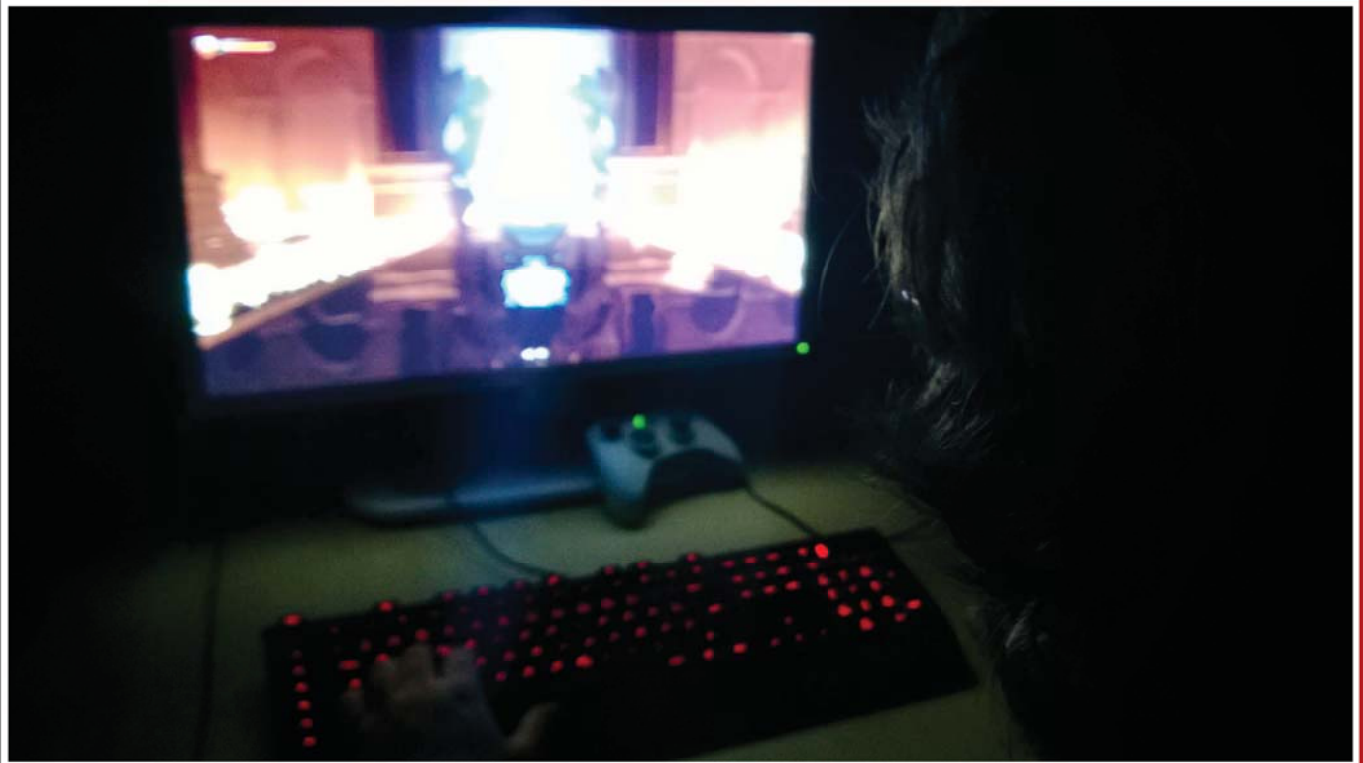




online

HEIDELBERG JOURNAL OF RELIGIONS ON THE INTERNET



Simone Heidbrink, Tobias Knoll (Eds.)

Religion in Digital Games

Multiperspective & Interdisciplinary Approaches

Volume 05 (2014)

Institute for
Religious Studies

University
of Heidelberg

Table of Contents

- 01 **Let's Talk Games!** - Introduction to the Special Issue on Religion in Digital Games
Simone Heidbrink and Tobias Knoll
- 05 **Theorizing Religion in Digital Games** - Perspectives and Approaches
Simone Heidbrink, Tobias Knoll and Jan Wysocki
- 51 **Studying Religion in Digital Gaming** - A Critical Review of an Emerging Field
Gregory Price Grieve and Heidi A. Campbell
- 68 **Developing a Framework for Understanding the Relationship Between Religion and Videogames**
Richard E. Ferdig
- 86 **Locating the Locus of Study on "Religion" in Video Games**
J.D.F. Tuckett and David G. Robertson
- 108 **Game Cultures as Sub-Creations** - Case Studies on Religion & Digital Plays
Elke Hemminger
- 134 **Maker's Breath** - Religion, Magic, and the 'godless' World of BioWare's *Dragon Age II* (2011)
Kristin M.S. Bezio
- 162 **'The Lamb of Comstock'** - Dystopia and Religion in Video Games
Frank G. Bosman
- 183 **Religion as Resource in Digital Games**
Ryan Clark Thames
- 197 **'When people pray, a god is born... This god is you!'** - An Introduction to Religion and God in Digital Games
Markus Wiemker and Jan Wysocki



- 224 **The Lord is My Shepard** - Confronting Religion in the *Mass Effect* Trilogy
Joshua A. Irizarry and Ita T. Irizarry
- 249 **Religion(s) in Videogames** - Historical and Anthropological Observations
Alessandro Testa
- 279 **Socialization of Teenagers Playing *The Sims*** - The Paradoxical Use of Video Games to Re-enchant Life
Pascaline Lorentz
- 301 **Fátima Postmortem**
Luis Lucas Pereira and Licinio Roque
- 317 **The Mythic Scope of *Journey*** - A Comparative Assessment Concerning the Spirit at Play and Cybernetic Shamanism
Robert William Guyker
- 352 **Review: eGods** - Faith Versus Fantasy in Computer Gaming
Moritz Maurer



‘The Lamb of Comstock’

Dystopia and Religion in Video Games

Frank G. Bosman

Abstract

In the article “The Lamb of Comstock’. Dystopia and Religion in Video Games’ I will introduce four high quality, commercially successful videogames: *Bioshock*, *Bioshock Infinite*, *Dishonored* and *Brink*. All these four games present a dystopian scenery as a background for an intelligent plot to criticize distinct modern political, philosophical and economical theories and practices: respectively the ‘hyper-capitalism’ of the Russian-American philosopher Ayn Rand, the idea of religion based American Exceptionalism, idealized industrialization and rationalism, and an ecological Apocalypse. Within these four games, religion – primarily different branches of Christianity – plays an important but often implicit role in the game narrative, sometimes supporting the dystopian scenery of the game, sometimes opposing it. In this article I will give a definition of the difficult term ‘dystopia’, introduce the four dystopian video games and demonstrate the importance of religion within the four game narratives.

Keywords

utopia, dystopia, videogames, cultural theology, *Bioshock*, *Brink*, *Dishonored*

‘Is a man not entitled to the sweat of his brow? “No,” says the man in Washington. It belongs to the poor. “No,” says the man in the Vatican. It belongs to God. “No,” says the man in Moscow. It belongs to everyone. I rejected those answers. Instead, I chose something different. I chose the impossible. I chose Rapture. A city where the artist would not fear the censor, where the scientist would not be bound by petty morality, where the great would not be constrained by the small.’

