational attachments*?
- Do they have value even though they can disrupt our own Self-suffiency? E.g., in rational planning?

2.2 Examples of Fragility and Ambition

2.2.1 Aeschylus and practical conflict

- What can we learn from tragic poetry and literature?

  > But the tragedies also show us, and dwell upon, another more intractable sort of case — one which has come to be called, as a result, the situation of 'tragic conflict'. In such cases we see a wrong action commetted without any direct physical compulsion and in full knowledge of its nature, by a person whose ethical character or commitments would otherwise dispose him to reject the act.

2.2.2 Sophocles' Antigon: conflict, vision, and simplification

- In response to what is learned from tragedy, we can simplify our value commitments.

  > For the claim is that the human being's relation to value in the world is not, or should not be, profoundly tragic: that it is, or should be, possible without culpable neglect or serious loss to cut off the risk of the typical tragic occurrence. Tragedy would then represent a primitive or benighted stage of ethical life and thought. [51]

2.2.3 Conclusion to Part I

What have we learned?

- Values taken in the singular are vulnerable
- *Irrational attachments* can disrupt.
- *Irrational attachments* can become grounds of conflict.

But this was an over-ambitious attempt to eliminate luck from human life.

- This shows the importance of human value, *rational choice*. [*tuché]

2.3 Plato: Goodness without fragility

Two problems:

1. Dialogue
2. Development

Some approaches

- lack of response to positive role of vulnerable values in the goodlife
- Plato's insuffienct critique of tragic literature

2.3.1 The *Protagoras*: a science of practical reasoning

How to develop a *tuche*

- social political techne → technai.
- Important: defeated threats from physical environment, but what about the social environment?

How does science save and transform us?

- how do we rank activity independent of the feelings they produce?
- how do we deal with the vulnerability and instability of individual human pursuits?

2.3.2 Interlude I: Plato's anti-tragic theater

Two ways of dealing with the question about mitigating luck in the social environment:

- Tragic theater: but irrational attachments can disrupt rational choice
- techne (science): but lack of response to positive role of vulnerability in human values

E.g.,

> Here, as in the *Protagoras*, Plato very deliberately creates a speech that will give the impression of not having been deliberately formed. It is not artless; but its art is one that claims to go straight to the truth-telling part of the soul. It is simple rather than flowery, flat rather than emotive or persuasive. [132]

2.4 The *Republic*: true value and the standpoint of perfection

Defends a life of goodness without vulnerability.

Q: What is valuable about a human life? A: Being invulnerable to luck by quarantining ourselves from irrational attachments.

2.5 The Speech of Alcibiades: a reading of the symposium

> I believe that a deep understanding of the *Symposium* will be one that regards it not as a work that ignores the pre-philosophical understanding of *er0s*, but as one that is all about that understanding, and also about why it must be purged and transcended, why Diotima has to come once again to save Athens from a plague. (Nussbaum 2001, 167)

How?

> *Eros* is the desire to be a being without any contingent occurrent desires. It is a second-order desire that all desires should be cancelled. This need that makes us pathetically vulnerable to chance is a need whose ideal outcome is the existence of a metal status, an artifact.

To be whole means not having any desires. Yet, we want to be whole, but also to have desires. This conflict however, can only be expressed through experience, *pathonta gnonai*, ***understanding through experience***.

Which is:

- the cognitive activity of imagination
- emotion
- appetitive feelings

But the *Symposium* shows us that desire does have an important function, which is to not only move us towards the good, but guide us as well. (As defended in *The Phaedrus*)

> . . . in people of good nature and training, the sensual and appetitive response is linked with, and arouses, complicated emotikons of fear, awe, and respect, which themselves develop and educate the personality as a whole, making it both more discriminating and more receptive. (Nussbaum 2001, 215)

To be moved towards beauty:

- open and receptive
- towards truth
- engrossed in a respect for the other person's choices

Chapter 3

Emotionism

3.1 Sensibility

3.1.1 The Emotional Construction of Morals (Prinz)

1. Sentimentalism by Michael Slote
2. The Discernment of Perception, Nussbaum 1990

Metaphysical Emotionism:

- Darwall et all., 1992
- McDowell (1985)
- Wiggins (1987)
- D'Arms and Jacobson (2006)

Epistemic Emotionism:

