

The Art of Time Project's

Recommended Video Games List

Welcome to The Art of Project's recommended video games list. This is the third instalment of different resources I recommend when exploring concepts of time and temporality. While reading books can be a useful learning tool, and watching films can be entertaining, nothing quite pulls you into a situation like a video game. In many modern games, you play the part of some character, navigate the world, and make choices. While games like these are a lot of fun, they can also raise significant philosophical questions.

This list features video games which involve, or have implications for, the philosophy of time in some way. They may encourage you to consider different themes of time and temporality more illustratively. Such themes include what it means to persist through time and change, the nature of the past and our connection to past events, and the future and whether it is predestined.

There is also a second section to this list, consisting of quick, simple games that do not deal with the philosophy of time but are brilliant exercises for easing you into a mindset for engaging with philosophy. I highly recommend having a look at this!

I have personally written a summary of each game, explaining the content, and why I have recommended it. I have also included details such as the year it was made, the genre, the difficulty, the age rating*, and where to find and play these games.

If there are any video games you would like to recommend, please message me via the contact page on the website and I will make every effort to play it. If you have any questions about any of the games listed here, again, please feel free to contact me.

Enjoy playing!

Kerry Langsdale

*I have not included content warnings because I do not believe I can adequately provide a complete list. Some of these games do include content which may be difficult or disturbing. Please check the content of each game before playing if this is a concern.

Philosophy of Time and Video Games

SOMA

Year: 2015

Genre: Survival horror – Single-player

Language: English

Age Certification: 16+

Summary:

An incredibly tense and captivating survival horror from Frictional Games (the makers of the famous Amnesia series), SOMA takes place in an underwater research facility, PATHOS-II. As your character, Simon, you are the victim of a serious accident and agree to an experimental brain scan. You lose consciousness and mysteriously wake up almost a century later to find yourself on PATHOS-II. You quickly discover that the Earth has undergone an extinction-level event and only the inhabitants of PATHOS-II survived. You must embark on a mission attempting to ensure both your survival and the continuation of humanity.

SOMA sees you solve a series of puzzles in a hostile environment, surrounded by machines and robots which are eerily human, all while questioning the nature of your own existence. This game has long been considered an excellent example of philosophy, provoking the player to consider the nature of consciousness, artificial intelligence, and the nature of the mind vs the brain.

Regarding the philosophy of time, SOMA asks you to consider the nature of personal identity, how we persist through time and change, and what kinds of change we cannot persist through. Are you one and the same person who started the game? Is the character who started the game, one and the same character as the one who finished it?

Questions of personal identity over time in philosophy can be easily misunderstood, so allow me to make some clarifying remarks. When we ask, 'What does it mean for a person to persist through time?', we are not asking whether you have changed, indeed, we assume that you have undergone change. Instead, we are attempting to determine what conditions we must satisfy to be one and the same individual over time. SOMA is remarkably effective at making the player face this question.

(Spoiler alerts: I recommend reading more *after* you play the game as reading more before playing is likely to diminish the impact of SOMA. To find out more about the underlying philosophy, read up on, or ask me about the following: identity over time, Parfit on survival, Locke on psychological continuity).

This game is available to download on PlayStation 4, Xbox One, and PC (I recommend Steam).

You can expect to pay anything up to £25, although this game is regularly on sale for much less.

The Stanley Parable: Ultra Deluxe

Year: 2022 (An expanded version of 'The Stanley Parable 2013).

Genre: Interactive story adventure - Single player

Language: English, also available in 12 other languages.

Age Certification: No official age rating, however, this game does contain mild threat. Please check if playing with a younger audience.

Summary:

You play Stanley, otherwise known as Employee 427, which is almost completely irrelevant to the game! As the player, you guide Stanley through the story, accompanied by a dryly comedic narrator, who delivers near-constant witty quips reminiscent of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. I could say more, but frankly, the less you know about 'The Stanley Parable' before playing, the more you will get out of it. A large part of engaging with the game is discovering everything for yourself.

Players have praised 'The Stanley Parable' for its philosophical underpinning, linking it to ideas such as existentialism and the theatre of the absurd. One debate that keeps popping up, and my focus here, is the free will versus determinism debate.

Free will is about making choices and being in control of our actions, shaping the future according to what we do now, while determinism says our actions are inevitable, as though there is some cosmic script we're all following and cannot stray from. Some players brush off this debate when it comes to Stanley, arguing that he is clearly making his own decisions, even if the narrator doesn't always approve. But it's not that simple. As Stanley, are you really making genuine choices which throw the narrator off course, or are your choices already predetermined? Does the narrator already have foreknowledge of every one of Stanley's actions?

This is where the philosophy of time comes into play. Does the future already exist? If it does, then do we really have free will? Are we following some unknown cosmic script, doing what we were always going to do? What if the future doesn't yet exist and is being created as we go along? Would this mean we are free to make decisions which shape the future?

'The Stanley Parable' is not just a game; it's a journey through big questions about whether the future is predetermined and we're just along for the ride or if we're steering the ship ourselves.

Availability:

This game is available to download on PlayStation 4 and 5, Xbox One, Nintendo Switch and PC (on Steam).

You can expect to pay between £16-£20 for the Deluxe edition.

Video Games to get you thinking philosophically

The games in this brief section do not deal with the philosophy of time but are fun and easy ways to get you into the mindset of thinking philosophically.

Something Something Soup Something

Year: 2017.

Genre: Defined as an interactive thought experiment – point and click.

Language: English.

Age Certification: None given but it should be suitable (and educational) for all ages. Please check suitability for your children before playing.

Summary

The year is 2078 and humans can ‘beam in’ goods from alien planets. The player must decide whether what is beamed in is a soup or not. To begin, turn on a teleportation machine via a mini-game in which you line up a dot with a line on a monitor. Once the teleportation device is on, goods will start appearing. For each item that arrives, you must click either ‘soup’ or ‘not soup’.

Inspired by the work of Wittgenstein, ‘*Something Something Soup Something*’ is designed to make the player interrogate descriptive language and consider the usefulness of thinking in analytical categories. While this game has nothing to do with the philosophy of time, I recommend it here because it is a quick, simple, (and free) game to ease you into a philosophical mindset. This game is rooted primarily within the philosophy of language. However, it is an effective 10-minute game to get you thinking through the nature of things, how we define things, and the limitations of language.

Availability:

You can play the game for free on the official website here: <https://soup.gua-le-ni.com/>