Thus spoke Andrew Ryan (born Andrei Rianofski), an American industrial, who was so disappointed by both the American and Russian governments, that he realized his own utopian dream, the city of Rapture on the bottom of the Atlasic Ocean. Time: somewhere in the sixties of the past century. Andrew Ryan, an acronym of the Russian-American philosopher Ayn Rand (1905 -

1982), created his utopian dream in hyper capitalistic colors focusing on the virtue of egoism as the key element of his sociological and economical order: no government, taxes, censorship or altruistic morality.

The game *Bioshock* (2007) features this ‘super capitalist’ Andrew Ryan and his capitalistic utopia of Rapture as a criticism on the theories of Ayn Rand and the economical praxis based on her works.¹ *Bioshock*’s Rapture was may have been intended to be a utopia, when the player enters the underwater game world it has already turned into a nightmarish dystopia. The dystopian genre is very popular ever since H.G. Wells published his *The Sleeper Awakes* (1910) and brought forth international acclaimed best sellers like Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* (1932) and George Orwell’s *Animal Farm* (1945) and *1984* (1949). Ironically enough also Ayn Rand published a dystopian novel of her own, *Anthem* (1938), unknowing of the fact that a little less than six decades later her own utopian novels *Fountainhead* (1943) and *Atlas Shrugged* (1957) would become the object of dystopian criticism themselves. Novels like *The Hunger Games*-trilogy (Suzanne Collins, 2008, 2009, 2010) and films like *The Matrix*-trilogy (Wachowski Brothers, 1999, 2003, 2003) continued this genre, opening it for even larger audiences.

The word ‘dystopia’ is derived from the Greek *dys* (‘bad’) and *topos* (‘place’), and is alternatively called ‘cacotopia’ (from the Greek *kakos*, ‘incorrect’) or ‘anti-utopia’.² The word was first used by the British philosopher John Stuart Mill (1806 – 1873) in a speech before the House of Commons in 1868 in which he denounced the way the English government treated the occupied Ireland. ‘It is, perhaps, too complimentary to call them Utopians, they ought rather to be called dystopians, or caco-topians. What is commonly called Utopian is something too good to be practicable; but what they appear to favor is too bad to be practicable.’ (Trahair 1999, p. 110) Mill was unconsciously the father of the genre of the ‘dystopian fiction’ which combines ‘a parodic inversion of the traditional utopia with satire on contemporary society.’ (Ferns 1999, p. 105) Dystopian writers can be characterized as having ethical and political concerns about ‘terrible sociopolitical tendencies that could, if continued, turn our contemporary world into the iron cages portrayed in the realm of utopias underside.’ (Baccolini 2003, p. 2)

The most important difference between utopian and dystopian fiction – literature, film, gaming – is its relationship with the actual reality in which we live. While utopian fiction stresses the *difference* between the ideal (and idealized) society it depicts and the reality of the everyday life, the dystopian writers present a nightmarish vision of a nearby future as a very real possibility for

1 When introducing a videogame, I will refer to the game website of the producer and to the game trailer on YouTube. For *Bioshock*, see: <http://www.2kgames.com/bioshock/> - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ymg2HzHF9-4>.

2 Lyman Sargent (1994) differentiates between ‘eutopia’, ‘dystopia’ and ‘anti-uptopia’, a division which received much following by scholars and critics alike. In this article the broader, inclusive term of ‘dystopia’ is used.

present society to ‘achieve’ if nothing is done to stop it. Dystopia seems then like ‘a no more than logical conclusion derived from the premises of the existing order.’ (Ferns 1999, p. 107) Utopias usually start with a long and sometimes magical journey to the ‘other land’, be it hidden in the future, an exotic place or even on other planets or galaxies. The dystopian texts usually begin directly with the terrible new world, as if one had only to leave his house to enter into it. (Baccolini 2003, p. 5)

Religion, in its institutionalized or individualistic form, sometimes plays a major part in dystopian literature. In some cases religion, often in its Christian form, is thought of to be a part of the dark new world while other authors depict religion as an antidote against totalitarianism and egoism associated with the ‘brave new world’. Philip Pullman (* 1946) for example has been heavily criticized for his *His Dark Materials*-trilogy (1995, 1997, 2000) by the conservative Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights and the Focus on the Family Foundation, both claiming that Pullman demonized Roman Catholicism. Also *The Chrysalids* (1955) by John Wyndham and *Cat's Cradle* (1963) by Kurt Vonnegut featured a deranged form of religion as a part of the dystopian society depicted and criticized by them. But in the aforementioned game *Bioshock* however Christianity is used as an integral part of the creators’ criticism on Rand’s utopia. What to think of the relation between dystopia and religion?

Religion and dystopia are actually not a rare couple in modern day video games. In this article I will therefore introduce four different videogames, all featuring a dystopian scenery and narrative combined with more or less explicit traces of religion, most notably in its Christian form: *Bioshock* (2007), *Brink* (2011), *Dishonored* (2012) and *Bioshock Infinite* (2013). Two questions will be asked. Firstly, what or whom do these games criticize by their dystopian fantasy? And, secondly, what is the role of religion in these dystopian games? The selection of the four games is based on the presence of a dystopian scenery and narrative, and contain at least traces of (institutionalized) religion. Moreover these games are considered as of very high quality by critics and gamers alike, and all the games have been quite a considerable commercial success.

Before discussing the four games a small warning should be given. In this article the games and their narratives will be discussed in detail. Those who would want to play the game by themselves should be warned that the outcome of the games will be disclosed.

1. Ayn Rand’s Martyrs. *Bioshock* (2007)

In the game *Bioshock*, set during the 1960’s, the player is in charge of the past-less protagonist ‘Jack’, who – after a mysterious plane crash above the Atlantic Ocean – finds himself in a retro

futuristic dystopia with the name ‘Rapture’.³ The city, created by the Russian-American industrial Andrew Ryan (as stated earlier in this article), is heavily troubled by civil war, chaos and anarchy. The player can become aware of the history of Rapture, built in the 1940’s, by listening to the scattered audio recordings to be found in the game. Andrew Ryan’s utopia slowly built itself and scientific progress greatly expanded, especially by the discovery of the plasmid ADAM, harvested from the sea slugs on the ocean floor. ADAM allows the users to alter their DNA (and so the player does with Jack) to grant them superhuman powers like telekinesis and pyrokinesis.

While Ryan hoped for a meritocracy, class distinctions grew heavily and mobsters like Frank Fontaine tried to overthrow Ryan’s supremacy. Fontaine created smuggler’s routes to the surface (very against Ryan’s isolationism). Together with Dr. Brigid Tenenbaum he created a cheap plasmid industry by mass-producing ADAM by the way of implanting the slugs into the body of orphaned girls named ‘little sisters’. Fontaine and his plasmid enhanced army tried to overthrow Ryan, but did not succeed. Fontaine even appeared to have died in the attack. Some months later another figure, now by the name of Atlas, preached an uprising by the lower class against the ‘rich folk’, creating social and political chaos. Civil war broke out on New Year’s Eve of 1959 when Ryan ordered a full fledged attack on Ryan’s army of beggars and workers. The battle left many dead and the few remaining survivors kept on battling amongst each other. Because no one thinks about the maintenance of Rapture, the water of the ocean slowly regains control. What once was a beautiful utopia has now fallen into a crumbling dystopia.

