

May 18th, 9:00 AM - May 21st, 5:00 PM

A Ludological Perspective on Argument

Michael A. Yong-Set
University of Windsor

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/ossaarchive>



Part of the [Philosophy Commons](#)

Yong-Set, Michael A., "A Ludological Perspective on Argument" (2016). *OSSA Conference Archive*. 98.
<https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/ossaarchive/OSSA11/papersandcommentaries/98>

This Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of Philosophy at Scholarship at UWindsor. It has been accepted for inclusion in OSSA Conference Archive by an authorized conference organizer of Scholarship at UWindsor. For more information, please contact scholarship@uwindsor.ca.

A Ludological Perspective on Argument

MICHAEL A. YONG-SET

M.A. Philosophy

University of Windsor

401 Sunset Ave., Windsor, ON N9B 3P4

Canada

yongset@uwindsor.ca

March 21, 2016

Abstract: This paper suggests a new perspective on argumentation that draws upon the resources of ludology—the critical and academic of study of games qua games. When ludology is conjoined with Wittgenstein’s language-game theory, the importance of rhetorical argumentation rather than analytic demonstration becomes apparent. The ‘Argument-Game’ is crafted—but not scripted—by formal aspects of a complex system of interacting elements that give rise to particular fields of ‘possibility-space’ in which arguments take place.

Keywords: argumentation theory, language-game, ludology, philosophy, rhetoric

1. Introduction

This introductory paper suggests a new perspective on argumentation that draws upon the resources of ludology—the critical and academic of study of games qua games. In the *Philosophical Investigations*, one of the later Wittgenstein’s more mysterious suggestions is that if one understands how games work, then one would be able to understand how natural language works (Wittgenstein, 1953/1958). In a similar fashion, it will be argued here that if we look to how games function as games, we will be able to understand how the ‘argument-game’ functions. By using the conceptual resources of ludology to elucidate the nature of ‘games,’ we will be able to better understand the nature of the ‘argument-game.’ In doing so, the epistemic importance of rhetorical argumentation rather than analytic demonstration becomes apparent. The activity of arguing is crafted—but not scripted—by the formal aspects of a complex system of interacting elements that give rise to an emergent field of ‘possibility-space’ in which arguments take place. In recognizing how we indirectly craft second-order fields through our first-order design choices, we gain a new perspective and a new set of tools with which to reflect upon the relation between bias, fairness and objectivity in argumentation.

2. The later-Wittgenstein

In the *Philosophical Investigations*, Ludwig Wittgenstein (1953/1958) presents clues pointing towards a new theory of language different from the model of object and denotation. This new theory deals in “the whole, consisting of language and the actions into which it is woven, the ‘language-game’” (Wittgenstein, 1953/1958, §7). It is suggested that, contrary to previous belief, the terms and categories we use in natural language are not clear and distinct; they can be somewhat vague and hazy. The meaning of a word is not determined or discovered a priori by some precise ontological determination of its extensional scope. It is not simply a ready-made verbal grid we extract from a discrete and bounded reality. Rather, the meaning of a word in natural language is determined intentionally by the functions it plays in a language-game. ‘Meaning’ is to be understood a posteriori and only once one has come to understand the rules or

norms of assertion that characterize—or even constitute—a natural language. To be a proficient natural language user is to understand how to follow rules and play the language-game with others in a community of users. In this way, language has a social foundation rather than an ontological one.

In §293, the later Wittgenstein (1953/1958) invokes the thought experiment of the ‘Beetle in the Box’ to show how the standard for successful language use does not necessarily presuppose a definite, shared ontological foundation. In this experiment, we imagine a situation where every member of a group had in his or her possession a sealed box. It is possible for each individual to peer into his/her own box but it is impossible to gain direct access to the box of any other. Nevertheless, this group of language users would say of ‘the thing inside their box’ that it was to be called ‘beetle.’ Even though no one could empirically or logically verify the identity of the contents of other boxes or determine whether or not each individual had had the same phenomenal experience when opening his/her box, all would understand what ‘beetle’ meant when uttered.

