

‘Worthy of a Certain Seriousness’: Games, Ludic Attention, and Political Life

by

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Abstract

In his “Manifesto for a Ludic Century,” Eric Zimmerman claims that the twenty-first century will have a ludic character. Zimmerman, like many game scholars, uses the Latin for “game,” *ludus*, to capture part of the complex human experience of playing games. He argues that games help to develop literacy for a world based on increasingly dynamic, flexible systems. This dissertation follows the implications of a similar claim about games with respect to political life and to the virtue of democratic citizenship identified in classical thought – pleasure found in ruling and being ruled in turn. I introduce the concept of “ludic attention” to describe the particular disposition that one brings to games. I establish a framework for understanding ludic attention through critical engagement with the *Nicomachean Ethics*, reassessing Aristotle’s elevation of seriousness in order to posit a virtuous mean that includes a measure of playfulness. Instead of treating seriousness and playfulness as binary conditions, Aristotle elucidates a continuum of potential dispositions between polar extremes of attention. Ludic attention describes the liminal experience of the possibilities between these poles, and games are structures that facilitate such a disposition. Subsequent chapters illustrate how this framework enhances our understanding of the relationship between games and political life. I consider three contexts in Homer’s *Iliad* – the assembly, battlefield, and funeral games for Patroclus – to show how games function as distinct sites of action. I then uncover how the dramatic qualities of Plato’s *Laws* demonstrate the persuasive importance of games and their attendant dispositions. Here I identify ludic attention as an important disposition in the development of a capacity for the types of attention required by democratic citizenship. I conclude by demonstrating the value

of considering these classical texts alongside the emerging literature in game studies, by considering contemporary examples that reveal the enduring importance of game structures for the relationship between persuasion and attention. Irrespective of the ludic character of the twenty-first century, games have mattered to political beings for millennia. These cornerstones of political thought indicate how games, and those dispositions that they inspire, matter to democratic citizens.

Prelude: Worthy of a Certain Seriousness

Don't be amazed, Megillus, but forgive me! For I was looking away toward the god and speaking under the influence of that experience, when I said what I did just now. So let our race be something that is not lowly then, if that is dear to you, but worthy of a certain seriousness.

– The Athenian Stranger, *Laws*¹

I. Games, Ludic Attention, and Political Life

Games are ubiquitous. We play games at almost any age throughout our lifetimes. We play complicated games that take years to understand and master, and we play simple games. We play games with high stakes, and we play games just to pass the time. We have played games throughout recorded history. The proliferation of computing technology has introduced new games and new ways of playing old games. Eric Zimmerman claims that we have entered a “Ludic Century,” in which games are a new form of literacy for a world based on increasingly dynamic and flexible systems. By this he means that games give us the tools we need for “creating and understanding meaning” in a world of complex digital and virtual networks.² He elaborates on the place for games in this Ludic Century: “When information is put at play, game-like experiences replace linear media. Media and culture in the Ludic Century is increasingly systemic, modular, customizable, and participatory. Games embody all of these characteristics in a very direct sense.”³ This concept of a Ludic Century is one of many ways that scholars are thinking about the impact of games. Sebastian Deterding notes the various related expressions of

¹ Thomas L Pangle, trans., *The Laws of Plato* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 804b. All Plato citations in the dissertation use Stephanus pagination and Pangle’s translation.

² Eric Zimmerman, “Manifesto for a Ludic Century,” in *The Gameful World*, ed. Steffan P. Walz and Sebastian Deterding (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2014), 21.

³ Zimmerman, 20.

a similar notion in the academic literature on games: “ludification of culture,” “ludofication of society,” “ludic society,” “ludic language,” and “ludic architectures.”⁴ The Latin word for game, *ludus*, underpins all of these ways through which scholars understand the transformation of the ways that human beings interact and the capacities that will matter for those interactions.

This dissertation is an exploration of one of the central capacities that emerges through playing games. Consistent with the tradition of ludic terms, I call this a capacity for *ludic attention*. The importance of this concept for political life will be developed in the following chapters alongside the treatment of the importance of games as structures in which human beings act in common. Ludic attention describes how we attend to acting in the contexts that are framed by the structures of games. It is the disposition that individuals bring to an activity that involves the conscious adoption of, and participation in, structures that govern one’s intentional – but not enduringly instrumental – action and the experience of the resultant uncertainty in the pursuit of one’s ends as compelling. I work to detail the contours of this new concept by combining close readings of classical political thought with contemporary scholarship on games and play.

The relationships among structure, context, and attention form the foundation of my analysis of how games matter to political beings. Game scholar Jaakko Stenros writes: “In a culture where playing games is ubiquitous and where games are seen as a model to be learned from in system design, it is necessary to separate the mindset, the socially negotiated activity, and the culturally recognized artifact.”⁵ Although he expresses the distinctions in slightly different terms, Stenros captures the importance of maintaining conceptual clarity between the structure of the activity, the intersubjective context in which the activity occurs, and how individuals attend to acting in that context.

⁴ Walz and Deterding, 6-7. The differing spellings of ludification and ludofication appear in the original.

⁵ Jaakko Stenros, “Behind Games: Playful Mindsets and Transformative Practices,” in *The Gameful World*, 201.

Stenros calls the mindset at the core of play and games “the mindset of *playfulness*” and situates the concept relative to influential accounts of play from the last century – Gregory Bateson’s meta-communication of play, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi’s flow, and Michael Apter’s reversal theory.⁶ Theories of play, largely grounded in psychology, tend to be important touchstones for scholars in game studies, but Stenros is but one of the many game scholars who reminds us that games, play, and playfulness are not identical. Games are structures for activities that can be approached from any number of perspectives and positions. Professional athletes, chess grandmasters, players in a Bingo hall, and recreational sports players in a city park all play games. Different structures, contexts, and individual dispositions lead to vastly different ways of attending to these activities. Furthermore, these dispositions of attention are contestable and contested. One can probably recall an anecdotal experience in which someone challenged someone else for taking a game “too seriously” or “not seriously enough.” Seriousness is as much of a part of the experience of playing games as playfulness is. Ludic attention involves the coincidence of the possibility for both serious and playful attention, a connection that I will develop in the first chapter.

An awareness of the peculiar indeterminacy of the experiences that are found within the context of playing is well-established in the literature. Brian Sutton-Smith calls it “the ambiguity of play” in his influential work of the same name, in which he cites other prominent examples like Mihai Spariosu’s “amphibolous,” Victor Turner’s “liminal” and “liminoid,” Gregory Bateson’s “play is a paradox,” and Kenneth Burke’s “dramatistic negative.”⁷ All of these examples capture the ways in which the condition of playing is an experience of multiple possibilities at once. For Turner, play occupies a threshold between reality and unreality, while

⁶ Stenros, 201-203.

⁷ Brian Sutton-Smith, *The Ambiguity of Play* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 1-2.

Burke understands it as the possibility of “indicating the negative through an affirmative action that is clearly not the same as that which it represents.”⁸ The ludic attention that we experience within the structure of games draws upon the multiplicity of these possibilities found through play as a part of the intentionality of one’s action. Experiences and exercises of ludic attention are important to the development of a capacity for different types of attention in political beings, regardless of whether or not one believes that we are at the start of a Ludic Century.

One of the most influential accounts of play in the 20th century comes from Johan Huizinga, whose *Homo Ludens* is one of the first canonical texts for the literature in the emerging field of game studies. Huizinga contends that play is an essential component of the development of all human culture – replacing *homo sapiens* with *homo ludens* – and he is also credited with the concept of the “magic circle” because of his assertion that play occurs in a “space dedicated to an act apart.”⁹ Implicit in Huizinga’s argument is that play is both necessarily separate and inextricably linked to “ordinary life.”¹⁰ In this dissertation, I explore these paradoxes that permeate our understanding of the experiences that we have while playing games in order to elaborate on the connection between *homo ludens* and the Aristotelian *zoon politikon*. In order to do so, I connect recent scholarship in game studies with the thought of Aristotle, Homer, and Plato. These pillars of classical thought help to establish and elaborate an argument about how games matter to the lives of political beings, but first I will detail some of the frameworks and investments that will guide that effort.

⁸ Sutton-Smith, 1.

⁹ Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*. (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1950), 10.

¹⁰ This is the term Huizinga uses to talk about life outside of the ritualized spaces of play, which I use because it captures something of the way that we think about certain activity as “ordinary.”

II. Context, Structure, and Capacity

The delineation of different aspects of games and how people experience them will continue to be an important refrain as part of developing an understanding of how ludic attention matters to citizens. I have already drawn on three terms – context, structure, and capacity – as distinctions related to games and how they impact people with respect to attention. The context of any situation encompasses the various conditions that frame the possibilities for action. Stenros refers to the play that occurs in games as “socially negotiated activity,” and context is that social component of which one is aware when one acts. Context may enable, limit, forbid, or suggest particular ways of acting. Context may often be experienced as an ambient condition – the background noise that comprises normalized interactions of everyday life – but context can also be specified. The context of a religious gathering evokes particular dispositions and actions, and the normalized interactions in that context differ from others. The same can be said of the contexts established by games: they have their own normalized ways of acting.

The influence of context relies on the dispositions promoted by the structure that is given to the particular activity. Structure intervenes in existing contexts and continues to shape them. The elements of structure give formal definition to the interactions that comprise the activity – the “rules of the game.” Structure may develop existing tendencies found through existing contextual features, or it may contravene those tendencies. Games function as structures by providing the parameters within which players agree to act, and that render the activity intelligible to others. Erving Goffman, for example, notes that games are “engines of meaning that enable events, roles, and identities to emerge that would not be understandable or meaningful in any other frame.”¹¹ Games provide Goffman with an example of how frames work, even as he understands the function of framing to be ever-present. As with framing,

¹¹ Stenros, 205. See Goffman, *Encounters* (1961).

structure gives particular order to an interaction and suggests ways of attending to the activity. Goffman is a helpful reminder that structure is just one component of the inputs that establish context, but the structure of an activity is a particularly potent means of doing so. The contextual possibilities enabled by the structure of games will remain important for developing an account of what ludic attention is and what it does.