When creator of Bioshock Ken Levine was asked by *The Guardian* (1-12-11) about the philosophical background of the game he replied: ‘What I tried to do, having read Ayn Rand, was to create Galt’s Gulch and stick real people in it.’ *Galt’s Gulch* is the name of the utopian, isolationistic village in Rand’s *Atlas Shrugged* (1956). In this village the ‘mighty’ men and women of America (industrials, scientists, artists) have retreated themselves (‘went on strike’) as a protest against the ‘socialistic’ society of the United States. *Bioshock* is literally loaded with references to Rand’s work. Rapture is in fact Rand’s Galt’s Gulch revisited. Andrew Ryan is a fugitive from the Soviet Union and received American citizenship, exactly like Ayn Rand. Both the name of Atlas and Fontaine are references to Ryan’s major works *The Fountainhead* (1943) and *Atlas Shrugged* (1956).

The name of Dr. Tenenbaum is also a reference to Rand, who changed her Russian name Alisa Zinov'yevna Rosenbaum to more English sounding Ayn Rand. The public broadcasts the player hears in Rapture are a close reminder of the never-ending speeches of *Atlas Shrugged*’s hero John Galt. Multiple people in Rapture rather destroy their own properties than leave them to the

3 Retro-futurism is a trend in the creative arts showing the influence of depictions of the future produced prior to about 1960: the future as seen from the past. See: Gruffey (2006, p. 155-7).

raiders, echoing the ethics of Roark from *The Fountainhead*, and Wyatt and d'Aconia from *Atlas Shrugged*. Furthermore in the game the player discovers a bottle of wine named 'Fountainhead Cabernet Sauvignon', another reference to *The Fountainhead*. The Pharaoh's Fortune Casino in Rapture is localized in the Cameron Suites, a reference to the architect Henry Cameron (*Fountainhead*). The name H. Roark appears on an advertorial for the Eve's Apple strip club (idem). And on numerous posters in Rapture the words 'Who is Atlas?' are printed, yet another reference to *Atlas Shrugged*.

Rand's philosophical program, which she called Objectivism, is not easy to define. The fact that Rand has not been recognized by the academic philosophers as such, does not help either. (Peikoff 1991) The closest thing to a definition of Objectivism has been given by Rand herself. Once she was asked by a book salesman to tell him what her philosophy was all about, 'while standing on one leg' (Heller 2009, p. 281-2), a reference to the legendary story of rabbi Hillel (Sabbat 31a). Rand accepted the challenge and replied: 'Metaphysics: objective reality. Epistemology: rationalism. Ethics: egoism. Politics: capitalism.' According to Den Uyl & Rasmussen (1986, p. x) the prism of Rand's philosophy is the political domain. 'The political positions Rand is most noted for depend on her defense of natural rights. To defend natural rights Rand believes she must formulate an ethical theory, and an ethical theory in turn requires a position on metaphysical and epistemological philosophy.'

But what about religion? Rand herself was highly critical on the topic of religion and especially Christianity (Bosman 2013). She described Christendom as the 'best *Kindergarten* of communism' and according to her every almighty being is 'by definition' a dictator whenever he uses this power of not (Heller 2009, p. 172). The 'drama of the Christian mythology' is, still according to Rand, that Christ 'did not die for his own sins' but for 'lesser' people. (Heller 2009, p. 324) In *Atlas Shrugged* every man must take a vow to enter Galt's Gulch: 'I swear by my life and my love for it that I will never live for the sake of another man, nor ask another man to live for mine.' (Rand 1957, p. 680)

When Rand was so strongly against religion, any dystopian criticism on her philosophy would benefit from the presence of Christendom within it. Amidst of the rubbles of Ryan/Rand's demolished utopia the player is informed that there are smugglers in Rapture. Not knowing what it is they smuggle into Rapture, the player learns that the smugglers themselves are being tortured and murdered by Ryan's men. Off course the smugglers violate Ryan's isolationistic policy, but the player cannot do otherwise than establishing a firm sense that there is more to the case. What can be smuggled into or out of a place without government to forbid certain enterprises or to collect taxes? In Rand's hyper capitalistic society smuggling is simply an impossibility.

When the player enters the *Smuggler's Hideout* he is confronted by a crucified smuggler. Above his tortured body the word 'smuggler' is written in blood. And at his feet the player finds bibles and crucifixes. No further explanations is made by the game, but the references to Christianity and the crucified Christ cannot be misunderstood. Further in the game the player meets tortured but still living smugglers singing a well know Christian hymn: 'Jesus loves me, this I know / For the Bible tells me so / Little ones to Him belong / They are weak but He is strong.' Other *splicers* (ADAM addicts) roam the borders of Rapture ranting: 'I'm sorry, Father... (...) Father...Why have you forsaken me? (...) Jesus! God! Somebody help!'

Bioshock criticizes Rand's hyper capitalistic utopia of Galt's Gulch by turning it into the dystopian fantasy of Rapture. According to Levine's creation, egoism, the lack of a central government and the absence of hope of a better life for the 'majority of mediocrity' leads inevitably to civil war, chaos and anarchy, and therefore to the end of the Randian utopia. Very remarkable is the role of Christianity within this dystopian criticism of Rand. While Rand herself was very critical about religion, in Rapture Christendom is the only thing so radically opposed to Randian capitalism, that its devotees are mercilessly murdered. Because if egoism is Rand's paramount virtue, than the inherent altruism of the Christian faith and tradition is the absolute opposite of everything Rand stood for. Levine uses the Christian tradition to enforce his already heavy criticism on Rand's political and economical utopia.

2. Noach's Arc Revisited. Brink (2011)

The game *Brink* takes place in the midst of the 21st century on an enormous floating city, called 'the Ark'.⁴ Originally the Ark was constructed off the coast of San Francisco as an experimental, self-sustaining, self-sufficient, climate neutral, man-made super island, designed to support around 5000 people. The island/boat is made of genetically-modified species of coral, called Arkoral, which is supposed to be stronger than steel. The highly ideological motivated original population of the Ark, called 'the Founders', moved the Ark to a certain position on one of the world's oceans. When the Earth's oceans and seas started to rapidly rise for further unexplained reasons (presumably because of global warming) the Ark soon became a place of refuge from the floated landmasses.

The Founders relocated the Ark because of the massive amounts of refugees coming to the island seeking shelter, but without success. The desperation of the refugees was soon exploited by smugglers, charging impossible high amounts of cash for a safe journey to the Ark. A large number of boats never reached the Ark because of bad water, bad equipment or straight on murder by the

4 <http://www.brinkthegame.com> - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iG-zbNn2at0>.

ruthless smugglers. The number of refugees was too high for the Ark to harbor in terms of mere space, water and food. The Ark was only constructed to sustain 5000 people, a number very soon heightened to 45.000 people.