It is through understanding the ‘rules’ for when and how the sign ‘beetle’ is to be used that a person can be said to understand the language. To understand the meaning of a word is to understand its function and place in the language-game played by a community of language users. Just as a group of players must be judged to all be following the same rules for us to say that they are all ‘playing the same game,’ a group of communicators must all be following the same rules of word-use such that one can say they are all ‘speaking the same language.’ Through ostensive definition, social training and no small amount of custom and habit, we incrementally and naturally ‘learn how to use language.’ We become players in the language-game

When Wittgenstein likens language to a game, the critical question is whether we have an understanding of what sort of thing a ‘game’ is; if language is analogous to a game but we do not understand what games are, this analogy brings us no closer to understanding how language functions. From the start, it is troublesome to some that Wittgenstein (1953/1958) claims that we are unable to articulate a set of necessary and sufficient conditions that could intentionally capture the extensional list of all the things that we would wish to count as games: “One might say that the concept ‘game’ is a concept with blurred edges. – ‘But is a blurred concept a concept at all?’” (§71). His answer to his own rhetorical question is an affirmative. Despite the ambiguity of blurred edges, we nevertheless *do* seem to understand what sorts of things are referred to when we deploy the word ‘game’ when communicating with others.

This poignant reflection on our standards of what constitutes an ‘intelligible concept’ lays some of the groundwork for Wittgenstein’s language-game theory of language. If only one were to look rather than think, one would see that we *do* seem to have a useful and functional concept of ‘game’ that we can and do use successfully in our communications. As a matter of empirical observation regarding natural language and its uses, “For if you look at [games] you will not see something that is common to *all*, but similarities, relationships, and a whole series of them at last” (Wittgenstein, 1953/1958, §66).

Even supposing this were to be true—and it is not self-evidently clear that it is—there is nevertheless merit in hoping for a more robust and detailed understanding of what sort of thing a ‘game’ really is. We may, as a matter of empirical fact, be able to more or less successfully use a word like ‘game’ in practice without ever having deeply reflected upon it. But to borrow a quote from the late legal scholar Ronald Dworkin (2011), our concepts “are not recognized in practice but justified by their role in making sense of practice” (p. 163). As we are presently interested in making sense of our argumentative practices—which I allege are of familial-relation to games—

we would be well served to turn to the ludologists—those that create concepts to reflect upon and make sense of our practices of gaming.

3. Ludology

For those unfamiliar with this neologism, *ludology* is the discipline that deals with the critical and academic study of games. Specifically, it focuses on: game design; players and player experience; and the role and nature of games within social, cultural and historical contexts. Surprisingly, ludology is an even more nascent field than argumentation theory; the roots of its modern form only began to take shape in the 1980s with the proliferation of the video game industry. It is important to distinguish ludology from *game theory*—the study of strategic decision making, especially in terms of mathematical models and in terms of economic agency. To roughly characterize the difference: a student of game theory studies how to develop a theory of decision making processes for optimal solutions *within* a given situation's parameters and conditions. By contrast, a student of ludology endeavours to view games from *without* and understand how a game's various elements come together and interact to bring about the experience of 'playing a game.' Where Wittgenstein chose not to—or could not—give a definition for what a 'game' is, the ludologist has been able to step in to bridge the gap in our understanding.

As a preliminary remark: it is rather unhelpful to broadly define a game merely as 'any activity that involves amusement' or 'any activity that involves play.' When one plays a musical instrument and performs a song, it would be strange were one to call this an instance of a game. We play with toys, we entertain ourselves watching movies, we engage with enthralling works of fiction—all of these and countless other activities involve varying degrees of interaction, manipulation, freedom and imagination. These may very well all be forms of entertainment. But these are not the sort of activities one normally thinks of when asked to name a game. We shall have to sharpen our understanding of the concept of a 'game' to gain useful insights.

Among the most influential texts in the domain of ludology is the *Game Design Workshop: A Playcentric Approach to Creating Innovative Games* authored by Tracy Fullerton, Christopher Swain and Steven S. Hoffman (2008); it is from this resource that much of the following was adapted. It should be noted that one should not mistake this text as an authoritative canon—the field is far from settled and its assertions far from universally accepted. The following is, however, an intriguing account of how we might understand games. A *game* can be defined as: a closed formal system that engages players in structured conflict that resolves its uncertainty in an unequal outcome (Fullerton, et al., 2008, p. 43). A more thorough exploration of this definition would require attention far beyond the scope of this paper. For the purposes of introducing the 'ludological perspective on argument,' a judicious amount of summation will have to suffice.

First and foremost, a *game* is a system. The goal or purpose of this system is ultimately to provide a particular experience of play and enjoyment for the participants. From the interacting elements of this system emerges a 'possibility-space' in which gameplay takes place; possibility-space is therefore a second-order phenomenon shaped by first-order elements. These elements are formal in the sense of being 'shape-giving.' Counted among the first-order formal elements of a game are 'players' and 'rules.' Among other things, the rules of a game define the objects, and the legal procedures a player can do, how the interaction between elements are resolve and the game's end/victory conditions.