While context and structure refer to conditions of the activity itself, capacity refers to the impact of the activity; it reflects an individual characteristic of one who participates in the activity. It denotes the effects of repeatedly acting in ways that are prescribed by structure and context. With respect to games, I will argue that ludic attention aids in the development of a capacity that is important for political life insofar as it engages human beings in different forms of attending to the pursuit of ends in contexts that are defined by uncertainty and renders that activity compelling. I argue that such a capacity is important for notions of democratic citizenship, particularly in the classical Greek sense, in which the virtue of a citizen is related to one's share in ruling and being ruled. Games are sites of action in which citizens engage in experiences of willingly submitting to the structure of the game while providing a context that emphasizes the inherent indeterminacy of the meaningfulness of the activity itself. Insofar as games provide for separate contexts in which political beings act, they provide unique possibilities for citizens to attend to action in ways that are otherwise not promoted by other structures. Insofar as games remain integrally connected to our political lives, they help to develop capacities that important for democratic citizens. As will continue to be a point of emphasis, an exceptional feature of games and the dispositions they promote is the ability to dwell in the in-between condition; games structure liminal contexts.

III. Attention, Games, and Communities

A consideration of games as structures that shape contexts for activities in which we cultivate our capacities for both serious and playful attention allows us to see how they exist as important sites for political life. Although they may not be the first site that comes to mind at the mention of “the political,” games continue to be one of the important ways through which human beings interact in society. In his *Histories*, Herodotus attributes the Greek origin of games to the Lydians, who used games as a distraction from starvation that allowed them to endure 18 years of famine by alternating days of playing games and eating. In 2005, a story briefly made international headlines in which a South Korean man collapsed and later died of heart failure after reportedly playing 50 hours straight of the videogame *StarCraft* in a public internet café with minimal breaks.¹² In 2014, Riot Games, developer of the videogame *League of Legends*, reported 11.2 million concurrent online viewers with 40,000 in attendance at Sangam Stadium – which was built for the 2002 FIFA World Cup in Seoul – for their Worlds 2014 championship competition, while FIFA– the international governing body for football/soccer – boasted record breaking numbers across the world for the final match of the 2014 World Cup between Germany and Argentina, including 26.5 million viewers in the United States.¹³ One year later, nine FIFA officials and five corporate executives were indicted in the United States for racketeering, conspiracy, and corruption as a result of ongoing investigations by the FBI and IRS.¹⁴ Although these events had no direct impact on one another, a thread can be woven through these

¹²“S Korean dies after games session.” *BBC.co.uk*. Last modified August 10, 2005.<<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/technology/4137782.stm>>

¹³“Worlds 2014 by the numbers.” *Riotgames.com*. Last modified December 1, 2014.<<http://www.riotgames.com/articles/20141201/1628/worlds-2014-numbers>>

“World Cup Final sets US TV Records.” *Espnfc.us*. Last modified July 15, 2014.<<http://www.espnfc.us/fifa-world-cup/story/1950567/world-cup-final-most-watched-soccer-game-in-us-history-more-than-26-million-viewers>>

¹⁴“NineFIFAOfficialsandFiveCorporateExecutivesIndictedforRacketeeringConspiracyandCorruption.” *Justice.gov*. Last modified May 27, 2015.<<http://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/nine-fifa-officials-and-five-corporate-executives-indicted-racketeering-conspiracy-and>>

overlapping examples that connects the ways in which various games have mattered – from attending to the needs of the body to the international implications of fandom and corruption – and how they have been differently vested with seriousness and playfulness in different contexts over time.

Herodotus gives a standard account of games as providing contexts that exist apart from necessity: the Lydians forgot about the needs of the body while they attended to playful activities, which enabled their continued survival. This common understanding of a characteristic separation of games has its initial articulation in Huizinga's *Homo Ludens*. The third characteristic that he includes in his account of play is "its secludedness, its limitedness. It is 'played out' within certain limits of time and place."¹⁵ However, the neglect of the physical body in the story of the Korean man acutely reminds us of the more complicated relationship between games and necessity than that which we find in the Herodotean story. Even in the case of these virtual games, the player plays with and through the body – a body that cannot be separated from necessity – and exists as a human being for whom the needs of the body continues to matter even while the individual attends to the role of a player in a game.

Furthermore, both stories remind us of precisely how compelling games can be in the way that they command our attention. The popularity of games among players and spectators alike, suggested by the number of spectators for these global events, indicates the complicated ways that games matter to people – a mattering that challenges our understanding of the ways in which games simultaneously ought not to matter by virtue of their qualified separation from necessity. Included in the complications of these questions of mattering is the attachment of players and teams to national identities and other politically salient categories as they relate to the

¹⁵ Huizinga, 9. As will be noted in the first chapter, Huizinga's work focuses on "play" as a concept, and tends to conflate the structure, context, activity, and experience all within his account of play.

contexts established by games. Such attachments once again refigure the supposed separation of games from other aspects of political life while simultaneously acknowledging that we do recognize games as a distinct category of how we structure human activity.

In order to clarify the relationship between games and political life, I argue that we ought to think of games as providing contexts for action in an Arendtian sense. Games exist as spaces of appearance before communities of others who observe, assess, and recognize the merit of the action performed in that space. However, due to the peculiar relationship between games and necessity— one that differs from more conventional sites of political action – games provide us with structures and contexts that shape our dispositions towards acting in ways that we experience as fundamentally distinct from our ordinary political lives. Situating this argument within existing debates about games from the literature in game studies and Aristotelian ethical thought, this disposition can be considered productively in terms of a *hexis* that is framed by polar extremes of seriousness and playfulness.¹⁶ The type of activity that we commonly refer to as “play” exhibits an altered disposition relative to these two poles than that which we find in what we think of as “ordinary life,” which is the foundation of an experience of ludic attention. The possibility for this disposition is dependent on the intersubjective recognition that the context established by game structures permits for the activity of play, which is to say that a game requires people who recognize and treat it as such.

As citizens of political communities, we are required to consider the question of, and make claims about, what matters on a regular basis— what is worth arguing, fighting, perhaps killing over. Political institutions provide the context within which these various considerations are assessed by citizens and decisions are made for the political community. The same is true for

¹⁶ *Hexis* is variously translated as disposition, state, active condition, or possession – literally a “having” – but I choose to use disposition to signal a particular orientation towards activity that motivates action. See Salkever, *Finding the Mean*, or Sparshott, *Taking Life Seriously*.

members of the communities that play games – what I will call ludic communities – although they experience a greater predisposition towards having that question of mattering be a fluid one. The fluidity comes from the particular relationship to uncertainty and the pursuit of temporary ends that is established by the structures of games. Games allow for citizens to cultivate and exercise this capacity for ludic attention in a context in which the uncertainty experienced and ends pursued in games are contrived and transitory, which is possible by virtue of the differences from other ways of structuring human activity. The Greeks of antiquity, and those of classical Athens especially, had an acute awareness of the role that different structures for playful activity had in the communal life of the *polis*. The importance of the theater in the civic lives of citizens is well-documented, and games follow in that tradition.¹⁷

IV. Games and the Ancient Greeks

Mihai Spairosu's work on the concept of play in Hellenic thought, *God of Many Names*, traces the conceptual movement from Homer through the Presocratics, playwrights, Plato, and Aristotle.¹⁸ The movement from the connection between *agon* and *arete* in Homer to the notion of *paidia* in Platonic thought represents a significant movement for Spairosu with respect to how the Greeks – and, thus, we – think about the relationship between play, power, and politics. Spairosu situates the agonistic understand of play in Homer with the aristocratic ideal expressed as “always be best and excel others.”¹⁹ Moving into the classical period, Spairosu argues that there is a shift in the valence that the Greeks attach to *agon* and its association with violent

¹⁷ Simon Goldhill and Robin Osborne, ed., *Performance Culture and Athenian Democracy*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

Josiah Ober, *Mass and Elite in Democratic Athens*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).

For a counterpoint, See PJ Rhodes, “Nothing to do with democracy: Athenian drama and the *polis*,” *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 123 (2003): 104-119.

¹⁸ Mihai I. Spairosu, *God of Many Names*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991).

¹⁹ “*Aien aristeuein kai hupeirochon emmenai allon.*” We are told of how the ideal was impressed upon Achilles by his father at Iliad 11.780.

contest. He identifies this shift as a transition from an archaic to median mentality,²⁰ and Plato and Aristotle provide us with a lens into how that transition unfolds. The purpose of pointing to Spariosu's extensive treatment of play is two-fold. First, his account of play as "amphibolous," as noted by Sutton-Smith in his work, is particularly appealing in its formulation for thinking about the qualities of ludic attention as a disposition. The term translates literally to "throwing in both directions," which captures the indeterminate and fluid condition of the way that we attend to actions while at play. I will return to the importance of this account as I elaborate on ludic attention as a disposition in the first chapter.

More immediately, Spariosu's work clarifies the differences in an account of play that travels across a multitude of structures and contexts. Spariosu notes that *agon* is almost always used in connection with games in Homer, which is to say that the activity is almost always associated with a particular structure. After Homer, the sense of contest associated with games in *agon* becomes applicable to a number of other structures and contexts – "law, politics, warfare, eros, rhetoric, history, philosophy, and literary criticism."²¹ Then, as now, play was woven into the experience of any number of possible activities, but games themselves remain a distinct site in which a particular type of activity occurs. The distinct qualities of games as structures that shape, and are shaped by, human activity call for us to meet them on their own terms, even as games remain fundamentally connected to these other aspects of political life through this notion of play upon which Spariosu and the other above-mentioned scholars draw.

The relationship between the structure of games and political life runs through the thought of these prominent Greek thinkers. Plato and Aristotle both frequently use games as

²⁰ Spariosu intentionally uses "median" to distinguish his framework from the traditional designations between archaic and classical Greece.

²¹ Spariosu, 5. Relatedly, Spariosu also notes the importance of recognizing the variety of Greek words that are meaningfully associated with an understanding of play, including *athlos*, *eris*, *tuche*, *ananke*, *charme*, *schole*, *diagoge*, *paideia*, and *mimesis*.

illustrations of political phenomena. Plato compares the movement beyond a discussion of the best possible city in the project of establishing a *politeia* in the *Laws* to a move in the game of *petteia*, while Aristotle, in his introduction of man as *zoon politikon*, compares a man without a city to an isolated piece in a game of *pessoi*.²² Leslie Kurke notes that the development of games like *petteia/pessoi* happens alongside the conflict between egalitarian and elitist traditions in Greece, much in the same way that Spariosu connects heroic *arete* to *agon* or that Ober associates with the theater as one of the Athenian institutions. She identifies the board games (*petteia/pessoi*) as games of order that were fundamentally connected to the advent of the *polis* in the same way that games that use the body celebrate noble virtues of aristocratic heroes.²³ Games were directly linked to political life in Hellenic thought in ways that stand out in comparison to our contemporary moment.