Soon the Ark lost contact with the outside world, presumably because everything else on earth was swallowed by the rising waters. The ‘Guests’, as the new arrivals were euphemistically dubbed by the Founders, built enormous ghettos of sea containers at the rims of the man-made island. Initially grateful for the rescue the Guests soon began to rise against the Founders, because of the ‘Apartheid’ between the two sections. The Founders keep on living in relatively health and wealth, keeping all of the essential positions within the Ark’s society. The Guests are ‘located’ in the overpopulated ghettos, exposed to all kinds of shortages and contagious diseases. Civil war seems inevitable, while both sides can make a more or less equal moral claim: the Founders want to defend the order on the Ark for the benefit of all, while the Guests want a more equal division of the Ark’s stocks. Both sides however are forgetting something. The Founders cannot image the poverty and despair of the Guests, while the refugees wrongly believe that the Ark has enough resources for everyone which is definitely not the case.

Now both sides have armed themselves: the Security Forces against the Resistance. And the player has to choose one side, to lead that side to victory over the other. As sad before, as both sides can secure a certain moral claim to back up their actions, the moral balance between the two groups seems to be perfectly even. It is to the player to decide which side wins, and which side loses. It is quite an impossible choice to make, which is exactly the point the game director Paul Wedgwood seems to impose upon the player: there are no obvious ‘good’ or ‘bad’ guys in this game. While playing as a team member of one of the two sides, the player learns that both the Founders and the Resistance have kept secrets for each other and for their own members. The Resistance frantically wants to lay contact with the outside world for help, the Founders already tried to do likewise. Their scouting pilots were however brutally tortured by the survivors of the float to describe the exact location of the Ark, which would inevitably lead to the conquest of the Ark. The leader of the Resistance, at the other hand, finds out that the Arkoral of which the Ark is made, is slowly beginning to disintegrate, jeopardizing everyone on board. He refuses to make his findings public, especially not to the Founders.

Brink sketches most clearly a utopia gone terribly wrong. Out of the noble intentions of the environmentalist Founders a terrible new world emerged from the waters of the world-wide flood. What started as an experiment on sustainability ended into a civil war about the sparse resources left on earth. The utopia was not in itself wrong nor is it criticized by the game as such. Unfortunately for the Founders, the disaster they were planning to counteract with their ‘green’ experiment, catch up with them before anytime could be learnt from the experiment. The utopia of the Ark changed into the dystopia of the civil war between Security and Resistance, between Founders and Guests,

not because of the inherent flaws in the utopian ideology, but because of global warming and a following ecological apocalypse.

The dystopian world the Ark has become, is a clear criticism by the game producers on several, very real and actual problems in our late-modern society: ecology and mass immigration. Global warming is threatening hundreds of millions because of the rising of the water levels worldwide. More and more inhabitable land will be swallowed by the sea, leaving sparse resources – land, food, water, energy – as the object of increasing tension between nations, regions, cities and even individuals. *Brink* warns us for the political, sociological and economical consequences of global warming by creating an dystopia of a future which is very likely to be just like the game predicts.

The second criticism of *Brink* is about the also very real and actual problem of mass immigration. Lured by the wealth of the Western world, deceived by ruthless smugglers, desperate to find something of a future millions of third world émigrés try to find a new home in Europe and North America. Every day hundred men, women and children try to cross the Mediterranean Sea, to land on one of the Greek or Italian islands, hoping to appeal for a residence permit. And the same amount of people try to cross the desert between Texas, USA and Mexico, hoping to find jobs in the ‘Land of the Free’.

Politics, civil protesters and nongovernmental organizations (NGO’s) alike tend to have the habit of voicing only one side of the problem. On the one side concerned (mostly right-winged) politicians warn us that the West is not capable of absorbing these kind of numbers of émigrés without a serious threat to the stability of the fabric of society. Western countries, so they plead, cannot take all those refugees in and provide shelter, education and work for all. At the other side, activists and protesters emphasize the moral obligation of the ‘rich’ West to help those less fortunate. They point to the incredible wealth of the western world and ask rhetorically if one could not hope to share some of this wealth with the poor émigrés from third world countries. *Brink* shows the two sides of the same coin, without taking a stand on either side, letting the player the decision about who is (more) right or wrong. Both sides have valid arguments and both sides are to be blamed for some part of the civil problems caused by mass immigration.

Brink features religion in a most indirect way, hardly visible for the untrained eye. There are no visible traces of religion on the Ark, nor with the Founders, nor with the Guests. Religion seems to be obliterated by the ecological Apocalypse letting the Ark to be the only place on earth save for the rising of the world’s seas. The Ark is named after the coral Arkoral, as the game explains while playing it, but in fact it is the other way around. Arkoral is named after the Ark, as a late-modern interpretation of the Genesis story of Noach’s Ark, reinterpreting the Christian concept of ‘ancestral sin’ in socio-ecological terms. In chapters 6 through 9 of Genesis the world is floated by waters,

because of God's anger with the sins of mankind. Only Noach, his family and a selection of animals survived the water apocalypse in a special designed boat, called the Ark. Noach's Ark was the only place where mankind could survive and eventually start anew. The parallel with the Ark of *Brink* is undeniable, and so is the reference to the biblical story.

There is however still a deeper level of the connection between the flood of *Brink* and the notion of mankind's sin. In Christian tradition the theological notion of 'original' (or 'ancestral sin') is widely known. In its core this theological notion is based on Genesis chapter 3 in which Adam and Eve are cast out of Eden because they violated God's commandment not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. From this story theologians like Augustine of Hippo, Martin Luther and Karl Barth have developed a full-fledged doctrine of Original sin, both referring to the primordial sin of Adam and Eve (*peccatorum originale originans*) and the ancestral sin of every man and woman somehow transferred from Adam and Eve to every human person ever born (*peccatum originale originatum*). All men have sinned because of Adam (Wiley 2002, p. 5).

The French philosopher Pascal Bruckner links the idea of an ecological apocalypse explicitly to the Christian notion of ancestral sin. In his book *La fanatisme de l'apocalypse* (2011, translated in English in 2013) In our agnostic society 'Ecologism' is the new religion. Bruckner: 'Consider the meaning in contemporary jargon of the famous carbon footprint that we all leave behind us. What is it, after all, if not the gaseous equivalent of Original Sin, of the stain that we inflict on our Mother Gaia by the simple fact of being present and breathing? We can all gauge the volume of our emissions, day after day, with the injunction to curtail them, just as children saying their catechisms are supposed to curtail their sins.' (p. 2) The French philosopher warns us that this 'credo of ecologism' has drafted a whole apocalyptic scenery and narrative 'already tried out of communism', and is borrowing from 'Gnosticism and medieval forms of messianism.' The 'prophets' of ecologism, as Al Gore and sir Martin Rees, 'constantly beat the drums of panic and call upon us to expiate our sins before it is too late.'

Brink reinterprets not only the biblical story of Noach's Ark, but also the old theological notion of original and ancestral sin. Traditionally Adam's sin is thought of as a biological or even metaphysical reality, closely connected with sexuality. *Brink* however changes the notion of original sin to a socio-ecological level. The sins both the Founders and the Guests gave to face are the collective sins of their ancestors, the generations who lived before them on the face of the earth, and who are responsible for the environmental condition from which the ecological catastrophe could take place. The ancestral sins of *Brink* do press on the actual living generation of the Ark, but are actually derived from the faults of former generations. The dystopia of *Brink* is primarily ecological in form, but is on a deeper level charged with the Christian notion of original sin. The Christian tradition is used on a very implicit level by *Brink*'s developers to express the immanent dark world which seems to arise from our own present.