The rules also effectively situate players in a goal-oriented, structured conflict where not-just-anything-goes and where not everyone wins. The interaction between the rules that constrain the players' actions and the goal the players seek naturally gives rise to a de facto set of internal values that unequally rewards different attributes, traits or actions. Insofar as there is a clear goal being sought, it is possible to say of some moves that they generate more or less advantage compared to others. Finally, a game must fundamentally have uncertainty in how it will resolve or else there would be no purpose in trying to 'play' it. The importance of uncertainty will become clearer later on.

To further expand our understanding: *possibility-space* is an abstract concept. In the same way that the hockey rink is a board-bounded physical space in which the physical actions of hockey take place, there is a rule-bounded conceptual space in which the elements of 'hockey, the game' interact. It is through the imposition, acknowledgement and enforcement of these 'boundaries' that the spaces within can be understood as spaces. These spaces literally 'make possible' certain activities by creating conceptual structures and points of reference. It is within and because of these second-order conceptual bounds—shaped by first-order formal elements—that gameplay becomes possible at all.

To be clear, a game's possibility-space is not identical with its formal system, nor can it be reduced down to its rule set or any of its individual formal elements. In a piece by Eric Zimmerman, it is remarked that "Game design is therefore a second-order design problem in which designers create play, but only indirectly, through the systems of rules that game designers create" (as cited in Fullerton et al., 2008, p. 19). 'Gameplay' is an emergent second-order phenomenon that takes place amid a second-order possibility-space that is shaped by a system of first-order formal elements that have interacted with each other in a myriad of complex ways.

It should also be noted that a structured conflict is not necessarily adversarial or a direct competition. Just as the 'competition' for a scarcity of resources among animals in nature does not necessarily involve a direct confrontation with others, neither does the conflict in a game. Conflict can take many different forms that include but are not limited to: player vs. player; player vs. system; player & player vs. system and countless other permutations. At the broadest level of analysis, conflict occurs because there is a *goal* that players are induced to accomplish and uncertain means by which to overcome the obstacles and constraints that prevent the immediate and most expedient path to accomplishing this goal. There is no clear and distinct path to victory, in other words. While there is certainly a definite 'victory condition,' this is different from saying that there is a set of certain and definite procedures for guaranteeing that condition. There is a condition for victory but there is no formal solution that guarantees it.

The last point to emphasize is that a *system* is "a set of interacting elements that form an integrated whole with a common goal or purpose" (Fullerton et al., 2008, p. 111). A system is greater than the sum of its individual members because of the emergent properties that appear from the multitude of complex interactions that take place. To understand how to achieve the system's goal of crafting enjoyable forms of play, one must necessarily include the 'players' in the analysis—and their particular traits, values and circumstances. Similarly, to understand how to craft fair and effective forms of argument, one cannot analyze argument in isolation without giving consideration to the 'arguers'—and their particular positions, their notions of values and their epistemic circumstances.

4. The argument-game

This proposed ludological perspective on argument will be *rhetorical* in the sense that it takes as its basic term ‘arguers’ with their goals, positions and interests. This is in contrast to ‘dialogical exchanges and procedures’ or the ‘formal and structural products of logic.’ Following the lead of Wittgenstein, argument has a social foundation rather than an ontological, dialogical or logical root. To participate in the ‘argument-game’ is to follow rules and play the game with others in a community of mutually-engaged, rule-following participants. Just as Fullerton et al. (2008) advocate for a ‘player-centric’ approach to understanding games, so too will this approach to argument be ‘arguer-centric.’

We begin our introduction to this perspective by adapting the familiar distinctions made by Daniel O’Keefe in his seminal *Two Concepts of Argument*. He originally writes: “an argument₁ is something one person makes (or gives or presents or utters), while an argument₂ is something two or more persons have (or engage in)” (O’Keefe, 1972, p. 121). In this sense, an argument₂ is a species or subtype of social interaction while an argument₁ is typically identified as the speech act or public artifact that gets exchanged (O’Keefe, 1972). While this distinction is a good start, we can further enhance and precisify these terms by introducing some refinements inspired by ludological concepts. I shall refer to the following pair of proposed definitions as the ludological definitions of argument:

Argument₂ refers to the class of communicative interactions in which at least one arguer puts forward a position with the intention of its adoption improving the cognitive attitude of a real or potential audience. It is a second-order phenomenon that occurs within an emergent possibility-space that arises from the complex interaction between formal elements—such as arguers and their goals.