- Gibbard 1990
- Ayer 1952
- Stevenson (1937)
- McMillen and Austin 1971

3.1.2 Apt Imaginings (Gilmore)

Moral Judgments and the Emotions:

- Greene et al 2001
- Lerner et al 1998
- Tye 1995, 100. Intentionality
- Sentimentalism about Moral Understanding

Representative Appraisal Theories:

- Arnold 1960

- Lazarus 1984
- Smith and Ellsworth 1985; Scherer, Schorr, and Johnstone 2001; Smith and Lazarus (1993); Schacter and Singer (1962)
- Greenspan (1988); de Sausa (1987); Roberts (1988)

Cognitivists Theory of the Emotions:

- Nussbaum 2001; Solomon 1993; Lyons 1980; Kenny 1963; Gordon 1990; Lazarus 1984; Lazarus 1991
- Nussbaum 2004
- Goldie 2000; Goldie 2009 (distinctive kind of evaluative state)
- Prinz 2004

2. Chapter 3 of Apt imaginings

3.1.3 Fragility of Goodness, Wandering in Darkness

Sensibility and Well-Being:

- Nicomachean Ethics
- Chapter 14 of Wandering in Darkness
- Vulnerability of the Goodlife 1, and 2 (Fragility of Goodness)
- Finely Aware and Richly Responsible, Nussbaum 1990

Tragic Emotions:

- FG Interlude 2: Luck and the tragic emotions
- WD, Ch. 9, The Story of Job: Suffering and the Second-Personal
- That Obscure Object of Desire: Pleasure in Painful Art [pdf]

Chapter 4

Biotechnology and Bioengineering

Star Citizen is a space simulator, sandbox, MMO that is set 930 years into the future from our current timeline. In this imagined future, like many imagined futures, humans have developed a number of transformative technologies that allow them to operate in environments previously unimaginable. These transformative technologies include various kinds of armor used for a variety of purposes, from mining deep underground or in space, to engaging in combat. Armor here has different kinds of practical purposes, keeping the wearer warm, cool in adverse whether conditions or protecting them from shrapnel and other projectiles in hostile environments.

In our own timeline, unlike that of Star Citizen, we are only now having to consider to what extent we should allow emerging technologies to influence and change human biology. When considering the impact that technology may have on human biology, we might consider a number a terms used to describe such interactions. Biotechnology is one such term, and is typically defined as the "manipulation of biological systems and organisms through technological means" (**?**). The kinds of interactions between human biology and technology under the umbrella of Biotechnology, are performance enhancing drugs, stem-cell research, genetic engineering, cloning, and genetic screening to name but a few possibilities.

What does transhumanism have to do with Star Citizen, when this might on the surface be obvious. However, from the perspective of the lore surrounding the development of the game, it is not as obvious as one would think. One constant fact about game play in Star Citizen, is the length of time often required for the most trivial of pursuits. In most games, an individual logs in, and can engage in game play almost immediately. However, here Star Citizen, in the interests of immersion, that facet of game development that seeks to represent

the real world as much as possible, differs from most games. At the start of a typical game session, an individual logs in and finds themselves in a habitation unit. This is a shelter where you "live", or one where you might have logged out during the previous game play session. From here, depending on what you would like to accomplish during that session, you will walk towards some type of transportation platform. You will then take something akin to a shuttle to a platform. Here you will take an elevator to your hanger, recall your ship, fly to a location etc etc. All of this takes time, lots of it.

A mistake I often made in the beginning, is the subject of this portion of the video. Namely forgetting to source nutrition and hydration, which are necessary for game play. There is often a visual representation of your state of health, including your hydration levels, in the bottom left corner of the screen. This tells you how long you have until you need to rehydrate or taken in nutrition. Rehydrating takes time because you have to source hydration which is available on kiosks at various locations across the game. More additionally, you have to walk to these, which once again takes time. However, you can always carry various drugs. Would it be wrong to, say inject yourself with a drug solely for the purposes of mitigating the adverse affects of dehydration or nutrition deprivation? One distinction that is important for consideration here, references the kind of drug, of which there are two. On the one hand, taking a drug to mitigate the effects of disease, it would most likely be a therapeutic one. However, if I am merely looking to improve my performance, say avoid the need for nutrition or hydration, then this would be enhancing. There are not really such drugs on the market currently, although we are getting close with various nutrition supplements. These often mitigate the need for more robust nutrition intake in the interests of gaining muscle mass or loosing weight. But there are other enhancing drugs which are quite prevalent in many first world nations, for instance taking Ritalin even though one does not have adhd.