3. The Abbey of the Everyman. Dishonored (2012)

The game *Dishonored* takes place in the industrial city of Dunwell, modeled on the actual cities of London and Edinburgh between the late 1800's and the early 1900's.⁵ Like *Bioshock* the game features a retro-futuristic scenery in which steam-powered technology and otherworldly forces coexist. More specifically *Dishonored* is considered as one of the first commercial 'Steampunk' games on the market.⁶ The dystopian city of Dunwell is clearly a criticism on industrialization and the unethical use of technology. When philosopher Esmond Roseburrow discovers the hidden power of whale oil, the steam powered machinery of Dunwell succeeds in reaching a technological level equal to that of the West just before the First World War.

Initially Dunwell is ruled by the empress Jessamine Kaldwin, a kind of Platonic 'enlightened despot', but when she is murdered a downright dictatorship is established by the Lord Regent Hiram Burrows and the High Overseer Thaddeus Campbell. The city is stricken with a plague spread by rats and dogs which is killing the poor and isolating the rich. The infected, known as 'weepers', cry blood and can become violent. The government uses the plague as an excuse to take or purge citizens as they wish. Order is maintained by the Tallboys, heavily armored officers on tall, mechanical legs, and districts are separated by barriers known as 'Walls of Light', which are made of energy and disintegrate people who try to cross them.

The player takes the role of Corvo Attano, the empress' special agent and body guard. Corvo is framed for the murder on the empress and the sequential kidnapping of her daughter, the Young Lady Emily by both the Lord Regent and the High Overseer. A covert group of activists, the Loyalists, plots to overthrow the government and install the Empress' daughter as the new Empress. They aid Corvo as well as they can. The player, in charge of Corvo's character, can choose from two different 'paths' to solve the game: violence or tactics. The player can choose to shoot everything and everyone on sight, adding to the gloom and darkness of the game world. Or the player can choose to tiptoe around most of his adversaries, only knock some minor enemies unconscious and get rid of his most important enemies by clever use of tactics and diplomacy, adding to the lightness and eventually salvation of Dunwell.

Within the dystopian society of Dunwell religion plays an important role, not in the form of traditional Christianity, but in the form of imaginary religion known as 'the Abbey of the Everyman'. The Order received a sort of 'kick-start' during the events known as 'the Siege of the White Cliffs', Whitecliff being the name of a nearby city. The order member, called 'the Overseers' purged the city of 'heretics, witches and thralls of the Outsider'. (More information about the

⁵ <http://www.dishonored.com/> - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zcSc4uBc3nQ>.

⁶ Steampunk is a sub-genre of science fiction that typically features steam-powered machinery, especially in a setting inspired by industrialized Western civilization during the 19th century (Donovan, 2011).

Outsider will be given later in this article.) The Abbey succeeded in becoming the most powerful religions fraction on the island of Grislor, on which both Dunwell and Whitecliff are situated. The overseers are tasked with several civil duties like officiating marriages, regulating the isle's calendar (with 13 months of 28 days) and the Feast of Fugue. This feast is supposed to commence the time between the last day of the last month and the beginning of the new year. This day is said to exist outside time. Any events that occur during this period are not recognized to be happened at all, giving the population free reign to commit inappropriate, immoral and even criminal acts without official consequences. A parallel to our feast of Carnival is obvious visible.

When the actions of the game take place, the Abbey controls the public and spiritual life of the citizens of Dunwell by the authority of the High Overseer Thaddeus Campbell. Supported by the Lord Regent who took control of the city after the assassination of the empress, the Abbey starts an ongoing raid against all supposed heretics in the city by means of the seizure of property, financial recompense, public humiliation, service to the order, prison time and public burnings of heretics and witches. The plague that is ravishing through the streets (probably be spread by the vast amounts of rats in the city) is connected by the Order to the 'impurities' within certain heretical elements in the society. The Order has no stated deity, but its primary theology consists of the idea that the 'universe is unknowably vast and swarming with all manner of dangerous spirits and forces, most of which are hostile to man's existence'. Citizens are encouraged to put their devotion and faith in the Abbey, assuming a role as spiritual guard dog or official Magisterium. No other religions are allowed and everyone who dares to question the authority of the Order is merciless killed.

The Abbey's most important reason of existence is to stand against a mysterious figure, known as 'the Outsider'. The Outsider, only rarely to be seen by certain individuals (amongst others by Corvo), is thought of as being part angel, part demon, and is associated with everything magical and supernatural, like runes and bone charms the player can find during the game. (Surprisingly enough the Order itself deals with astrology, which is not thought of as 'magical'.) The Outsider is actually more a morally neutral force within the reality of the game, seemingly only occupied by following 'interesting' people. The deity seems to be habitually bored and in constant need of distraction, like delivered by Corvo. His shrines and devotees can be found throughout the game world, heavily opposed by the Order. The Outsider is associated in the book *Spirit of the Deep* (to be found in the level 'Dunwell Sewers') with a primordial 'whale' or 'Leviathan', lurking in the deep waters of the oceans around the isles. The bone charms and the runes within the game are made of whale bones. And when an antagonist of Corvo dies, she cries out: 'Bones of the great Leviathan, protect me!'

Because the technology of Dunwell is so closely connected with whale oil as its primary source of power, the Outsider seems to have a far greater influence on reality than the Overseers think. The association with Leviathan is therefore not without meaning. Leviathan (or 'Levithian')

is a mysterious, legendary and primordial ‘monster’, often thought of living in the oceans. ‘You crushed the heads of the monster Leviathan, then fed him to wild creatures in the desert.’ (Ps. 74,14; cf. Ps. 104,26; Is. 27,1; 2 Esd. 6,52)⁷ Sometimes Leviathan is named with its ‘twin’ monster Behemoth: ‘You named two of these living creatures: one was Behemoth, and the other was Leviathan.’ (2 Esd. 6,49) In the book of Job the Lord replies to Job’s accusation by provoking him to take charge of the monsters of the primordial chaos himself (as God does every day). ‘Can you catch a sea monster [‘Leviathan’ in Hebrew] by using a fishhook? Can you tie its mouth shut with a rope? Can it be led around by a ring in its nose or a hook in its jaw? Will it beg for mercy?’ (Job 41,1–34) The majority of translators choose to translate ‘Behemoth’ and ‘Leviathan’ into existing animals, but it is far more likely these two form two symbols of the primordial chaos from which God created the heaven and the earth, as narrated in the first two chapters of Genesis (Good 1990).

If the Outsider of *Donshonored* is associated with ‘sea monsters’, ‘monstrous white whale’ and even with Leviathan himself, he symbolizes chaos and anarchy within the narrative of the game. His decisions are not immoral, but a-moral, his grace is arbitrary and prayers directed to him are more or less meaningless. His is associated with the primal chaos before creation, with the supernatural, and with magic and witchcraft. The Abbey of the Everyman, not accidentally (or inconveniently) abbreviated as ‘the Order’, is the Outsider’s opposite, fighting everything the Outsider stands for. The Abbey stands for order, discipline, separation and rationality, but also for the inclination of domination and control. Contrary to its name the Abbey is not ‘of every man’, but is closely connected to the elite of Dunwell, law enforcement and city politics, sharing its corruption and its oppression of the common people.