The important difference for the role of games in political life is a socially-contingent recognition of the game as a structure that permits for distinct possibilities from the other ways in which human beings interact. This is Huizinga's space "dedicated to the performance of an act apart."²⁴ This distinction holds across historical context, and is dependent on some element of separation. The features and conditions of this separation are both fundamentally vulnerable and inextricable from the way that games work as structures for human activity. It is only through a sense of separation that ludic attention becomes possible. The understanding of these aspects of games will be developed by turning to the Greeks as a way of grasping central features that continue to apply to our contemporary moment. It may seem odd to rely on close readings of

²² Plato, *Laws*, 739a

Aristotle, *Politics*, 1253a

Both *petteia* and *pessoi* are generic names of board games. See R.G. Austin, "Greek Board-Games," *Antiquity* 14, 55(1940): 257-271.

²³ Leslie Kurke, "Ancient Greek Board Games and How to Play Them," *Classical Philology* 94,3 (1999):251-252

²⁴ Huizinga, 10.

classical texts as a point of departure for exploring games in relation to political life, but these texts give us insight into how closely games and politics were treated in the earliest articulations of political thought.

One of the central overlaps with classical Greek thought is how the relationship between games and political life matters for the lives of democratic citizens. Work like that of Spariosu and Kurke demonstrates the relationship between the developing notion of citizenship and the place for games in society. As part of exploring the characteristics of games that render them as important sites of action for political beings, the capacity for ludic attention becomes a fundamental connection between games and the virtue of a democratic citizen. The classical sense of the importance of ruling and being ruled in turn, as a part of democratic citizenship, resonates with the dispositions facilitated by games, as can be seen in the ways that these thinkers consider both games and the dispositions of political beings. Expressions of a concern with dispositions appear in works of Aristotle, Homer, and Plato, and these expressions are ones from which we can learn about the importance of the dispositions of ludic attention.

The connection between the amphibolous character of ludic attention and the political importance of games is found in the way in which human beings express, experience, and contest the ways in which we attend to acting in the world. People have a sense of what ought, and what ought not, to be worthy of our attention, and that sense will differ amongst different individuals and peoples. Plato dramatizes these differences in his *Laws*, the primary subject of the third chapter of the dissertation, through the interactions between the character of the Athenian Stranger and his companions, a Spartan and a Cretan. In the course of the dialogue, the Athenian Stranger offends Megillus the Spartan's sense of what is worthy of serious attention when he asserts that "every man and woman should spend life in this way, playing the noblest possible

games, and thinking about them in a way that is the opposite of the way that they're now thought about."²⁵ Megillus provides the reader with a recognizably human response to an affront to his sense of what is appropriate for human beings to take seriously when he accuses the Stranger of belittling the human race. Megillus' anxiety about what is worthy of seriousness will linger throughout the following pages, defining a central political concern that is engaged by the experience of ludic attention.

V. Megillus' Challenge, the Stranger's Concession, and Ludic Attention

The Athenian Stranger makes the concession found in the epigraph about human affairs being "worthy of a certain seriousness" after being rebuked by Megillus for his assertion that we are, at best, playthings of the gods and ought to spend our time playing the noblest possible games and singing in praise of the gods.²⁶ In this moment of contention between interlocutors, Plato demonstrates an enduring conflict in human experience about what we ought to be doing and how we ought to attend to doing those things. In the words of the Stranger, this conflict can be expressed in terms related to seriousness (*spoude*) and playfulness (*paidia*) as distinct ways of approaching the things that we do.²⁷ In "The 'Serious Play' of Book 7 of Plato's *Laws*," David Roochnik notes the tension between the perceived seriousness of the project of the three characters in the *Laws*, as they set forth a plan for the laws of the Cretan colony of Magnesia, and the playfulness both asserted and exemplified by the Stranger in this moment.²⁸

²⁵ *Laws*, 803c

²⁶ *Laws*, 803e

²⁷ Pangle tends to translate these terms as "seriousness" and "play." As will also be the case with Aristotle, *paidia* in Plato is considered as a type of activity, even if it also is frequently related to a way of attending to activity in the context of the discussion through its pairing with seriousness (*spoude*). As such, I treat *paidia* as marking a disposition, and not just as a description of particular activities.

²⁸ David Roochnik, "The 'Serious Play' of Book 7 of Plato's *Laws*," in *Plato's Laws: Force and Truth in Politics*, ed. G. Recco and E. Sanday (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 144-54.

Roochnik notes how the Stranger's willingness to "unsay" what he says about human beings could be read as showing exactly how un-seriously he takes his own words (although he argues that we need to consider what the specific language "a certain (*tinós*) seriousness" suggests in a more nuanced way).

Furthermore, the interaction between the Athenian and the Spartan accentuates that tension by demonstrating how these assessments of what is worthy of attention becomes contested between individuals with different perspectives. The contested sense of appropriate disposition in this moment illustrates how the question of attention is a political one.

Platonic dialogues frequently portray rote assent on the part of unengaged interlocutors – as with Euthyphro or Gorgias, in the dialogues that bear their names– but these same dialogues also exhibit similar moments in which a nerve is struck when some deeply held commitment has somehow come under attack, to the surprise of the reticent interlocutor. It is in these moments when Socrates – or another primary interlocutor, like the Athenian Stranger in this case – gets accused of distorting the conversation, of *playing* with words. The movement of the conversation is acceptable until it reaches a particular conclusion, at which point the interlocutor changes how he attends to what is being said. The following argument looks to draw our own attention to an overlooked site in which a political capacity based in types of attention is experienced and developed. I will detail moments like these Platonic ones that help make sense of: (1) the amphibolous quality of attention – to use Spariosu’s description of play to apply to the attention it elicits – that leads to the question of what is worthy of our seriousness or playfulness, (2) how we think about the appropriate attentiveness for those activities to which we give our attention, and (3) the ways that our attention matters as part of our broader political lives through the activities that are promoted or stifled by the various dispositions of attention, including the persuasive possibilities of the activity found in game structures. In doing so, we will become more aware of how seriousness and playfulness matter to political beings as ways of attending to action. An understanding of our dispositions of attention helps clarify how they are produced,

reproduced, or contested in relation to the various ways that we structure our interactions in common.

I begin this consideration by turning to Aristotle, whose approach to virtue in the *Nicomachean Ethics* helps to clarify the relationship between action and attention and provides a framework for characterizing ludic attention as part of a disposition. Aristotelian *hexis* – as a way of thinking about the ethical relationship to action by an appeal to a continuum of states that are set between polar extremes – is useful for conceptualizing how human beings experience seriousness and playfulness as forms of attention. Before articulating the contours of ludic attention, I detail a framework for understanding a disposition of attention generally. With that framework in mind, I elaborate on some of the key concepts, introduced here to some degree, that enable a discussion of how this disposition of attention can be considered political in nature and why games exist as particularly fruitful sites for encountering that disposition and exploring its contours. I draw on a sense of action from Hannah Arendt, as well as prominent theoretical work from game studies, to elaborate on these connections.

The next chapter brings these ideas to bear on a reading of Homer's *Iliad* that sets the funeral games for Patroclus in Book XXIII alongside the battlefield and the assembly as sites of action in the poem. By considering the games alongside these more conventional sites of political action, we gain a greater appreciation for the action that occurs relative to the different ways of structuring activity and how the heroes attend to acting in the world relative to different contexts. The funeral games exhibit possibilities for action that are foreclosed in other contexts because of the way that the games help to attenuate the pervasive seriousness that is found on the battlefield and in the assembly. The funeral games provide examples of how members of the community figure and police a sense of appropriate attentiveness relative to the context in which

they act. The poem demonstrates how attention itself can become a point of contestation in addition to its role in shaping how we engage in action. The games also enable new possibilities for appearing before the political community by virtue of their separation.

The funeral games, however, present us with an account of games that overemphasizes the contained impact of games as a site for action. The discussions of games in Plato's *Laws*, on the other hand, directly reflect the permeability of games with respect to the effects of the activity. The third chapter elaborates on how games affect those who participate in ludic communities by discussing of the persuasive implications that emerge from an engagement with contested dispositions of attention. In the *Laws*, the Athenian Stranger provides an argument about the role that a more playful disposition has in education and political order, an argument that resonates with the broader conversations in the dialogue. As the three old men journey to the Cave of Zeus, the reader sees the variation in how they attend to the different topics of conversation, which emphasizes the Stranger's argument about the potential persuasive effects of a particular disposition of attention. I show how Plato figures ludic attention into the very structure of their journey, which the Stranger identifies as *diatribe*, meaning potentially both a pastime and serious occupation.²⁹ Although not exactly a game itself – although the Stranger will call it that at several points – the entire activity of the conversation exemplifies the ludic attention of the *diatribe* while demonstrating its potential successes and failures with respect to facilitating different attention. In doing so, Plato infuses the Stranger's words with lessons from the dramatic qualities of the dialogue that culminate in an account of games as providing contexts that are persuasive for the development of a particular type of citizen virtue.

²⁹ "LSJ. The Online Liddell-Scott-Jones Greek-English Lexicon," Thesaurus Linguae Graecae, accessed March 9, 2016, <<http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/ljsj/#eid=1&context=lsj>>.

I expand upon the provocations about attention and persuasion from Plato's *Laws* in the final chapter by returning to contemporary examples of games and their application as structures in the service of persuasion. By first considering a particular category of videogames, mobile free-to-play games, I offer an account of how the developers of these games rely on ludic attention as a central means of convincing players to spend money on their ostensibly free game. The argument about the persuasive qualities of these games builds on the framework of ludic attention developed in the previous chapters in order to illustrate the implications of the liminal position afforded by game structures. This same framework is also applied to the recent attempt to make use of familiar elements of game structure to shape non-game contexts, which has gained notoriety under the term "gamification." These contemporary contexts allow us to elaborate on the various possibilities afforded by the ludic attention found in the context of games, possibilities which are only suggested in the *Laws*.

Ultimately, these contemporary examples lead us to the conclusion anticipated by the *Laws* about a particular virtue of membership in community that can be promoted and cultivated in the contexts established by games. Ludic attention remains attached to a capacity that is relevant to a classical understanding of democratic citizenship. As scholarship in game studies continues to explore the place for games in contemporary society, this characteristic of games is worthy of its own "certain seriousness" for students of politics – a lesson from classical thought.