Argument₁ designates any of the moves made by an arguer within the context of an argument₂ that are intended to achieve this goal of improving the cognitive attitude of a real or potential audience. The acceptable modalities of argument₁ are dependent on the character of the specific argument₂ in which they are to be used.

Just as with gameplay, argument₂ is a second-order phenomenon that occurs within the emergent possibility-space whose particular shape is a function of a system of interacting formal elements. The formal elements that craft the field for argument₂ are ‘arguers’ rather than ‘players’ and the ultimate goal is ‘to improve cognitive attitudes’ rather than ‘play.’ Just as we strategically choose how to make use of various procedures in a game to generate advantage in regards to obtaining the final goal, we elect to deploy whatever sort of arguments₁ we think will be of use in getting the other to accept the proposed position. What moves are available and how efficacious they will be depends on the context of the particular situation. Of course, the context of each argument and each game is its own unique possibility-space—a rule-bounded conceptual space given form by the particular rules and players from which it emerged.

While it was earlier asserted that the ludological perspective on argument is ‘arguer-centric’ and takes arguers as the basic term, rules are still extremely important. However, to fully understand rules, one must reference the participants who construct and assent to those rules. One must understand what purpose—what goal—there is behind a rule’s design and implementation. Far from being evil, restrictive or the enemy of freedom, rules enable the realization of possibilities. If ‘just anything’ could go, then it would also be the case that ‘just

anything' can go against everything else and nothing could get done. A fully-unbounded space would create no possibilities and therefore contain no freedom.

Natural language is an example of a ruled enterprise; that we can use it productively to communicate means that we are following mutually-acknowledged rules for proper assertion. That there is infinite combinatory and expressive potential in our natural language despite the presence of rules is what makes expression a rule-bounded freedom in which we participate. From Wittgenstein's *Investigations* (1953/1958): "Following a rule is analogous to obeying an order. We are trained to do so; we react to an order in a particular way" (§206). This social training—such as the training to participate in language-games—is part of what it means to be a human creature. To be sure, these rules are more expansive than the technical rules of grammar and syntax. As Paul Grice suggests in "Logic and Conversation" (1975), there are also implicit 'maxims'—or unspoken, presumed rules—that further characterize and shape communicative interactions among the social creatures that are humans. However, Wittgenstein (1953/1958) also asks us what it would be like at the other end of the spectrum: "But what does a game look like that is everywhere bounded by rules? Whose rules never let a doubt creep in" (§84). What would a completely-bounded space be like?

By drawing upon ludological resources, we are able to say that such a 'game' would actually be a puzzle instead. Scott Kim adapts a distinction made by Chris Crawford as cited in Fullerton et al.: *Puzzles* are rule-based systems, like games, but the goal is to find a solution, not to beat an opponent or win (as cited in Fullerton et al., 2008, p. 38). In a puzzle, the immediate goal is to reach or uncover the pre-determined, definite and certain solution by overcoming a specific, static challenge. In a game, the goal is to attain the victory condition while navigating a dynamic and uncertain but structured conflict. The outcome of a puzzle is both given and fully-specified in advance and need only be found. The outcome of a game is undecided until it is played out and a result is resolved. It is true that both games and puzzles involve rules and both involve different kinds of play. But games are "not everywhere circumscribed by rules; but no more are there any rules for how high one throws the ball in tennis, or how hard; yet tennis is a game for all that and has rules too" (Wittgenstein, 1953/1958, §68). Games—also, language and argument₂—take place amidst a space that is more than a radical indeterminacy and less than a fully-deterministic board. There is an optimal level of uncertainty that is somewhere other than either extreme.

Similarly, when it comes to the perspectives of the arguers, there is an optimal sweet spot that is somewhere between 0 and 1. In Wayne Brockriede's "Where is Argument?" (1974), the sixth observed characteristic of argument is the *optimally shared perspective*. The optimal degree of similarity between perspectives must be less than perfect but more than zero. If they were maximally similar, they would already be in perfect agreement—the matter would already be settled. At the opposite end of the extreme, complete and total opposition might render all forms of co-operative communication impossible to begin with, argument₂ included.