Within the animistic reality of *Dishonored*, religion – in the form of the Abbey of the Everyman – does not criticize the dystopian society the game depicts, but – quite the opposite – reinforces the dark and dangerous world of Dunwell. The Abbey is aggressively monotheistic, hunting down everyone who does not agree on their beliefs and theology. Instead of defending the rights of the common people, they have jointed the intellectual and political elite of Dunwell to combine their strength in a never-ending search for power and control. The terminology of ‘disease’, ‘purity’ and ‘plague’ adopted by the Abbey, helps to divide the society between ‘good’ and ‘back’ along simplistic lines, set by the Order. The religion of *Dishonored* is an integral part of the dystopia of Dunwell.

⁷ All Biblical quotations are taken from the Contemporary English Version (1995).

4. The Lamb of Comstock. Bioshock Infinite (2013)

Six years after the initial *Bioshock*, Ken Levine produced the game *Bioshock Infinite*, also featuring a dystopian society drawn in retro futuristic colors, combined with steam punk influence (as *Dishonored* did earlier).⁸ In 1893 the United States government built a floating island based on an unknown technology called ‘quantum levitation’. It was constructed for the World’s Columbian Exposition of 1893 in Chicago, commemorating the 400th anniversary of the arrival of Christopher Columbus in the New World (1492), and intended to be a ‘floating world’s fair’ honoring the greatness of the American nation. The floating city, named ‘Columbia’ after the female personification of the United States, was built in the French neoclassical style of Daniel Burnham and Frederik Law Olmstead, who also designed a number of impressive buildings for the Columbian World Fair, concentrating on the concepts of the ‘Beaux Arts’: symmetry, balance and splendor (Gilbert 2009).

Unfortunately Columbia got involved in an international ‘incident’. Apparently it fired on Chinese civilians during the (historical) ‘Boxer Rebellion’ of 1899-1901. Unmasked as a weapon of mass destruction, the embarrassed US government banned Columbia from its territory, leading to the disappearance of the floating city into the clouds and harsh civil riots on Columbia itself. When the player enters Columbia in the person of Brooker DeWitt (who will be discussed in more details below), only two factions are left, bitterly striving each other for the supremacy over the power of Columbia’s weaponry. The Founders, led by a mysterious ‘Prophet’ called Zachary Hale Comstock, are at the upper hand. The Founders, who named themselves after the Founding Fathers of America (Washington, Franklin, Jefferson and the like) are basically ultra nationalistic white supremacists. They proclaiming ‘Father Comstock’ as the true ideological successor of the Founding Fathers, giving birth to an unholy alliance between American exceptionalism and religious zeal. A fanatical fraction of the Founders, called the ‘Fraternal Order of the Raven’ even worship Lincoln’s murderer, John Booth, as the glorious killer of the ‘Great Apostate’. Lincoln is famous for his abolishing of slavery in the United States. According to Ken Levine himself the competing ‘Vox Populi’ (‘the voice of the people’) are molded to the anarchistic and violent terrorist group the *Rote Armee Fraktion* (Bertz 2010). Headed by Daisy Fitzroy, the Vox Populi has developed from a civil movement against the racism and elitism of the Founders into a terrorist organization, equally cruel and violent as the ones they fight against.

Levine explicitly stated that one of the major themes of *Bioshock Infinite* is the criticism on the concept of American exceptionalism (Matos 2010). The World Fair of 1893, held in the United States is considered as one of the birth grounds of this still popular notion (Gilbert, 2009). The

8 <http://www.2kgames.com/bioshock/> - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bLHW78X1XeE>.

American political sociologist Seymour Lipset (1922- 2006) defined ‘American exceptionalism’ as the idea that the United States of America are ‘qualitatively different’ from other nations, the so called ‘first new nation’ (Lipset 1996). This notion is based on egalitarianism, individualism, republicanism, populism and laissez faire capitalism, thought off as all belonging to the one American history and culture. The origin of this exceptionalism is often linked to the words of the French philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-1859), who was visiting the young American nation, thinking it was rather ‘exceptional’ among the nations (Tocqueville 1840), a notion later adopted by numerous generations of American intellectuals (Pease 2009). The political scientist Richard Rose summarized American exceptionalism as: ‘America marches to a different drummer. Its uniqueness is explained by any or all of a variety of reasons: history, size, geography, political institutions, and culture. Explanations of the growth of government in Europe are not expected to fit American experience, and vice versa.’ (Rose 1989)

As stated earlier in this article, the game *Bioshock Infinite* links the notion of American exceptionalism to Christianity, giving the whole notion a religious inclination. And this link is not without historical backup. Historically the idea of American exceptionalism has been linked to the puritan tradition (Gandziarowski 2010). Puritanism is a religious movement, started within the Church of England in the 16th and 17th century, influenced by the reformer John Calvin (1509-1564) and aiming at the purification of the established church’s morals, theology and worship. While gaining some influence in England during the English Civil War and Interregnum (1643-1660) a great number of Puritans fled to the New World, trying to establish a ‘new Eden’ along their own religious beliefs (Bremer 2009).

One of the most influential Puritan leaders going to America, was John Winthrop (1587/8-1649). Still aboard the migrant ship *Arbella*, he described in a sermon in 1630, the future of the Massachusetts Bay colonists. He referred to the city they were about to found (Boston) as ‘the city on the hill’. The notion of ‘the city on the hill’ is drawn from a passage from the Gospel of Matthew (5,13-16): ‘You are like salt for everyone on earth. But if salt no longer tastes like salt, how can it make food salty? All it is good for is to be thrown out and walked on. You are like light for the whole world. A city built on top of a hill cannot be hidden, and no one would light a lamp and put it under a clay pot. A lamp is placed on a lampstand, where it can give light to everyone in the house. Make your light shine, so that others will see the good that you do and will praise your Father in heaven.’ In their own view the New England Puritans were not mere political refugees fleeing to avoid persecution, but missionaries intent on setting up a light to the nations. (Litke 2012) In American folklore this notion has lived on to present day in phrase as ‘God’s own country’ and ‘the shining city upon the hill’. Both Democratic (John F. Kennedy) and Republican politicians (Ronald Reagan) have used the phrase to underline their patriotism, but the notion has become more and more the ‘possession’ of ‘neocons’ like Gary Bauer, Sarah Palin and Michael Regan.

The link between Christianity and American Exceptionalism is clearly established in the dystopian society of Columbia. The player enters Columbia as Booker DeWitt by passing through a candle-lit shrine dedicated to the Prophet Comstock and his deceased wife, the Lady Comstock. The stained glasses feature three Founding Fathers, depicted as traditional Roman Catholic saints, complete with ‘attributes’, virtues and Latin phrases. Washington holds a sword, symbol of strength. Franklin has got a key, symbol of justice. And Jefferson holds on to a scroll, symbol of wisdom. The only possible entrance to the city itself is through a church-like structure, ending in a shallow water-basin. Preacher Witting is ready to baptize everyone wanting to enter in the name of the Prophet and the Three Fathers. Witting’s baptism is by full body emersion, and DeWitt almost gets drown in the process.