Um, that was tasty.

A constant in human innovation has been the improvement of technology for a direct benefit to human lives. This includes being more efficient with respect to resource management and production, warfare, environment management, habitation and so on. More importantly, when considering the distinction between healthcare and human enhancement, bioethicists often promote three distinct aims. These include beneficence, autonomy, and non-maleficence. Arguably, a given health procedure should pursue the three. This means that a health procedure should be beneficial, performed with respect to the patient's autonomy, and not intended to harm the patient. But this leaves a lot of room for enhancements to human biology and it is not clear what lines should be drawn. One possible ethical commitment is a kind of consequentialism, namely that the consequences outweigh other considerations with respect to the moral value of a given action. Nick Bostrom is one such philosopher who embraces transhumanism as a biotechnology that produces good consequences. On the one hand, embracing whatever technological advances contribute to more well-being

overall might be morally obligatory for a utilitarian like Bostrom.

For instance, if we consider cognition to be a kind of resource, then developing drugs which improve cognition is no different than creating a system that enables us to more efficiently manage food crops. More efficient use of food crops means that they can be enjoyed by more people. The more people who can make use of such crops, means that the well-being of more individuals is promoted.

One particularly important area of improvement for technology, has been those improvements of technology with respect to the benefit of individuals with disabilities. However, it is not clear where we have always drawn the line here, or whether we need to. For instance, while some drugs and treatments were initially created for individuals with disabilities, they are often used by individuals without disabilities. Is inability the same thing as disability? I am unable to fly while birds have no trouble doing such. I can mitigate this fact by buying and building a hobby kit plan, allowing me to fly like a bird. Why shouldn't I take drugs to improve my cognition or pursue treatments that do the same? If I could take a drug that enables me to play the violin like Itzhak Perlman, why shouldn't I?

Consider whether some individuals have a cognitive advantage over others. Is it justifiable to use technology enhancements to decrease the gap in cognitive performance? What about physical advantages? Is it justifiable to use technology enhancements to decrease gaps in physical performance abilities? What about individuals without quote unquote disabilities? Would it be fair for these individuals to make use of technology to boost their performance, whether cognitive or physical? We live in a day and age where many technological advances are forcing us to confront such questions.

In Star Citizen, such questions have seemingly already been answered in the form of various technologies available to the general public. But what advancements in Star Citizen would be considered controversial today? One such controversy includes the wealth gap between those who can afford to engage in interplanetary travel, namely the player's character, and the many NPCs that inhabit the various space stations and outposts around the system. These NPC characters often remind me of retail employees given their seeming lack of enthusiasm and drive. Additionally, it is impossible that such individuals are earning the credits necessary for living similar lifestyles as the characters us players play as. Further more, according to lore, there is an important distinction between "citizens", a group which we as players belong to, and non-citizens. My initial assumption as that the NPCs who inhabit and work the various kiosks that we purchase goods such as weapons, armor and drink, likely do not belong to this class. What medical technologies are they prohibited from possessing on account of this fact?

Such wealth gaps become important to consider especially when we include the access to medical innovation that "us Star Citizens" possess. Our access to performance enhancing drugs is one kind of such access. These drugs include Demexatrine, which relieves muscle fatigue and concussion symptoms; Roxaphen,

alleviates symptoms that hinder movement, typically as the result of injury; and Sterogen, symptoms related to muscle weakness. Such individuals will have an unfair advantage in improving their social stature, for instance, mining rock which can be quite lucrative but is also physically demanding. Performance enhancing drugs like those mentioned above, would be very beneficial when performing such lucrative activities.

What about individuals with unequal leg lengths? It is now possible for them to have a surgery which increases the length of one of their legs to make it the same length as the other. But what about elective reasons for such surgeries, for instance the person who always wanted to be an even 6 feet tall? Cosmetic height surgery is an elective surgery that individuals pursue for the sole interests of being taller. Is there a limit to what kinds of cosmetic surgeries are allowed by the FDA? But what about practical uses of such surgeries, for instance perhaps an increased height might be necessary to pilot some ships or don some armors.