I conclude this prelude to the argument with the words of Kleinias the Cretan. When the Athenian Stranger suggests that their opening discussions of the *Laws* have been a prelude that will orient them correctly for the attempt at detailing the laws of Magnesia, Kleinias responds favorably and with reference to a practice found in games. He encourages them to renew the intentionality of their discussion by saying: "Let's repeat, with a second and better start, as they

declare in playing games, but this time with the intention of completing a prelude and not just any chance sort of speech.”³⁰ I begin my own “second and better start” by turning to Aristotle in order to clarify our understanding of a disposition of attention as it applies to this discussion of games and political life.

³⁰ *Laws*, 723e

Chapter 1: Ludic Attention and Games as Sites of Action

“Being in politics is like being a football coach. You have to be smart enough to understand the game, and dumb enough to think it’s important.”

– Eugene McCarthy³¹

I. To Think It’s Important

In pursuit of the central implication of Megillus’ challenge about what of human activity is worthy of a certain seriousness, this chapter begins with a reconsideration of Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* and the way that it presents seriousness as the necessary disposition of a life of virtue, while denigrating playfulness as characteristic of lesser activity – an account that is commonly reflected in the subsequent Western tradition. There is an ambivalence about the apparent lack of important activity that occurs while at play, one that is not all that different from the sentiment about politics expressed by Senator McCarthy above. Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to categorize either games or politics as being marked by only one proper way of attending to acting within their contexts. Aristotle, ironically, provides the conceptual means by which we can correct for the simplistic over-identification of particular dispositions with particular activities. By rethinking how the types of attention that we find in seriousness and playfulness could be better understood as dispositional extremes, the Aristotelian ethical framework of disposition (*hexis*) and the mean (*to meson/mesotes*) becomes an aid in conceptualizing a disposition of attention.

³¹ Eugene McCarthy, *Washington Post*, Nov. 12 1967 in Bill Adler, ed., *The McCarthy Wit*. (New York: Fawcett, 1969).

This effort requires a critique of the existing privileging of seriousness in Aristotle's teleology, but his ethical thought provides the conditions upon which attention can be better understood as a *hexis*. Although Aristotle does not provide an explicit definition of seriousness and playfulness, his use of both concepts allows for an engagement with how we act in the world as a connection between what we do and how we express (and others perceive) the intentionality of our actions. The connection that Aristotle makes between disposition and virtue helps to identify how attention becomes an issue of political salience, which is to say that attention becomes contested as part of living together and impacts how we react to conflict and its resolution. With these issues in mind, I treat this Aristotelian framework as a foundation upon which to explore how games serve as particularly relevant sites for exploring the questions about a disposition of attention that emerge.

Games are not readily considered alongside more conventional sites of political life, owing in large part to their peculiar position relative to necessity and the pursuit of temporary ends. Even though those who play games are often subject to conditions of uncertainty and pursue ends under constraints like political actors do – which is why it is not a coincidence that game theory is a prominent way of understanding political phenomena – games are still recognized as structuring a distinct type of activity that differs from ordinary life. In order to understand that distinction, and the consequences of it for actors and their attention, I look to some of the literature in the emerging field of game studies alongside the familiar account of action and the public realm in Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition*. The problem of interestedness and the attempt at defining an idealized space for action is a concern for Arendt in the same way that it presents a problem with how we understand games. This tension serves as a helpful introduction to a more thorough account of how games function as structures that shape

interactions and facilitate particular types of contestation between human beings. This chapter combines a treatment of ludic attention as part of a disposition of attention with an understanding of games as sites of action to articulate a conceptual framework for understanding the relationship among games, attention, and political life.

II. Seriousness and Playfulness in Aristotle's Ethical Framework

One of the most recognized arguments in the *Nicomachean Ethics* is the way in which Aristotle sets up polar dichotomies in order to get at an understanding of virtue; however, one dichotomy that appears in the work does not get treated in the same way – the dichotomy of seriousness (*spoude*) and playfulness (*paidia*).³² In Aristotle's account, the serious (*spoudaios*) man is worthy of praise, so much so that this sense of the serious man is often simply rendered in terms of being good or excellent, as in Irwin's translation.³³ *Paidia* describes activity that is associated with amusement and distraction for Aristotle and gets relegated to a realm of activity that is separate from the appropriate, which is to say philosophic, form of leisure (*scholē*). Aristotle devotes an important part of his closing discussion in the *Ethics* to an explanation of why the type of amusement that one finds through *paidia* is not the same as what he means when he points to the autotelic activity that is central to happiness (*eudaimonia*). It is on this point that Aristotle's conceptualization of *paidia* is shown to be problematically narrow in order to remain consistent with his teleological account of virtue, as he only understands amusement as a particular type of activity that is aimed at replenishing the individual's ability to do other things, serious things.

³² *Paidia* in this form tends to refer to an activity similar to what we call play, which is how Aristotle uses it, but its pairing with *spoude* renders it also intelligible as part of a person's disposition, as we will see below. In this argument, I make frequent use of the Attic Greek words in clarifying points. I try to limit that use to points where clarifying Aristotle's argument, or the links between arguments, is the primary aim.

³³ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terrence Irwin (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1999), 1098a. All Aristotle citations use Bekker numbering.

As a result, playfulness becomes associated exclusively with relaxation (*anapausis*) as characteristic of activity that is amusing. If the playfulness found in amusement is doing anything more than this task of rejuvenation, he treats that activity as an excess and associates it with tyranny and the types of activity that enables the tyrant's aims.³⁴ By linking his account of amusement to the fulfillment of tyrannical impulses in this way, *paidia* becomes instrumental for Aristotle – it exists for the sake of what is serious – and therefore does not disrupt his account of *eudaimonia*, which must only exist for itself. Aristotle dismisses playfulness from serious consideration, and the relationships among seriousness, virtue, and *eudaimonia* stay intact.

This framework maintains the sense that *paidia* is something one does – and that activity is inextricably linked to how one does it, as *paidia* gets paired with *spoude* – but the identity between act and disposition is inconsistent with his account of virtuous action in the *Ethics*, in which it is not just what we do, but how we do it, that matters.³⁵ Act and attention are understood as distinct in his ethical thought, but not in this formulation of *paidia*. I offer an understanding of ludic attention that builds out from this contradiction in the *Ethics*. By returning to the familiar account of virtue and the mean (*to meson/mesotes*) in Aristotle's work, I offer up a new framework for understanding attention that renders both seriousness and playfulness in a way that is more consistent with Aristotle. *Spoude* and *paidia*, set as polar extremes with a continuum of possibilities for attention between them, fit the Aristotelian model of a disposition (*hexis*), which avoids the issue of assuming that particular dispositions are determinant characteristics of discrete types of activity.

In this rearticulation of a disposition of attention, Aristotle's good/serious man (*spoudaios*) would actually be better understood as someone who demonstrates a virtuous mean

³⁴ *Ethics*, 1176b

³⁵ *Ethics*, 1105a

of attentiveness that lies between dispositional poles. Although it may reside closer to seriousness – consistent with Aristotle’s emphasis that *to meson* is not an arithmetic mean – it remains an error to identify virtuous attention as a categorical seriousness. By considering attention as a disposition, the question of appropriate disposition can be understood relative to context, and thus is open to disagreement and contested opinion as political beings act in the world.

Insofar as the *Ethics* presents the virtue of the individual as Aristotle’s own prelude to the virtue of the political community found in the *Politics*, this discussion of a disposition of attention prepares us to think about how the individual experiences attention relative to the political community, as well as how our experiences and expressions of a sense of the appropriate disposition of attention relative to particular contexts becomes politically articulated and contested.³⁶ In order to begin that effort, it is important to first wrestle with the teleological impetus that leads to a privileging of seriousness in Aristotelian thought. The intentionality of virtue in the *Ethics* is based in the primacy of *telos* for Aristotle. We must understand how a sense of playfulness confronts that teleology before we can figure its place in an ethical and political disposition in Aristotelian terms.

III. Teleology and the Problem with *Paidia* in the *Ethics*

In *Masking the Abject*, Mechthild Nagel argues that scholars often misattribute the denigration of play in the Western canon to Plato when it is actually Aristotle who sets a strict dichotomy that privileges seriousness in his work, as detailed above. This privileged position lingers through the Western tradition, and it is identified by Nietzsche as being captured in the

³⁶ One way of discussing how one’s sense of the appropriate disposition relative to particular contexts would be experienced is as affective, which is to say that our attention is not solely the product of rational reflection. Insofar as thinking about Aristotelian *hexis* alongside an understanding of affect may be helpful to the reader, the term could be applied to the following discussion. However, I endeavor to remain within explicitly Aristotelian terms in my discussion of his ethics.

Apollonian and Dionysian.³⁷ Nagel explains that Plato's dialogues often treat the value of *paidia* with subtlety – and occasionally with explicit praise, as happens in the *Laws* – while Aristotle treats *paidia* as unqualifiedly inferior. A similar recognition of the primacy of seriousness at the expense of playfulness comes in Francis Sparshott's treatment of the *Ethics*, *Taking Life Seriously*. In Sparshott's account, seriousness is explicitly tied to the central understanding of attention as a particular way of approaching human activity. Aristotle's *spoudaios* describes someone whose activity demonstrates deliberation (*bouleusis*) and choice (*prohairesis*) as the defining characteristics of attending to the act, which is what drives the veneration of *spoude* in his account.³⁸

The centrality of *bouleusis* and *prohairesis* in Aristotle's understanding of ethics emphasizes the primacy of the teleology of his account. As the opening words of the work indicate: "Every craft and every line of inquiry, and likewise every action and decision, seems to seek some good."³⁹ Embedded in the teleology of Aristotelian thought is the intentionality that we associate with seriousness, which (along with *bouleusis* and *prohairesis*) seems to undermine any place for playfulness, as its counterpoint, in a virtuous life. One might say that seriousness intends something in a way that playfulness does not, and this is the problem for Aristotle. Even as Aristotle acknowledges at points in the *Ethics* that empirically *paidia* has a role in human activity, its relevance maintains only insofar as it exists as a necessary means of refreshing human potentiality for serious action – more like sleep than activity. He does not treat *paidia* as a potentially significant component of his account of a virtuous life – let alone a life lived in common with other human beings – and that includes not discussing how playfulness relates to his teleology.

³⁷ Mechthild Nagel, *Masking the Abject: A Genealogy of Play*, (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2002).

³⁸ Francis Sparshott, *Taking Life Seriously*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994).