When mysteriously ending up in the city, he ventures deeper into the city to an enormous tower, where a strange girl named Elizabeth is kept. Comstock claims she is his daughter, predestinated to become the next leader of Columbia. She is revered as the ‘Lamb of Columbia’ and a ‘miracle child’ by the people of Columbia. Comstock warns the people constantly for the coming of a ‘false prophet’, unquestionably being Brooker DeWitt. When DeWitt managed to free Elizabeth from her prison, the intertwined live lines of Elizabeth, Brooker and Comstock are revealed. The narrative of *Bioshock Infinite* is highly complex, even for the genre it belongs to. The main reason is the existence within the reality of Columbia of parallel universes and the possibility to travel between them by a machine called the Trans Dimensional Device, making it possible for one and the same person to exist more than once in the same reality. DeWitt’s storyline is only fully revealed at the end of the game, but needs to be told chronologically.

Born on the 19th of April 1974 the young Brooker jointed the American 17th Cavalry Regiment at the age of 17. Accused of being of native American birth, he viciously murdered all the Indians he came across, culminating in the (historical) blood bath of Wounded Knee in 1890. Brooker generally became overcome by grief and guilt, until meeting a preacher, baptizing people in the river, by the name of the aforementioned Witting. At this point there are two possible realities to keep in mind. In the first reality Brooker lets himself be baptized, eventually becoming the Prophet Comstock. Convinced his is chosen by God to purify the decadent American society, he seizes hold of Columbia, making it into his own ‘new Eden’ as the true inheritor of the Founding Fathers. Booker/Comstock succeeds in taking control because of the trans dimensional device by which he can predict the future. His frequent travels make him sterile, to the grief of both him and his wife.

In the second reality, that of the Brooker the player controls in *Bioshock Infinite*, refuses the baptism by Witting, only to fall even deeper in alcoholism and debts. On a night, an agent of Comstock (Brooker in the other dimension) offers to trade Brooker’s only child, called Anna (the later Elizabeth of Columbia) ‘to wipe away the debts.’ Brooker accepts, but regrets its immediately.

Alas, he is too late to stop Comstock from abducting his ‘own daughter’ from another universe. Later on, the unbaptized Brooker is taken through a dimensional port by two repentant scientists (Rosalind and Robert Lutece) who invented the trans dimension device, to reclaim his daughter and to stop Comstock (thus himself). The tattoo ‘AD’ on Brooker’s hand only appears on the second (unbaptized) Brooker, as a memory of Anna Comstock, but also as a reference to the title Elizabeth received in Columbia. ‘AD’ stands for *Agnus Dei*, ‘Lamb of God’ in Latin, with all the liturgical and biblical notions associated to it.

Eventually Brooker succeeds in finding himself as Comstock, only to kill his baptized version by smashing him to a baptismal font and drowning him consecutively. When Elizabeth is finally freed of all bonds he supernatural ability to make ‘tears’ in the walls between the parallel universes, the player learns by her hand his own back story, especially that Brooker and Comstock are one and the same persona. The game ends with Anna/Elizabeth and Brooker standing at the river where Witting is performing his baptisms. Anna’s and Elizabeth’s of countless parallel universes urge Brooker to end Comstock’s nightmare once and for all. Brooker realizes only one solution is definite: he give himself into the hands of his daughters from the parallel universes who drown him on the spot. His last words are: ‘It is finished’, a reference to Christ’s last words on the Cross (Jh. 19,30).

The religious based American exceptionalism of the Comstock’s Columbia is the firm ground on which Ken Levine has created his second dystopian society. Levine explicitly wanted to criticize the American feeling of moral and technological superiority, supposedly given by God himself. Historians like Howard Zinn (1922–2010) have argued that American history isn’t just imperfect, but filled with morally questionable politics and ethics like slavery, civil rights struggles and social welfare issues. America cannot be an exemplar of virtue (Zinn 2003). ‘God’s own country’ is an utopia gone wild into the dystopian horror of Columbia, just like Rapture in the earlier *Bioshock* was Rand’s utopia destroyed in the face of harsh reality. The religious zeal of Puritanism and the ‘faith’ in the moral purity of the Founding Fathers and the American culture for which they stand, did not deliver a new Eden, but a dark and dangerous place full of racial and civil riots, with a distorted hint of Christian morality poured over it to hide the stench. The Christianity of *Bioshock Infinite*’s Columbia is an integral part of Levine’s dystopia, adding to the suppression of the ‘lesser’ people: ‘Papists, Gypsies, Irish, Greeks’, as Comstock at one point summarizes. Comstock’s actual ‘city in the sky’ is a decadent and violent cry from Winthrop’s idealistic ‘city on the hill’.

5. Conclusions

After examining *Bioshock*, *Brink*, *Dishonored* and *Bioshock Infinite*, some conclusions can be drawn. As said before all the games feature a dystopian scenery and narrative. And all the games feature a form of organized religion, most notably Christianity. The role of that religion within the dystopian setting is however quite different from game to game.

All four games criticize certain political, economical or philosophical notions of ideas by ‘putting them into the real world’ to see what will go wrong. *Bioshock* criticizes Ayn Rand’s laissez faire capitalism by creating a Galt’s Gulch on the bottom of the ocean. *Bioshock Infinite* criticizes the notion of American exceptionalism including its (semi)religious foundation and symbolism. *Dishonored* criticizes the unholy union between secular and religious powers into an almost unstoppable force, which is only aimed at self perseverance. And *Brink* criticizes both the way modern man treats the environment, and the one dimensional ‘solutions’ provided by some politicians and intellectuals from both ‘the left’ (‘let everyone in’) and ‘the right’ (‘keep everyone out’) for the Western problems with mass emigration.

The dystopian worlds of the game all started as utopian fantasies (with the exception of *Dishonored*, which society never was ideal or ‘utopian’). Rapture (*Bioshock*) started out as an Randian utopia in which ‘the great would not be constrained by the small’. Columbia (*Bioshock Infinite*) started as a prestige project of the American government, later ceased by Comstock who had plans for his own utopia, modeled after (his interpretation) of the ideas of the Founding Fathers and the image of the God sanctioned ‘city on the hill’. And the floating island the Ark (*Brink*) also started from an utopian dream: to life in a climate neutral society in harmony with the environment. All three utopias felt prey to anarchy and chaos. Rapture crumbled because of the anarchy of egoism, and Columbia because of its believed white supremacy. And the Ark is about to sink into the ocean because of the *hubris* of its creators and because of the uncontrollable amounts of refugees.