There is a minimal degree of convergence that must obtain before an appropriate possibility-space can form. Even the most competitive games require a certain principle of co-operation between the players. However antagonistic or conflicted they may be with one another, the players must all be in a minimal kind of agreement to abide by the rules and play together within *this* game's possibility-space and not some other. There may be different methods, different strategies, and different techniques that players can freely use in a game, but ultimately we would need this agreement to say that they are even participating in the same game. This is the optimally shared perspective required among the players of an argument-game. This mutual

buy-in, tacit acceptance or voluntary willingness to abide by a specific rule set is part of the complex interaction that creates possibility-space in the first place. This is the same for gamers, the same for language users and the same for arguers. At the root of all productive disagreement is an agreement.

5. The epistemological shift

Consonant with Wittgenstein's (1953/1958) language-game, the argument-game is a fundamentally social enterprise that is well suited for co-operative endeavours; in principle it cannot be private nor can it be radically subjective. They are both systems—a set of interacting elements that form an integrated whole with a common goal or purpose. On the ludological perspective, the goal of argument₂ is the 'improvement of cognitive attitudes.'

To begin situating this new theory of argument and exploring what might motivate us to recognize 'the improvement of cognitive attitudes' as an important goal, we turn to Michael Dummett's classic essay *Truth* (1959) and an epistemological shift that "this involves dethroning truth and falsity from their central place in philosophy and in particular in the theory of meaning" (p. 162). Contrary to past beliefs, the epistemic situation in which we now find ourselves is one that does not begin with 'truths' that simply await discovery; rather our inquiries build and construct that which we would deem to be 'true.' Instead of beginning from self-evident, clear and distinct foundations, we start in a position of uncertainty, vagueness and blurred frontiers with no confidence that there is a truth 'out there' that will settle our disputes. This relates to what I will dub the *Paradox of Argumentation*. If there is no answer to a problem, no one would bother searching for it—they could never find one. Conversely, if there *is* an answer, no one would bother searching for it—they would already have it.

Western philosophy's traditional way out of this disoriented quandary has been to deny the first horn of the dilemma and believe in answers out-there while making reference to something innate, natural or eternal that transcends and precedes the fallible human faculties. Supposedly, these *a priori* things can serve as a universal and necessary reference point around which all else can be founded. Yet as Michael Devitt suggests in his aptly titled "There is No A Priori" (2005), there may not be any *a priori* bits of information upon which we can build an unassailable edifice of justified, true belief. Even the so-called 'truths of mathematics' can be explained in ways that need not posit a mysterious but necessary concept such as the 'a priori.' By using what he terms 'epistemological naturalism' he argues that it is possible to empirically justify knowledge in an indirect, holistic way. The question is not from where one acquired a belief, nor is it an inquiry into the truth-value of a belief. At the heart of his concern is how one would become justified in holding a belief. Our beliefs are justified not by truth but experience.

Negotiating or constructing justification from experience is a very different task from discovering self-justified truths. The rules and procedures that would be productive in the latter will not be so in the former situation. There is a striking quote on this subject by legal scholar and philosopher of law Ronald Dworkin in his posthumous *Justice for Hedgehogs* (2011):

Absolute confidence or clarity is the privilege of fools and fanatics. The rest of us must do the best we can: we must choose among all the substantive views on offer by asking which strikes us, after reflection and due thought, as more plausible than the others. (p. 95)

When one compares the above with the methods favoured by philosophers such as Plato, Descartes and Kant in the history of philosophy, it is certainly a stark contrast. The challenge of a new epistemology in which ‘truth’ has been dethroned is not to root out the objectively flawed reasoning from the objectively harmonious reasoning—it is not simply elucidating truths and rejecting falsity. The new challenge is to decide how to mediate between competing choices when each appears to have persuasive but not irresistible reasons for being accepted. This is a whole new enterprise that will have to be resolved through argumentation and not meditation.

The newly realized inadequacy of these previous modes of reasoning led to a renewed interest in formulating new ways to resolve conflicts of opinion. In Chaim Perelman’s highly accessible *Realm of Rhetoric* (1982), a distinction is made between two different modes of inquiry: demonstration (analytic) and argumentation (dialectic). The difference is not that a demonstration is shown while arguments are said; the difference is in what kind of problem each is meant to address. In the epistemological shift, the very nature of the enterprise changed from one where analytic demonstration would have made sense to one in which dialogical argumentation makes sense. Perelman (1982) adds that it is "in the absence of a body of recognized truths and theses that recourse to a dialectic of question and answer appears to be indispensable" (p. 17). As we are currently in a post-Quinean age without a body of irresistible and unrevisable truths and theses, argumentation has indeed become indispensable.