³⁹ *Ethics*, 1094a

Such an understanding of Aristotle suggests a fundamental way in which a valorized sense of playfulness is nonsensical within an ethical framework based in a teleological understanding of the world. The intentionality of an act relates the thing that is done to how one approaches acting; the way in which an act is done informs how one interprets the act, and the way in which something is done matters to Aristotle's account of virtue. Seriousness has a direct relationship to intentionality in a way that fits within a teleological understanding of the world; playfulness does not. If I make a statement in a way that is understood as playful, the implication is that some aspect of making that statement is inconsistent with the intentionality that would be implied if that same statement was understood as serious.

Intentionality and action are more dubiously linked when the action is attended to with a playful disposition, and this is a problem for Aristotle. If there is any intentionality to be found in *paidia* within Aristotle's framework, it is the orientation towards the amusement and relaxation with which he identifies it and finds either contemptible or begrudgingly necessary (or both). Aristotle, on this account, is a peculiar choice to open up a discussion of seriousness and playfulness as extremes of a political disposition. However, although Aristotle ultimately discards *paidia* while privileging *scholē*, I want to argue that the framework of *hexis* and the virtuous appropriateness of *to meson/mesotes* serves as a model for thinking about the dispositions of attention that we bring to the activities in which we engage – a disposition in which both seriousness and playfulness can still be consistent with Aristotelian teleology. Aristotle's account gives us the tools to think more comprehensively about how playfulness exists as a significant dispositional counterpoint to seriousness in the life of the *zoon politikon*.

IV. Virtuous Means and Appropriate Attention

The most important component of the Aristotelian ethical framework for reconsidering the role assigned to *paidia* is that *to meson* exists as a proportional, not arithmetic, mean – virtue can only be understood relative to the individual and the circumstances within which it gets expressed through activity.⁴⁰ Inherent in Aristotle’s model of virtue is a sense of appropriateness in context that grounds our ethical dispositions, which we lose if we take seriousness to be an ideal disposition unto itself. Human beings act in various contexts in which seriousness might be more or less appropriate, so it is inconsistent to assert that all activity demands seriousness in the same way at any given time. As such, it is more helpful to understand seriousness as an extreme of a disposition of attention that can be understood as an excess – the individual attends to the intentionality of an activity more than is warranted by the context – for which we find a recognizable counterpoint in playfulness, as a deficiency relative to intentionality relative to context.

What Aristotle consistently refers to as *spoudaios*, intending at a virtuous meaning of seriousness, actually represents something more like *to meson* of a disposition of attention that applies to the various types of human activity. This disposition of attention relies on the same reflective capabilities and habits that Aristotle champions in the rest of the *Ethics* as part of virtue. As such, human beings are always engaged in action while simultaneously, through their attention, determining and expressing what is “worthy of a certain seriousness,” in the words of the Athenian Stranger. As Nagel identifies, Plato demonstrates the more subtle treatment of playfulness by recognizing that the moral and practical education of citizen occurs through

⁴⁰ *Ethics*, 1109a

activity that occurs “whether seriously or playfully.”⁴¹ The limited value that Aristotle assigns to *paidia* in the *Ethics* does not lead to such a role for playfulness, but that need not be the case.⁴²

The problem for *paidia* that leads to its denigration in Aristotle’s ethical framework is the importance of *telos*, *bouleusis*, and *prohairesis* to his account of virtue. Virtuous human beings must know that an action is virtuous, must decide on the action for the sake of performing that action, and must do from a firm and unchanging position.⁴³ Virtuous action is intentional – it aims at some end, and does so for a reason – which becomes problematic for thinking about *paidia* as an Aristotelian concept linked to virtue. Nevertheless, it is still possible to consider how seriousness and playfulness can work together as part of a disposition of attention in such a way that it does not violate this fundamental premise of intentionality in Aristotelian virtue.

Doing so requires that we somewhat relax the opening teleological gambit of the *Ethics* that everything aims at some end – a move that is likely no less of a sin in the eyes of an Aristotelian. Playfulness has a fundamentally different relationship to ends than Aristotle presents; it would be better thought of as parateleological.⁴⁴ It is not that playfulness does not intend at something, but rather that its intentionality exists apart from particular ends. In the teleological account, it is the end that gives directionality and meaning to the movement of the action – it is the reason for which it occurs – but playful movement is not bound to this logic in the same way. Insofar as one attends to an action playfully, the action is still intentional, but it is not motivated exclusively by the realization of its *telos*. Relatedly, it is important to note that playful attention is not the same as inattention; the latter being passive, while the former is active.

⁴¹ Thomas L Pangle trans., *The Laws of Plato*, Chicago: University of Chicago, 1988.

⁴² Even so, Aristotle seems to recognize the possibility of virtue in something that resembles playfulness in his treatment of wit or tact as a virtue later in the work, which I will discuss below.

⁴³ *Ethics*, 1105a

⁴⁴ The term “paratelic” comes from Michael J. Apter’s reversal theory (*Reversal Theory*, 2007) in which serious and playful are juxtaposed as distinguishing motivation based on ends from that based on enjoyment of process, respectively.

Playfulness is a way of attending to action, even as its intentionality is not strictly guided by the pursuit of ends.

This relaxing of the intentionality associated with Aristotelian teleology becomes more palatable, although it still violates the logic of *telos*, if one adds an account of human fallibility to the clause that virtuous action must be done from a “firm and unchanging” disposition;⁴⁵ the “firm and unchanging” qualities of that disposition can only ever be provisionally so for fallible beings. Deliberation and choice must always reflect upon the condition of fallibility. Furthermore, the relation of virtue to the particulars of context and necessary adaptability is already embedded within Aristotelian considerations of *arete*, *hexis*, and *phronesis*. Across contexts, human beings act absent perfect knowledge, and thus should not reasonably be completely serious in their actions. This approach to attention is characteristic of Socratic humility, and will also be important to the account of attention found in the *Laws*. The Athenian Stranger’s reflection on what is worthy of seriousness is itself a serious contention – it attends to a central question about human activity as its motivating *telos*. That *telos* is bound up in the very project of the *Ethics*, that of the good life. As such, the question of the appropriateness of relative seriousness and playfulness of attention becomes the sort of contentious point of living together that we find as the central preoccupation for the *Ethics* and the *Politics*.

V. Seriousness, Playfulness, and the Disposition of Attention

With the problem of *paidia* and the place for attention in the context of the *Ethics* in mind, it is now possible to sketch the outlines of how playfulness can be considered more fruitfully as part of an Aristotelian *hexis*, in terms of a disposition that human beings experience through the attention that they bring to activity rather than as necessarily characteristic of any particular activity. Virtues, for Aristotle, are intermediate conditions (*mesotes*), found between an excess

⁴⁵ *Ethics*, 1105a

(*hyperballein*) and a deficiency (*elleipon/endeia*), and they are dispositions (*hexeis*).⁴⁶ As such, we can think of a disposition of attention that has seriousness as an excessive state of intentionality and playfulness as a deficient state of intentionality. Most people tend to lie somewhere on the continuum between the extremes for any given context, and Aristotle helps us conceive of a virtuous mean of attentiveness for such a disposition. Ludic attention is a particular disposition of attention that occupies its own sort of in-between position, though not necessarily the *mesotes* for any particular context. The attention experienced and demonstrated while playing games does, however, illustrate why the continuum of an Aristotelian *hexis* is a better way of understanding attention.

It is central to this notion of extremes of attention that different experiences and expressions of relative seriousness and playfulness are appropriate to different contexts. In what is appropriately Aristotelian fashion, the proportional mean of such a disposition of attention would be responsive to particulars of individuals and contexts, rather than the categorical seriousness that seems to be the privileged mode of attention found within the *Ethics*. Human beings must assess whether or not any particular activity is worth the attention given to it, an assessment that is always partial, contested, and subject to revision. I will now trace some provisional outlines of what these dispositional poles that comprise our attention might look like, in order to open up a framework that can be elaborated upon in the following chapters.

At the outset, the colloquial American English use of variations on “serious” and “playful” does a significant amount of the lifting, and these meanings largely have been relied upon thus far. When someone says, “Don’t take it so seriously,” the comment suggests that its target has acted in such a way that demonstrates too fervent of an investment in a particular situation or its outcome. The intentionality of the action is driving an overwhelming intensity of pursuit of its

⁴⁶ *Ethics*, 1107a and 1114b

aim. By expressing that such a degree of seriousness is unwarranted, there is a claim about the inappropriateness of such intensity for the particular situation. Similarly, one can probably think of situations in which the opposite has been expressed and someone was admonished for not taking something seriously enough, suggesting the need for recommitting the intentionality of one's attention to the aims of the activity and how one moves towards them.

On the other hand, if someone were to say, "I was just being playful," it would likely be an indication that person is looking to deny the perceived degree of intentionality that others seemed to ascribe to a particular action. A comment about someone showing up a few minutes late might express genuine frustration or light-hearted banter – relative degrees of seriousness and playfulness in its intention – depending on the particulars of the context in which someone says it. The confusion about whether or not the comment was guided by a desire to admonish from genuine frustration leads to the confusion about whether the comment ought to be taken seriously or playfully; it is confusion about the degree to which the act was associated with its intention. Seriousness and playfulness represent two conceptual poles of attention to an act, such as the act of commenting on tardiness, that indicate the difference in intentionality and intensity with which actors act relative to their aims. In common language use cases like those above, these poles can be used to challenge the perceived attention given on the part of others.

Further contours of this distinction can be found by considering how these terms are paired in the Greek. Initially, the terms of *spoude* and *paidia* might make for a somewhat unintuitive pairing in that they don't immediately represent conceptual opposites; nevertheless, the conceptual relations are instructive. *Spoude* has definitional associations with haste and speed, as well as effort, zeal, and earnestness.⁴⁷ In true Aristotelian fashion, descriptions associated with *spoude* indicate that one aims at something and aims at it with effort and purpose.

⁴⁷ The Greek meanings here come from the Liddell-Scott-Jones Greek-English Lexicon.

It is an attention that seeks to see something done, and done with vehemence. *Paidia*, on the other hand, does not necessarily denote the obvious conceptual opposites to *spoude* – which one might think of as slow, languid, or indolent – but rather childishness and pastimes. The obvious philological connections are with children (*pais*) and education (*paideia*) through the verbal form *paizō*, which suggests play, sport, and jesting. Unlike what we might expect of a conceptual opposite to a term related to effort and zeal, *paidia* is still vital and attentive, but in a different way. This observation is consistent with what was said about language use above, and this pairing in the Greek provides further clarification for both terms. Put in opposition to playfulness, seriousness gains connotations of maturity and order to go along with the intensity of investment. Similarly, playfulness becomes aligned with being indirect and disinterested.