Except for *Brink*, all the games feature a retro futuristic scenery and narrative. Retro futurism paints an image of our future seen from the past. The technology of *Bioshock*, *Bioshock Infinite* and *Dishonored* is more advanced than that of our own in the beginning of the 21st century, but is suggest to exist in our relative past. *Dishonored* uses whale oil to boost the technology of a society much like that of England in the 19th/20th century. *Bioshock Infinite* suggests that a certain sort of ‘quantum physics’ has been utilized around the passing of the 19th to the 20th century to built a flying city that even would not be possible to construct nowadays. And in *Bioshock* an underwater world has been built in the sixties of the last century, which – similar to *Infinite* – cannot be built even by today’s standards. Paradoxically this ‘alternative present’ of the retro futuristic genre

suggest an even more real threat to our society than dystopian fantasies taking place in a far and distant future. The dystopia of the four games are not so much a warning of a *future* dark world which will be realized if nothing is done to prevent so, as it is a warning that our *present* day world has already began to turn into a dystopia.

The Christian religion plays an important role in three of the four discussed dystopian games. *Dishonored* features a non-Christian religion and will be discussed later on. The role of Christianity in *Bioshock*, *Bioshock Infinite* and *Brink* is not unambiguous. In *Bioshock* Christianity is used as a part of the game creator's criticism on the dystopian narrative. Christianity and its inherent altruism is the perfect critique of and antidote for the egoism of Randian hyper capitalism. In *Bioshock Infinite* however, the same Christian tradition (in the Puritan form) is depicted as a part of the dystopian narrative itself. The American exceptionalism of Columbia and its Prophet are expressed in clearly Christian words and symbols. The Christianity of *Bioshock* defends the weak and the poor, while the Christianity of *Bioshock Infinite* helps to subject the needy to the will of the powerful. In *Brink* Christianity itself is not explicitly used, but by naming the floating island 'the Ark', the creators of the game hint to a surprising link between the theological notion of primordial and ancestral sin, the Biblical story of Noah's Arc and the ecological disaster taking place within the game narrative. Christianity nor supports nor opposes the dystopian narrative of *Brink*, but – at a deeper level – provides ingredients for the narrative itself. In *Dishonored* religion altogether is considered a part of the dystopian narrative of the game.

Religion and dystopia are not an unusually couple, nor in dystopian literature, nor in dystopian videogames. Religion is seen both as the criticaster of the dystopian society and as an integral part of the dystopia. All four games warns our modern day society that institutionalized religion has a Janus face: oppression and liberation, altruism and racism. No one knows to which side our future will fall: to utopia or dystopia. Nor does anyone know to which side Christianity and institutionalized religion will fall: against or in line with the utopia/dystopia. *Bioshock*, *Brink*, *Dishonored* and *Bioshock Infinite* warns us that religion is a human phenomenon not be thought lightly of or to be toyed with. It is capable of releasing and focusing the best mankind has to offer. And at the same time it is able to give birth to the greatest oppression imaginable: the oppression of the mind. Elizabeth is Comtock's lamb, to be sacrificed for our sins. Hopefully it will be otherwise.

Bibliography

Arkane Studios 2012, *Dishonored*, PC, videogame, Bethesda Softworks, Rockville, Maryland.

- Baccolini, R & Moylan, T (eds.) 2003, *Dark horizons. Science fiction and the dystopian imagination*, Routledge, New York
- Balasopoulos, A 2011, 'Anti-Utopia and Dystopia: Rethinking the Generic Field', in V Vlastaras (ed.), *Utopia Project Archive, 2006-2010*, School of Fine Arts Publications, Athens
- Bosman, F 2013, 'Christenen zijn geen Atlassen', in P van Geest (ed.), *Vrienden met de Mammon. De levensbeschouwelijke dimensie in de economie*, Parthenon, Almere
- Bremer, F 2009, *Puritanism. A very short introduction*, Oxford University Press, New York
- Bruckner, P 2013, *The fanaticism of the Apocalypse. Save the earth, punish human beings*, Polity Pres, Cambridge
- Den Uyl, D & Rasmussen, D (eds.) 1984, *The Philosophical Thought of Ayn Rand*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana
- Bertz, M 2010, 'Columbia. A city divided', in *Gameinformer.com*, 12-09-10
- Donovan, A 2011, *The art of steampunk. Extraordinary devices and ingenious contraptions from the leading artists of the steampunk movement*, Fox Chapel Pub., East Petersburg
- Ferns, C 1999, *Narrating utopia. Ideology, gender, form in utopian literature*, Liverpool University Press, Liverpool
- Gandziarowski, A 2010, *The Puritan Legacy to American Politics*, Grin Verlag, München
- Gilbert, J 2009, *Whose fair? Experience, memory, and the history of the great St. Louis Exposition*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago
- Good, E 1990, *In Turns of the Tempest. A Reading of Job with a translation*, Stanford University Press, Stanford
- Guffey, E 2006, *Retro: The Culture of Revival*, Reaktion, London
- Heller, A 2009, *Ayn Rand and the world she made*, Nan A. Talese/Doubleday, New York
- Irrational Games 2007, *Bioshock*, PC, videogame, 2K Boston/2K Australia, Novato, California
- Irrational Games 2013, *Bioshock Infinite*, PC, videogame, 2K Boston/2K Australia, Novato, California
- Lipset, S 1996, *American Exceptionalism: A Double-Edged Sword*, W.W. Norton & Co., New York
- Litke, J 2012, 'Varieties of American Exceptionalism: Why John Winthrop Is No Imperialist', in *Journal of Church and State*, vol. 54, pp. 197–213

- Matos , X de 2010, 'BioShock Infinite Interview: Ken Levine on Exceptionalism, Expectations & Returning to the Well', in *Shacknews*, 12-09-10.
- Moylan, T 2000, *Scraps of the untainted sky. Science fiction, utopia, dystopia*, Westview Press, Boulder
- Pease, D 2009, *The New American Exceptionalism*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis
- Peikoff, L 1991, *Objectivism. The philosophy of Ayn Rand*, Dutton, New York
- Rand, A 1943, *The Fountainhead*, Bobbs-Merrill Co., Indianapolis
- Rand, A 1956, *Atlas Shrugged*, Random House, New York
- Rose, R 1989, 'How Exceptional is the American Political Economy?', in *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 104, no. 1, pp. 91-115
- Sargent, L 1994, 'The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited', in *Utopian Studies*, vol. 5, no. 1, pp. 1-37
- Splash Damage 2011, *Brink*, PC, videogame, Bethesda Softworks, Rockville, Maryland.
- Trahair, R 1999, *Utopias and Utopians. An historical dictionary*, Greenwood Press, Westport
- Tocqueville, A de 1840, *Democracy in America*, Saunders and Otley, London
- Wiley, T 2002, *Original sin. Origins, developments, contemporary meanings*, Paulist Press, New York
- Zinn, H 2033, *A people's history of the United States: 1492-present*, Perennial, New York

Biography

Frank G. Bosman (PhD) is a cultural theologian from the Tilburg School of Catholic Theology in the Netherlands. In December 2013 he hopes to defend his doctoral thesis on the ‘Sound Theology’ of the German, catholic and Dadaistic artist Hugo Ball. Bosman is the author of many articles and books about the relation between culture, theology and faith, focusing on the role of religion and religious themes in video games. Visit his weblog: goedgezelschap.eu.

Frank G. Bosman, PhD
Tilburg School of Catholic Theology
Luce/Centrum voor Religieuze Communicatie
PO Box 90153
5000 LE Tilburg, Netherlands
www.luce.nl – www.lucepedia.nl
f.g.bosman@tilburguniversity.edu