Supposing that there were a body of recognized truths, definite parameters and certainties in the problems that confronted thinkers, one might be able to say that knowledge is like a *puzzle*. Recall that a puzzle is the kind of thing that admits of a single, definite solution. The old view of epistemology treats knowledge as though it were a puzzle that need only be solved by the correct procedures of discovery. One need only deploy the proper method with which to operate upon or manipulate the confounded elements and then the solution will present itself in due course to yield ‘truths’ that have been pre-determined and given elsewhere in advance. By analyzing the given elements and understanding the nature of the problem, one could then demonstrate the realization of a puzzle’s expected solution. However, knowledge does *not* seem to be a puzzle. It is not the kind of enterprise that can be done through private meditation and reflection in hopes of discovering the ‘natural light of truth’ that shines from some things and not others. This new epistemic enterprise is more like a game that can and must be played with others as we place our cognitive attitudes in a structured conflict with one another. What we now need are not analytic demonstration-puzzles; what we need are rhetorical argument-games.

Cognitive attitudes are not simply claims or conclusions that can be easily separated from their holders and recast as abstract entities of study. One cannot separate argument from the person anymore than one can separate the game from its players. As Perelman (1982) observes, "we have seen that every argument presupposes a meeting of minds" (p. 11). Just as games should be analyzed in a player-centric framework, so too should argument be analyzed in an arguer-centric framework. Brockriede (1974) further insists that “Arguments are not in statements but in people. Furthermore, argument isn’t a thing to be looked for but a construct people use, a perspective they take” (p. 3).

Our analysis must be a broader and more holistic way to go beyond analyzing the sensible artefacts of expression and include the minds that met. This notion was taken up and iterated upon in *Coalescent Argumentation* by Michael Gilbert (1997): “Claims are best taken as icons for positions that are actually much richer and deeper . . . A position is a matrix of beliefs, attitudes, emotions, insights, and values connected to a claim (p. 105). A position is an orientation or perspective. It is not strictly identical with or reducible to its medium of expression

—the explicated claim. Nor is a position equivalent to an argument₁; it is what the argument₁ is promoting for adoption by the other party. To better connect with the discourse of contemporary analytic epistemology, we can think of these rich matrices as *cognitive attitudes*.

During the meeting of minds—when one engages in argument₂—it is with the purpose of improving these cognitive attitudes in some way. We take attitudes towards many different subjects, not all of which are indicative. In addition to attitudes towards the state of worldly affairs, we also have action-oriented attitudes concerning ‘what to do’ in a situation, ethotic attitudes towards individual characters, attitudes about values and countless more. The means by which one attempts to improve the cognitive attitudes of an audience is what I have referred to as an argument₁. Whatever its form and whether an argument₁ is successful or not is irrelevant; *that* it was intended to effect this change and promote a certain position rather than another one is its defining characteristic.

6. The ameliorative principle

Every argument₁ presupposes an audience; if an argument₁ was never intended to be received then it could never have the intent of improving a cognitive attitude. Likewise, some expression that incidentally and unintentionally leads to the amelioration of attitudes would not be considered an argument₁ as it did not occur within the context of an argument₂. When one engages in argument₂, one does more than simply make an assertion or forward a claim representative of some position. One is also putting forward a cognitive attitude as a candidate for adoption by others.

In “Making Sense of Relative Truth,” John MacFarlane (2005) suggests that to make an assertion is to make a series of commitments. Asserting is to make a commitment to justify a claim if challenged; to withdraw a claim if it cannot be defended; and to take responsibility for it being taken as reliable by others (p. 321). It is no accident that the third term of MacFarlane’s suggestion has a noticeably moral and social character. Argument₂, as stipulatively defined in the ludological sense, is *fundamentally ameliorative* in nature. It is the social interaction in which an arguer puts forward a position for adoption with the intention of *improving* the cognitive attitudes held by a real or potential audience. Whether amelioration actually occurs or how we ought to determine whether the change should be counted as ameliorative rather than deleterious is, of course, another matter.

Since we do not have a priori knowledge handed to us nor—as Dworkin remarks—ought we be either fool or fanatic, we must engage in argument₂ amongst ourselves in our pursuit of better beliefs to guide better actions. After all, taking an attitude is not simply holding it; it entails acting upon it as well. One could not make sense of argument—or philosophy generally—if there was not a value-laden, ameliorative principle operating in the background that would motivate one to search for *better* beliefs. Unless we had some sense that it be *worse* to hold one position rather than some other, we would never bother reflecting upon them, iterating upon them, nor devise argument₁s to promote the adoption of *better* beliefs. And unless we also cared about what others believed and acted upon, we would never bother engaging in argument₂ in an attempt to change their attitudes for the better. Argument is ameliorative and co-operative.