An underlying conceptual affinity within this pair is the way in which they both account for different ways of understanding the intentionality of movement. Seriousness intends at a particular outcome and seeks its realization or completion – it moves towards an end. Playfulness still moves, like a child spinning around on a playground, but without the same logic of intentionality and no clear desire for an end.⁴⁸ Both concepts refer to the way that we move and act in the world and, in doing so, represent different extremes of intentionality that individuals feel through the way that they attend to the directionality of that movement and activity. Ludic attention engages both of these dispositional poles.

This sense of seriousness, as noted above, has a clear resonance with the logic of Aristotelian thought and its valorization of deliberate action, as well as with colloquial use. If we say that someone is serious about something – whether that be work or a pastime – we indicate that this person pursues that activity and its goals with directedness, intention, investment, and/or

⁴⁸ On this point about movement, it may be helpful to consider Gadamer's discussion of play in *Truth and Method* in which he uses our descriptions of play in nature – the play of light or waves, for example – to characterize the endlessness and self-perpetuating qualities of play.

care. Alternatively, as above, we might say that the same person takes that thing “too seriously,” indicating that we do not believe that said activity merits the degree of intentionality and investment that is signaled through the intensity of attention that he or she demonstrates. It may be more common to say that someone is not taking something seriously enough, rather than to say that they are attending to something playfully, but one can likely imagine situations involving experiences of, and claims to and against the appropriateness of, varying degrees of excess and deficiency with respect to this disposition of attention. These experiences and expressions of a disposition of attention do not happen in a vacuum, but rather are fundamentally related to the contexts in which they occur. As such, it is important to consider the ways that we structure the various contexts in which we act, sites of action.

VI. Sites of Action and Attention

As part of justifying the applicability of Aristotelian *hexis* for thinking about attention, I argued that a disposition of attention implies the appropriateness of a virtuous mean condition relative to the context of action. The experiences of the individual are felt and, in turn, expressed through action relative to the circumstances of that particular situation. It can be easy to overlook the importance of this experiential aspect of *hexis* in the Aristotelian ethical project, especially with the emphasis on deliberation and choice through rationality. Nevertheless, it is precisely this contextualized experience that leads Aristotle to consider *mesotes* as always being articulated relative to the particular individual and circumstances.⁴⁹

For example, I might feel invested in a basketball game in such a way that I attend to it with a heightened seriousness when compared with my other friends. It may result from the physical exertion that I have put into it myself, or the way that my family or my town or my state gets excited about the sport, or an early memorable experience (and likely some combination of

⁴⁹ *Ethics*, 1106a

these things and others). I may only experience seriousness as a spectator, and not as a player. It might be the way that I experience the spectacle, in a crowd of other spectators, cheering a team that represents a community with which I identify. Similarly, I might be sitting next to someone whose experience of those same conditions will likely lead to a different disposition of attention in that moment. The same could be said of any number of potential sites of action – a community meeting, rally, protest, etc. – in which people expresses how they are attending to their action in that context. Regardless, what Aristotle considers to be the mean condition varies depending on the relationship between the individual and the context. The idiosyncratic quality of such an experience relative to the site of action emphasizes why the model of *hexis* is all the more applicable to how individuals attend to activity as political beings.

Another way of approaching this point is to say that sites of action – the structures and contexts that govern various human activities – influence both the embodied and intuited experience of those people who act within their structures. The same physical act – say, attempting to punch someone else – is read differently by all involved if it happens in a boxing ring rather than if it happens in a bar. Similarly, a comment that is strategic in nature may be received differently in a town hall than it would be at a card table. Our dispositions are affected by the expectations set by structures, which is why those structures that we think of as games are treated differently than other sites of action. There is a reason Aristotle dismisses amusement as being unworthy of serious attention, because those types of activities have been intersubjectively set aside as sites of particular forms of attention; we mark games as being separate sites for particular types of activity. Nevertheless, that measure of separation does not mean that we ought to dismiss the activity out of hand as limited to particular ideas of meaningfulness and the attention appropriate to those contexts. The relationship between activity and dispositions is not

predetermined, even though this is the suggestion made when Aristotle aligns *paidia* firmly with relaxation.

As noted as part of uncovering what is problematic about playfulness with respect to virtue, the deliberate nature of virtue is fundamental for Aristotle. And yet, the Aristotelian framework emphasizes the possibility – indeed, frequency, if we consider the rarity of virtue and the common problem of *akrasia* – of a separation of intentionality and action. Again, it is not sufficient in Aristotle’s account of virtue that the correct action be done, but it must be done knowingly, only for the sake of that action, and from a firm and unchanging position.⁵⁰ An acknowledgment of the separation of action from the way in which the act is done is implicit in Aristotle’s requirement for virtuous action and the obstacles to its fulfillment. It is for this reason that the good man gets called *spoudaios*, since Aristotle exalts seriousness as the way of attending to action, and one that is difficult to achieve. However, the actions and contexts for actions that are worthy of relative seriousness is a contested matter, which means that *spoude* is not always considered to be the appropriate way to attend to action. Aristotle seems to begrudgingly recognize this when he remarks that relaxation (*anapausis*) seems to be a necessary part of life and even elaborates on an account of the virtue appropriate to it, agile wit and dexterous tact. This social virtue is notable for the way in which Aristotle figures it as its own sort of movement, which is a helpful point of comparison for the disposition of attention and further demonstrates how it remains consistent with the Aristotelian framework.

VII. To Wit and Movement as Part of *Hexis*

At the end of his discussion of virtues of character, Aristotle provides his account of a mean condition that is similar to how we might conceptualize a mean between seriousness and playfulness when he discusses those who have agile wit (*eutrapeloi*) and dexterous tact

⁵⁰ *Ethics*, 1105a

(*epidexiotes*) with respect to jokes, amusement, and relaxation.⁵¹ This account of wit as a social virtue is noteworthy as it is the last virtue in the account of virtues of character that Aristotle actually treats as such.⁵² While the position of this account of the social virtue related to *anapausis* suggests a certain marginality or inferiority, it nevertheless provides us with a treatment of virtue recognized by Aristotle and associated with something that is not defined by its seriousness. Despite how Aristotle understands the instrumentality of relaxation as a means to revitalize us so that we may return to serious pursuits, he still applies his ethical framework to the virtuous *mesotes* associated with that *hexis*. In doing so, he provides a model for the virtue associated with a disposition of attention and the grounds upon which one can make a claim to the appropriateness of attention.

The excessive and deficient extremes of this *hexis* are relative to what Aristotle refers to as the movement of character,⁵³ which Aristotle identifies with the ability to joke. The excessive condition is exemplified by someone who is willing to joke too frequently, “since there are always opportunities at hand for raising a laugh,”⁵⁴ while the deficient condition demonstrates stiffness that leads to an unwillingness to engage in such amusement altogether. Aristotle’s discussion of wit refers to character types that represent the extremes with respect to *anapausis* – translated by Irwin as the character types of the boor (*agroikos*) and the buffoon (*bomolochos*) – that set the parameters of the mean conditions of *eutrapelia* and *epidexiotes*. These examples draw on this sense of a joke as a movement of character: the boor is unwilling to engage in

⁵¹ *Ethics*, 1128a

John Lombardini, “Civic Laughter: Aristotle and the Political Virtue of Humor,” *Political Theory* 41,2 (2013): 203-230. Lombardini provides a more complete account of the role of wit and humor in Aristotle’s thought, but the purpose of exploring this section here is to provide a model of virtue that has affinities with a disposition of attention, not a full reconstruction of the place for wit in the *Ethics* (even if those two purposes are aligned).

⁵² An account of shame follows, but Aristotle notes that it is more appropriately thought of as a feeling rather than as a *hexis*, and then he immediately turns to his detailed discussion of the case of justice.

⁵³ “τοῦ γὰρ ἥθους αἱ τοιαῦται δοκοῦσι κινήσεις εἶναι,” *Ethics*, 1128a10

⁵⁴ *Ethics*, 1128a

movement when it is appropriate, allowing for the possibility of humor, while the buffoon is too willing to engage in such movement. As the mean condition, the movement of the *eutrapeloi* is greater than that deficiency of the boor, but not to the excess of the buffoon. Aristotle considers *epidexiotes* as engaging in an appropriate amount of movement relative to the amusing situation in which one finds oneself, while both the boor and the buffoon act inappropriately.

There is something to be gained for the model of a disposition of attention in the way that Aristotle guides us to think about this *hexis* through a consideration of a relationship to movement as a central characteristic of its *mesotes*. Embedded in the way that Aristotle discusses dexterous tact as an intermediate state in this section on wit is a sense of appropriate movement (*kinesis*) of character (*ethos*), which qualifies his earlier assertion that virtuous action must come from a firm and unchanging position.⁵⁵ Virtue requires an attention to context on the part of the actor, as exemplified by his understanding of *epidexiotes*. Furthermore, this particular movement of character is not the characteristic intentional movement that we have come to associate with Aristotelian virtue and its veneration of the serious man – it has an element of playfulness. The movement of *eutrapelia* and *epidexiotes* does not have the same intentionality or directionality that pervades the account of virtues in the *Ethics*. There is an affinity between the virtuous movement of character and the intentionality of attention. Insofar as the witty person aims at humor as an end, such an aim can only be realized through a willingness to embrace a certain measure of movement.

One can imagine, as Aristotle begins to do here, a virtue that is defined by some element of the playfulness of its movement with respect to attention, instead of through a categorical seriousness. The point here is not to catch Aristotle in a moment of inconsistency, but rather to illustrate how playfulness can rightly be considered as a part of a disposition in Aristotelian

⁵⁵ *Ethics*, 1105a

terms, even as the parateleological nature of *paidia* cuts across his understanding of virtue. In this way, Aristotle's framework of *hexis* and *to meson/mesotes* remains an asset to an understanding of a disposition of attention, despite the explicit denigration of *paidia* in his work. I offer a few more words about the implications of this framework on the idea of what virtuous attention might look like for political beings before proceeding with an account of how an understanding of a disposition of attention matters for our understanding of ludic attention and games as sites of action.