Each of these questions fall under a more general one. Trans-humanists allow that human progress will necessarily involve therapeutic and enhancing applications. Therapeutic applications benefit individuals with what are typically described disabilities and diseases while enhancements are applications that benefit individuals without industry defined applications. Where transhumanists different from a more conservative approach is that they will also allow enhancing technologies arguing that transform human experience overall.

In our own timelines, many deaf people have recently been using a device called a “cochlear implant” to mitigate the effects of their auditory disability. A cochlear implant is an electronic device that “bypasses the ear and connects directly to the auditory nerve”. This seems to be an admirable use for such a device since it allows the wearer a sense of autonomy that perhaps was less available to them previously. They can now have conversations with others who perhaps do not know sign language, say the worker at the Department of Motor Vehicles. However, surely such a device might be also put to good use by someone without a defined auditory disability. For instance a soldier who would benefit from having more sensitive auditory equipment directly implanted into her skull. Developing this technology is an example of bioengineering, which is the application of biological science to design machines. It is not clear whether such biological enhancements are necessary for us Star Citizens.

Are neural implants used to create an interface between our brain and the armor we wear? What about piloting our ships? In Eve Online, another space sim, sandbox, MMO, the player has been bioengineered so that the ship they fly becomes an extension of themselves. We do not have a similar lore in Star Citizen. But it is possible that our ability to pilot the ships we pilot, was augmented another way. For instance, most pilots in our own timelines need to be in peak physical condition at all times. Piloting planes is very taxing on the human body. It only stands to reason that piloting space-ships is infinitely more taxing, especially through wormholes and in quantum travel. What is the lore surrounding the ability of so many individuals to meet the demands that such

travel obviously present?

One possibility is a robust eugenics program. Eugenics is the science of improving the genetic components of a species. Examples can be seen when comparing corn samples from hundreds of years ago which looked more similar to wheat, to those we might find in the supermarket today. Not only would it have been effective in eradicating hereditary diseases, but also improving the cognitive abilities of the average person in the same way that corn has been improved over the centuries to be more nutritious. Once again however, this could be where being a Star Citizen would have been necessary. Inhabiting such a class would likely provide certain benefits that enabled access to such a eugenic program, or the medical technologies that allowed an individual to select certain traits that they desired their offspring to possess.

Since world war II, eugenics programs have become wildly unpopular for obvious reasons. However, what is less obvious, is the possibility that though unpopular, such programs still persist in the form of IVF and other fertility treatments. When selecting sperm and eggs for such treatments, it is highly unlikely that fertility patients will actively pursue specimen from low level criminals or retail employees.

But other concerns include the wishes of the potential individual. To what extent does an individual have autonomy regarding who they want to be? Do we have the "right to an open future" as some suggest? Or is it the case that improving one's biology actually have more, not less, options available to her. For instance, there are developing technologies that allow scientists to modify the genes of an embryonic cell, what Rosemarie Garland-Thomson has called "Velvet Eugenics". This is different from selective breeding, which might be compared with how an individual chooses a romantic partner, as it entails actively seeking out those traits that a patient doesn't want, and removing them from the genome of the potential embryo. Lets imagine that a parent does not want to pass on their genes that contributed to the fact that they write with their left hand. Bioethicists have asked whether the potential individual should have a say in whether they wanted to be left-handed or not.

Chapter 5

Personal Identity

Consider the following uses of the personal pronoun *I*:

Remark. "*I* fell in love today."

and

Remark. "Sir, *I* have finished loading the cargo onto the cutter, prepare for quantum travel."

> Our ability to use these sorts of expressions meaningfully seems to presuppose knowledge of a clear criterion of identity, a reliable way, that is, of telling: (1) when something still counts as the same object or person after having undergone changes over a period of time, and (2) what makes two different things or people different from one another. (Cogburn and Silcox 2009)

This is more than a question of whether the two uses are asynchronous. On the one hand, we might think that while one use of the pronoun *I* is controversial since *I* would likely never be in the position to load cargo onto a space vessel, the other use is uncontroversial since it references the real world and things that I am likely *to* do. However, consider some additional uses of the first type of usage that will complicate this assessment.

Remark. "*I* can't believe that *I* would have been so stupid as to have thought that we would have worked as a couple."