It should be noted that although every argument₂ is a communicative interaction, not every communicative interaction is an argument₂ in the ludological sense. In the contexts of jokes and comedy, the intent is not necessarily to improve cognitive attitudes and alter an audience’s position regarding some subject matter. Sometimes the goal of entertainment is to

entertain. Likewise, instances of propaganda, slander and ‘trolling’ might be excludable from argument₂ on the grounds that their goals are not the *improvement* of the audience’s cognitive attitude. There is certainly merit in studying those other activities and there is reason to believe that significant portions of this analysis can be productively applied to other kinds of activities played in the broader language-game. However, the goals and functions of those interactions are sufficiently dissimilar so as to warrant a different categorization. Recall that we differentiated different systems based on their function and goal that is to be achieved; a different function requires different rules and constitutes a different system. When it comes to recognizing some systems as argument-games, one of the key formal elements is the presence of the ameliorative principle.

7. Objectivity, bias and fairness

While this is not much more than an introduction to the ludological perspective on argument—which is itself still very much a work in progress—there is enough substance here that a few inferences and insights can be drawn from this account.

We can remark that argument-games are ‘objective’ in the sense that they involve public, shareable, communicable and communal elements that allow us to recognize them as instances of argument-games. Just as we would be unable to recognize a radically private language *as* a language, we would be unable to recognize if a person was playing a ‘radically subjective’ game. Certainly, it is a very modest sort of ‘objectivity.’ Games broadly are objective only in the sense that rules exist independently from the whims of any one player and constrain players from without during the course of participation. However, the further exaltation of ‘objectivity’ as somehow connoting neutrality or eternity or incorrigibility simply does not follow. The rules that make up a game were neither discovered in the weave of creation nor etched into unalterable stones forevermore.

While we do engage in and play games, there are also times where we step back and ponder how we might design *better* games. Just as natural language is not a static, closed and unalterable system, neither are games. We can re-open the project; we can iterate upon it if and when we see the need to do so. We can re-design the second-order experience by altering the first order formal elements—either by changing the rules or changing ourselves. We can change and tweak the rules that we—as a community of participants—would assent to following if such a change would improve the system and better achieve its goals. Conversely, we might adopt new values and new goals entirely that would require different rules and procedures to reach. Despite having this kind of ‘objective’ character, very little—if anything—about games is truly beyond revision.

Another intriguing consequence of the ludological perspective on argument is that we can clearly see that this sort of ‘objectivity’ does not automatically imply ‘neutrality’ or ‘fairness’ either. In an important sense, games are not supposed to be ‘neutral’ or ‘fair’—a player cannot do ‘just anything’ and also expect to win. Certain moves will generate ‘advantage’ insofar as they are conducive towards obtaining the victory condition while other moves will not be so. Because of the interactions between a game’s various formal elements, certain actions will naturally emerge as more valuable than others. This is because the game’s rules are designed in such a way to value some skills, attributes or techniques more than others; a game specifically and purposefully rewards some traits more than others.

Take for example the rules of billiards. They were chosen to be as they are because the game is specifically designed to reward certain abilities and certain moves more than others. Variations in a game's formal elements can have drastic implications on the emergent experience of play. For example, consider the formal implications of an instance of 'billiards' where the 'call-shot rule' is in effect. When this rule is in effect, before taking his/her shot, a player must announce what will occur during this shot—for example, that the 'Two' ball will bank off of the rail and then be sunk in the right-side pocket. If something other than what was called were to happen, then the move will be deemed a foul regardless of whether a ball was pocketed or not.

This rule is often used in high-level competitions, but is often not included as an element of play when the game involves players of lesser skill. Casual players will rarely have the required proficiency to consistently pocket balls at all, much less have them move as planned in advance. With the call-shot rule in play, a player cannot simply 'hit the ball and hope for the best!' since pocketing a ball in that scenario would lead to a foul. Having the game's outcome be determined so heavily by skills—skills that low level players simply do not have—would be frustrating and can cause the game to drag on and become non-enjoyable if neither casual player can successfully meet the conditions of a legal shot and make progress in the game. The express function of this rule is to more heavily reward 'skill' and negate 'luck' as a factor in determining the winner of the game compared to a version of billiards where this rule is not in play.