VIII. *To Meson* and the Political Virtue of Attentiveness

Insofar as seriousness and playfulness capture the degrees of intentionality, intensity, and investment of action, it is possible to elaborate on what the mean, *to meson*, of a disposition of this sort would look like in Aristotelian terms, and how that virtue might be applied to political actors. If *to meson* can exist between extremes of relative movement, as we see in Aristotle's account of wit, then the virtuous mean would be found between the directed intentionality of seriousness and the undirected para-intentionality of playfulness. The virtuous disposition would be one that appropriately attends to the intentional pursuit of ends while also remaining capable of reorienting that same attention in order to release oneself from an insistence on the realization of those ends when appropriate. The mean condition is not myopic, nor is it aimless. It is for that reason that we ought to understand this mean condition of a disposition of attention as importantly political and relevant to democratic political action. Citizens must be capable of both attending to potential ends within the political community and letting go of the attendant intentionality if further pursuit threatens the body politic when, for instance, an excess of serious

attention might instead lead to violence.⁵⁶ A virtuous democratic disposition requires some degree of playfulness to exist alongside the seriousness with which citizens pursue outcomes.

In the context of a modern representative democracy, for example, we can think of this disposition operating within the institutional structure of elections. Citizens actively pursue the election of a candidate as an uncertain outcome – engaging in that pursuit in a variety of possible ways that indicate varying degrees of investment and intentionality – but also recognize that the structure dictates that they assent to the outcome of the election when the uncertainty resolves through a vote. Although individuals will attend to the activity of electoral politics in different ways, most citizens of a modern liberal representative democracy adopt a relatively narrow range of responses to the structure of the activity. This attention usually entails accepting the outcome of the process and abandoning the pursuit of particular representation as a result of a vote, and such attention requires some measure of playfulness to achieve. Although using the metaphor of “playing the game” to describe how electoral politics works would undermine the current attempt to distinguish games as sites of action, it is also important to recognize the similarities between the ways that we structure different types of activity – games and political institutions – and how those similarities prime our relative attention. The democratic institutions and norms that shape our engagement with, and responses to, political moments like electoral politics are rooted in particular ways of attending to political contestation that rely on a particular relationship to the uncertain pursuit of ends, and one would be remiss to characterize that relationship as exclusively serious.

⁵⁶ It is worth noting that either extreme of attention might increase the tendency towards violence; playful attention might be violent in its aimlessness just as seriousness can be violent in its vehemence. However, the overinvestment of seriousness – of someone who cannot let go of the pursuit of particular ends – more readily suggests examples that turn to violence. It may also be fairly argued that violence is part of political communities, rather than a threat to them, in which case the particular extent of seriousness remains a necessary component of citizenship. The discussion of the role of violence in political community is beyond the scope of this argument, but does not appear to undermine the validity of applying an Aristotelian framework to our understanding of attention.

The political virtue to be found in such action manifests as a moderate and appropriate response to the particular context as it relates to the uncertainty experienced in the pursuit of particular ends. One might be censured by members of the political community for acting in a way that indicates that he or she is treating an election too playfully or seriously – or for being altogether inattentive – which speaks to competing claims to an understood measure of appropriate attention in one’s disposition. As part of the continuum of a disposition, one’s attention will not be one or the other in any given context, but rather an amalgam of potential possibilities. Virtue involves the appropriate mix of those possibilities for the context, and the context within which one attends to action is bound up in both the thing that one intends, an end, and the uncertainty of its pursuit. Political beings engage with the virtue of attention when they act and observe others acting in common in context that are defined by uncertainty in the pursuit of ends; and yet, the sense of what attention is appropriate is itself an uncertain and contestable feature of living in political community.

Given the range of possible dispositions of attention and the indeterminacy of how one ought to approach any particular activity, the question of virtue becomes one of assessing the appropriate disposition of attention relative to particular circumstances. In short, the virtue here relies on an awareness like that expressed in the Athenian Stranger’s provocation about what is “worthy of a certain seriousness;” it requires a capacity to assess, and then apply, the appropriate attention relative to one’s understanding of the context. In this way, the virtue of attentiveness allows for the type of deliberate and choice-worthy action found within Aristotle’s emphasis on *bouleusis* and *prohairesis*, but it also does not assume that human beings should, even if one could, attend to everything with equal intentionality and effort. Given the limitations of possible attentiveness, the question of appropriateness of this disposition is open to contestation within a

political community. The propriety of attentiveness relative to a particular situation is not prescribed, but rather comes to be realized through the practices of individuals acting together in public and how their dispositions come to be expressed, contested or accepted by others.

These observations about a virtue of attentiveness remain consistent with this Aristotelian framework, but there is more to say about the role of playfulness as part of this disposition. Aristotle's teleology, as noted above, obscures a consideration of the value of parateleological action. As such, accounting for the importance of more playful attention as part of a political virtue can also emphasize the generative possibilities that come out of the separation from the strict intentionality of teleological action. Aristotle misses something important about the generative possibilities of playfulness because of the way that he dichotomizes and then denigrates *paidia* as instrumental for relaxation. The separation from an ends-means logic that is found in the character of playfulness permits a certain novelty of action.⁵⁷ It does not follow established patterns of intentionality in its orientation towards ends.

IX. Beyond *Anapausis* and into the *Politics*

If *paidia* is to be recuperated from its association with *anapausis* that Aristotle gives it in the *Ethics*, we need to elaborate on the account of its effects in political communities, just as Aristotle moves his discussion of virtue from the *Ethics* to the *Politics*. Insofar as the disposition of attention that we bring to any particular activity is both idiosyncratic and responsive to context, we can expect both moments of coherence and contestation to follow from the disposition that any particular actor demonstrates before a community of other actors. People will variously agree and disagree about the appropriate way to attend to any given activity based on their

⁵⁷ Here, it may be helpful to think of action in the Arendtian sense, in which the possibility of something new is found through the creative potential of human activity. There is something generative in action that might not be found through the attention of excessive seriousness; it requires a willingness to do otherwise, or fail in the attempt of something new, that can only come with the modulating element of playfulness in action. This becomes more relevant in the account of the funeral games in the next chapter.

assessments of how others are attending to action. The expression of disagreement is central to the colloquial use of seriousness and playfulness as ways of describing our attention, as outlined above.

As with the hypothetical examples of use – “Don’t take it so seriously” – people make claims about relative dispositions when they think that attention to action is not commensurate with context. Experiences like a parent yelling at young children playing sports or a defendant laughing in court will tend to violate the general sense of appropriate disposition relative to context. In moments like these, there may be contestation over the appropriate disposition of attention, but most actions fall in line with a pervasive agreement about appropriate attention. The appropriate attention to be given in any particular context is not self-evident, but is asserted or embodied and open to contestation. Playfulness does not pertain exclusively to *anapausis*, as in the distinction that Aristotle draws between leisure and serious pursuits, and it is not experienced exclusively in particular contexts.

It is relative to this issue of context that we ought to think of the various sites within which human beings act and how those sites shape, and are shaped by, the dispositions of attention that individuals bring to those sites. These sites include those that we recognize as games, which themselves provide for more than the rejuvenating *anapausis* identified by Aristotle. Games are not the same as sites that we might think of as more conventionally political, but they provide for distinct engagements with our dispositions of attention in which the question of what counts as meaningful action – what is “worthy of a certain seriousness” – is particularly pronounced. On this point, Hannah Arendt’s understanding of human activity in *The Human Condition* is helpful for clarifying how we treat games differently as sites of action, and provides a conceptual link between political thought and the definitional work in game studies.

By virtue of these connections, I begin to consider how games structure our experiences so as to facilitate ludic attention in our action and what the effects of those experiences might be.

X. The Attempt at Separation

Arendt's understanding of the public realm as an idealized site of action, divorced from the concerns of necessity, has been both an asset and a point of contention in political thought. As we find, for example, in Hanna Pitkin's treatment of the Arendtian distinction between public and private, there is a lack of clarity in Arendt's argument about what qualifies as belonging to the political realm and how its qualifications constrain the applicability of her vision of the public to our lived experience.⁵⁸ Concern over Arendt's preoccupation with protecting politics from necessity and the "social" leads Pitkin to identify a lack of substance in her politics – owing to an absence of a concern with justice – within which political beings are primarily intent on appearing before others and being recognized by equals. Pitkin notes how, in order to avoid the concerns with expediency (the logic of work) and process (the logic of labor), "Arendt constantly emphasized the autonomy of action and sought to divorce it from all motives, purposes, antecedent conditions, and consequences."⁵⁹ Pitkin's concerns with the Arendtian conception of the public reflects some of the same anxieties that pervade discussions of games and the activities they enable.⁶⁰

In fact, Pitkin expresses her concerns in terms of "sport" as something opposed to seriousness: "No account of politics or the public can be right that wholly empties them of substantive content, of what is at stake. No such account can display their potential seriousness

⁵⁸ Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, "Justice: On Relating Private and Public," *Political Theory*, 9 (1981): 327-352.

⁵⁹ Pitkin, 341

⁶⁰ In discussing Arendt on action, citing Pitkin's concerns, John McGowan makes a connection between games and the public that draws upon the McCarthy quote from the epigraph, writing: "Politics is threatened with becoming as trivial as a basketball game - full of intensity but signifying nothing - a situation that recalls Eugene McCarthy's observation that a good politician, like a good basketball coach, has to be smart enough to play the game well, but dumb enough to think it's important."

and value to us, nor correctly tell us what they are. Political life is not some leisure-time sport for aristocrats” and “Public life in this sense is of the utmost seriousness and importance.”⁶¹ Pitkin turns to the issue of justice in order to correct for the problem she identifies in the Arendtian public, but I want to draw upon this problematic ideal in Arendt’s understanding of the space of appearance as a separate context for action in order to understand the type of sites that games are for political beings. The designation of “game” carries a set of contentious implications about separation from necessity that has an affinity with, and shares the problems of, Arendt’s account of action. As with the above account of Aristotle, the focus here is not on a reassessment of a canonical thinker, but on how Arendt’s thought can help us grasp these issues that confront the study of games and politics alike. “Game” is a way of categorizing a set of structures, a genre that both shapes and is shaped by human activity. By considering games as a genre, I mean to capture the way in which games facilitate recognizable types of activity and experiences through the intelligibility of their structures, even as the specific structures remain varied and variable.⁶² The attempt to make sense of that category has been no less difficult for scholars of games than it has for those of politics, and thinking through Arendt can help us see the challenges of that designation.