Here, there seems to be two dissimilar *I*s. The first expresses dismay over over what the second previously thought. The concern here is that the passage of time has rendered the *I* into two distinct and separate persons. Therefore there arises a question regarding the accuracy of self-ascribing the second *I*. It seems like it should be wrong to self-ascribe actions referencing the past:

> How can we make sense of the superficially paradoxical fact that an

> object can undergo changes over a period of time while remaining (in some metaphysically significant way) exactly the "same thing?" (Cogburn and Silcox 2009)

This problem is adopted to game dev in the context that in such contexts, it also seems false to self-ascribe some action performed in the context of the game.

In consequence, Cogburn and Silcox (2009) will argue that understanding our roles in role-playing games such as MMORPGs and RPGs will show us that the "temporal and spatial boundaries of the self are fundamentally vague." Their proposition is to acknowledge three distinct first person avowals.

Remark. ***True First Person:*** True in the real world

Ambiguous: True in game but false in reality

Vague: Uncharacteristic honesty in uncharacteristic environs. (For instance, imagine someone who tells a previously unrevealed secret to strangers at a team building siminar).

5.1 Fictional Selves

There are a number of games that reveal important questions about the nature of the self.

These include simulators such as *Sims*, *Microsoft Flight*, *Second Life*. There are also MMOs that reveal similar questions such as *World of Warcraft*, *Elder Scrolls*, and *Final Fantasy*.

What is important about these, is that they depend on *representations* of alternative selves. Namely, the game-master as in the case of *Dungeons and Dragons*, the game's developer as in the case of table top RPGs like Monopoly, or the computer programmer as in the case of MMOs and MMORPGs, partially creates the player's character and as such, the identity represented in the game belongs as much if not more to the dev as the player.

However, there is a conflict here. Namely, which genre of game allows more authentic expressions of self.

In an RPG or MMORPG such as *World of Warcraft*, the player is invited to act out a given character. They are given a role, and the tools to enact out that role. These tools include things like props such as ships and armour, whether virtual or actual, etc.

In some versions of RPG, the player can be rewarded or penalized based on how convincingly they are able to adhere to this alternative *self representation*. So here, I do not think that such cases express what is interesting about personal identity. Rather it seems that we are supposed to suppress our identities in adoption of the alternative one. But Cogburn and Silcox (2009) says otherwise, that the RPG is "more liberating" than the MMORPG because:

> To achieve these goals, all the player can do is to have her character attempt the various tasks that the game actually puts before her, such as crawling through a cave or fighting off trolls, and then wait while the computer crunches numbers to find out if she succeeds or fails. This can often be a lot of fun, but it is also something quite different from actually pretending to be another person.

It is not clear whether this ambiguity is central to the main claim however.

Their important distinction between table top RPGs and MMORPGs is based on the fact that one case, the player is judged based on her ability to convincingly perform the role of the character prescribed to her while in the other, they just need to perform tasks that the character would perform.

The conflict arises when we realize that phrases such as *I charm the shopkeeper* are not in reference to what we would do, but namely what a given character who is not us, would do. Therefore, the use of the first person pronoun *I* seems misleading.

5.2 Naive Ficitonalist

The naive fictionalist says that the use of the pronoun seems misleading because it *is* misleading. Namely that the claim *"Sir, I have finished loading the Cutter"*, or any claim like it, is false. But they argue that this unsophisticated attempt to solve the puzzle fails. However, claims expressing what we as players do in a given virtual environment, if said in a real world context would be true. For instance, consider the following discussion:

Remark. The ITC Frigate NorthStar was parked in deep space while manned by only two crew members.

There are some emerging classes of game that better blur the lines between fictional and actual selves, and this assessment ignores the fact that some games, namely space sims, more of the onus is on the player to create their character through game play. These make the above assertions accurate and true.

Rather than defining a given character, all the dev does is provide props for the player to use, much like a day care center might provide toys and leave it up to the children to decide how to play with these.

These include what are affectionately termed Space Simulators and include games like *Eve Online*, *Elite Dangerous*, and *Star Citizen*. While some might think that these combine RPGs and MMOs since they often involve multiple characters and *can* involve role-playing elements, they do not necessarily need to. Perhaps the term *Space Sim*, though worse from a marketing standpoint, better reflect what we want in these virtual realms, namely to be our true and authentic ourselves and such platforms provide the props for us to do so.

A player can spend their days to their content exploring the vast environments

created by the developers behind such games, aesthetically appreciating the devs work. While one can play a fictional self, they do not necessarily need to.

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