Because of the formal characteristics of call-shot billiards—shaped by rules—the emergent gameplay experience is one in which the player with 'skill' will be rewarded more significantly than the player who only has 'luck.' By design, there is an unequal reward for some kinds of play compared to others. In this way, all games are in principle biased in favour of some things and biased against others. Games are systemically-designed to be inclined in some directions rather than others. But is this problematic in principle?

It is a curious question to pose—why *should* billiards be a game that rewards superior spatial-reasoning skills, strategic manoeuvring and physical execution? Perhaps the problem is not that it values some things more than others but that it values the wrong things. Why does billiards not reward superior real-time dynamic vision, twitch-reflex speed and foot speed? Further, why should any player be able to unequally parley his/her abilities into advantages that others without those same skills could not do? The short and simple answer is that we want 'billiards' to be this sort of game rather than another kind. We want it to be the kind of thing that will result in the participant with the best spatial-reasoning skill coming out on top more often than not. Billiards is biased towards some skills and not others; it does not value superior reaction speed and so does not reward it.

In the case of argument-games what sorts of things do we—the audience and the arguers—value? What kinds of play do we want rewarded? Which attributes do we consider relevant in determining what should come out on top in the end? There certainly seems to be an important significance in determining an unequal victor based on specific criteria. But how should argument-game designers determine which criteria will most reliably and most fairly reward the kinds of gameplay we value? There are no simple or ready answers to these questions—this isn't a puzzle with a pre-determined solution that need only be solved. What is clear is that, as I have argued, our ultimate goal is the improvement of our cognitive attitudes. What we would like to emerge victorious from the structured conflict is the most ameliorative belief. As for what that could mean, we do seem to be biased against attitudes or positions that are less coherent, less reliable, less practical and less effective in achieving the many goals we have in life.

8. Conclusion

Since the beginning of human culture and civilization, it is very likely that humans have played games with each other and have argued with each other. These are both activities engaged in the world over that occur naturally and readily between the social and deliberative creatures that are humans. It may not be a coincidence that the resources of ludology—the critical study of games and game design—might also be highly useful in understanding how the argument-game works. They both involve a complex system of interacting parts composed of persons, rules and values that allows for the emergence of a conceptual ‘possibility-space’—a rule-bounded field of free play. It is within this crafted but unscripted space that we can enter into a structured and meaningful conflict to determine who or what deserves to win. It is due to our epistemic situation as empirical, a posteriori beings with these particular cognitive abilities that we must co-operatively engage in an ‘argument-game’ to continually make sense of life and the world; life does not appear to be a puzzle that simply need be solved. Whether the goal is to search out the ‘best players’ or the ‘best cognitive attitude to hold’—we should embrace the revisable, value-laden nature of the systems we employ to do so. If we can understand how games work generally, perhaps we can apply that understanding to crafting a fair and effective game that all would like to play.

This is the ludological perspective on argument—and it is an attitude that I suggest we would be well-served to adopt.

References

- Brockriede, W. (1974). Where is argument? *Proceedings from Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association (SCA)*. Chicago: SCA. Retrieved from <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED102638>
- Devitt, M. (2005). There is no a priori. In: E. Sosa & M. Steup (Eds.), *Contemporary Debates in Epistemology* (pp. 105-115). Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers.
- Dworkin, R. (2011). *Justice for Hedgehogs*. Cambridge: The Belknap Press.
- Dummett, M. (1959). Truth. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, New Series*, 59, 141-162.
- Fullerton, T., Swain, C., & Hoffman, S. S. (2008). *Game Design Workshop: A Playcentric Approach to Creating Innovative Games* (2nd ed.). Burlington, MA: Elsevier Inc.
- Gilbert, M. A. (1997). *Coalescent Argumentation*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Grice, H. P. (1975). Logic and conversation. In: C. Peter & J. Morgan (Eds.), *Syntax and Semantics 3: Speech Acts* (pp. 41-58). New York: Academic Press.
- MacFarlane, J. (2005). Making sense of relative truth. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, New Series* 105, 305-323. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4545440>
- O’Keefe, D. J. (1977). Two concepts of argument. *The Journal of the American Forensic Association* 13 (3), 121-128.
- Perelman, C. (1982). *The Realm of Rhetoric*. (W. Kluback, Trans.). Notre Dame, IA: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Wittgenstein, L. (1958). *Philosophical Investigations* (3rd ed.). (G. E. M. Anscombe, Trans.). New York: The Macmillan Company. (Original work published 1953)