In a fundamental way, the turn to the model of the *polis* reflects Arendt’s desire for the separation of action from necessity. Necessity is pre-political, preoccupied with the requirements of labor, and concerns the household; “the realm of the *polis*, on the contrary, was the sphere of freedom, and if there was a relationship between these two spheres, it was a matter of course that the mastering of the necessities of life in the household was the condition for

⁶¹ Pitkin, 342-3

⁶² This sense of genre is similar to that defined by Berkenkotter and Huckin (1993) on academic disciplinary genre, in which they assert that “genres are dynamic rhetorical forms that develop from responses to recurrent situations and serve to stabilize experience and give it coherence and meaning.”

freedom of the *polis*.”⁶³ It is on this point that the connections between the Arendtian space of appearance and the literature in game studies demonstrate the most significant similarities, as they both posit a necessary separation that allows for a particular type of action. As mentioned briefly by way of introduction, this separation has come to be known in the game studies literature as “the magic circle,” a term that appears in Johan Huizinga’s *Homo Ludens*. For Huizinga, the magic circle is one example from a list of ways that human beings separate out the space for play, both temporally and spatially.⁶⁴ Subsequent scholars appropriate the term as a conceptual touchstone, often in order to critique the idealized form of separation implied in Huizinga’s understanding, but the desire to understand the context for play as distinctly separate is not unique to Huizinga. We find a similar idealization of play in Gadamer’s *Truth and Method* as a part of his ontological assertion that play, as a mode of being, can exist entirely separate from human activity, even as it achieves its representation through that activity.⁶⁵ The specifics of these claims would take us too far afield, but they also demonstrate the desire to understand play as an activity that is defined by its separation. These accounts are typical of an understanding of play in the scholarship that, like Arendt, is concerned with the possible encroachment of the outside world of necessity and interestedness on the existence of the space of play. For Arendt, the freedom found through action depends on separation in the way that Huizinga’s understanding of play depends on the magic circle.

The counterpoint to this idealization of play is a thread of scholarship that emphasizes the interestedness of those activities that we call play, especially in the context of playing games. This line of thought can be traced back at least to Roger Caillois’ 1961 *Man, Play, and Games*, in which he responds directly to Huizinga’s notion of a separate and disinterested play by

⁶³ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 30-31.

⁶⁴ Huizinga, 10.

⁶⁵ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Continuum, 2004).

pointing to the example of gambling.⁶⁶ The material interests that drive some element of the engagement of gambling disrupt any simple account of the separation of play, just as commentators like Pitkin contest that interestedness cannot be kept out of Arendt's notion of the public. This same notion is maintained in recent scholarship on games, such as Thomas Malaby on gambling or Mia Consalvo on cheating in games.⁶⁷ There is an emphasis across these different treatments on returning our focus to games as structures of human design, contrived and maintained by human beings as sites for human activity, rather than as idealized spaces for idealized activity. On these accounts, we should not be surprised if the types of interested action that we find in other contexts also occur in the context of games. As with any schematic account of opposing perspectives, the commitments of Huizinga and Caillois become somewhat overstated when put in opposition; but they provide helpful markers for a central debate in the literature of games studies – a debate that also informs how we might think about seriousness, playfulness, and attention as they are realized through the structure of games.

This consideration of Arendt and contemporary scholarship on games illustrates some of the same issues that emerge in Aristotle, embracing a non-essential relationship between the sites of action and the disposition attendant to acting in their contexts. Arendt writes: "Greatness, therefore, or the specific meaning of each deed, can lie only in the performance itself and neither in its motivation nor its achievement."⁶⁸ In this sense, the act lies apart from intentionality and can only be seen as the act itself by one's peers. Nevertheless, contra Arendt on greatness, as human beings we read intentionality in our assessment of the act; we embrace an Aristotelian teleology attendant to the act as we search for that inscrutable intention, the end that motivates

⁶⁶ Roger Caillois, *Man, Play, and Games*, trans. Meyer Barash (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1961).

⁶⁷ Thomas Malaby, "Beyond Play: A New Approach to Games," *Games and Culture* 2 (2007): 95-113.

Mia Consalvo, "There is no magic circle," *Games and Culture* 4 (2009): 408-417.

⁶⁸ Arendt, 206.

the act. As part of that search, we attempt to glean a sense of some part of that intentionality from the act in context by lending our own attention to an assessment of the actor's attention.

In games, as in other aspects of political life, the experiences, expressions, and perceptions of differing degrees of attention from actors are fundamental to how we interact in common. Games are a genre within a range of possible structures and contexts within which human beings act in public and appear before others; we call these structures "games" when there is some intersubjective agreement about that context, which enables a different type of attention than is found in other contexts. They are not separate, but neither are they just like any other context for action. Much like the ludic disposition that they enable, games as structures dwell in an in-between state of separation.

Although games are sites of action in which the problem of interestedness matters, insofar as games make us aware of the conflict about interestedness by activating our attention differently, they offer possibilities not afforded by familiar structures of the political community. A player might be more inclined to cheat in poker than he or she would be when it comes to taxes – or, furthermore, playing poker with friends when compared to doing so in a casino. On the one hand, it is because we believe games to be separate to some degree that we are able to approach action and the assessment of what matters with an altered disposition of seriousness and playfulness, which opens up new possibilities for the way that we think of ourselves as political beings. On the other hand, even within the genre of games, we can note a difference in how various factors influence how individuals attend to acting in that context. Players at a casino likely act differently than friends around a coffee table due to higher stakes, a grander venue, cameras and security, all in combination with whatever other factors that make up the particulars of their context. In this way, the casino begins to resemble more conventional sites of

politics in the way that it structures and polices the activity under its purview. Thus, games provide contexts within which we might experience a range of possible dispositions of attention, but beyond that, there is the amphibolous quality of attention that is built into the very structure of games that emphasizes the issue of how one should attend to the activity.

XI. Understanding Games through Structures, Actors, and Dispositions

Insofar as games exist as sites of action, they have distinct ways of structuring interactions between human beings that enable the (tenuous and contested) separation that allows for action. We need not posit an Arendtian/Huizingan ideal of separation in order to recognize that games to some degree designate a space “dedicated to the performance of an act apart.”⁶⁹ Beyond simply setting that space apart, games also specify the types of acts that will be readily intelligible within their context. For example, the structure of a game of basketball sets expectations about what bouncing or throwing the ball in particular ways should mean to fellow players and spectators. In addition to these considerations about how games are structured, we are also interested in how they function; specifically, how games enable a particular form of attention that distinguishes games from other ways that we structure interactions between human beings – ludic attention. In what follows, I will outline these basic characteristics of games as a genre of human activity while continuing to develop the terminology that will be useful as we continue to explore game contexts in subsequent chapters.

The relatively small body of literature on games and the related literature on play demonstrate significant disagreement about the defining features of games and game-playing, as evidenced by the early divide between Huizinga and Caillois with respect to separation. In his *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein heralds this ongoing debate when he claims that we cannot define games as such, and instead that games exist as an example of a “family

⁶⁹ Huizinga, 10.

resemblance.” In providing the example, Wittgenstein notes the ways that we will inevitably find challenges to any given definition based on some other example that someone might assert is a game despite not sharing certain features.⁷⁰ Espen Aarseth, a prominent scholar in contemporary game studies, rearticulates the problem with using “game” as a formal definitional category, and advocates instead for an ontology of games. He says: “The range of phenomena recognized as games in everyday language is simply too broad for easy theoretical demarcation. Thus, an ontology of games cannot productively start with a crisp, formal definition of what a game is, but must accept that it means different things to different people, and that is as it should be.” He points out the way in which the emerging field of game studies is currently struggling with the same problem that was “dismissed by Wittgenstein more than fifty years ago.”⁷¹ Following Aarseth, I want to embrace Wittgenstein’s challenge to definitions while clarifying aspects of what is contested about, and within, games. Instead of remarking as to whether or not any feature is present in every game, it seems more useful to consider the functions served by some of the shared characteristics of those structures that we call games.

As such, it is helpful, in the spirit of Wittgenstein’s “family resemblance” and Aarseth’s “ontology,” to think about game through the lens of genre. In this way, the debate is no longer about whether all games need to have opponents or points or victory conditions, and instead ask what the functions of those elements are when we designate something as a game. Put differently, we can ask what types of activities are signaled by referring to their structure as a game, and how does doing so facilitate the intelligibility of that activity – both in terms of what we do and how we do it. “Game” as a category remains intersubjectively determined and contested in the way that Wittgenstein prompts us, but it also leads us to consider how games

⁷⁰ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1953), 65.

⁷¹ Espen Aarseth, “‘Define Real, Moron!’ Some Remarks on Game Ontologies,” in *DIGAREC Keynote-Lectures 2009/10*, ed. Stephan Günzel, Michael Lieve, and Dieter Mersch (Potsdam: Potsdam University Press 2011), 053.

exist in relation to actions and communities, rather than as merely identifiable artifacts that stand on their own. A fundamental commitment, then, to this understanding of games is that they only exist as such through the human activity that renders them meaningful as structures.⁷² For that reason, we can think about games through the generic conventions that actors bring to, and experience within, their structures that allows for ludic attention.

Even as I look to resist the definitional impulse, one recent attempt at definition is helpful for orienting the discussion of the generic conventions of games. In his article “Beyond Play,” Thomas Malaby captures the sense of games as socially-recognized structures while identifying some central characteristics that help to establish generic conventions. For Malaby, games are “semi-bounded and socially legitimate domains of contrived contingency that generate interpretable outcomes.”⁷³ Malaby’s contention is that scholars get distracted by the need to account for “play” – and, particularly, its loaded counterpart, “fun” – as some sort of necessary experience in the context of games when, as noted with respect to separation, empirical observation in numerous game contexts suggest no such experience. His definition seeks to eliminate subjective experience as a fundamental consideration. Although Malaby’s definition may still acknowledge the possibility of a range of dispositions towards the activity, his desire to omit an account of “play” undermines the attempt to account for how games enable differences in the dispositions experienced within game contexts. In what follows, I use Malaby’s definition as a guide for how players experience ludic attention and the structural characteristics of games that enable such an experience. These structural characteristics set the stage for seeing how games provide contexts in which individuals act in front of others who recognize those structures as potentially meaningful.

⁷² Another philosophical perspective on this point comes again from Gadamer in his writing on play and the work of art in *Truth and Method*, in which the work of art only achieves its representation through the player/audience.

⁷³ Malaby, 96.

XII. Uncertainty, Ends, Obstacles, and Outcomes

Refiguring the structural features of Malaby's definition, games involve an engagement with a particular experience of uncertainty – what Malaby calls “contrived contingency” – insofar as they render some end – acknowledged through his “interpretable outcomes” – more difficult to achieve than it might otherwise be by prescribing a particular way in which that end must be achieved through the rules of the game. These temporary ends and constraints on the pursuit of those ends, which introduce the particular uncertainty to be experienced, require that games establish and permit some sort of separation from ordinary life – a separation that will always be partial and vulnerable, and thus games are “semi-bounded.” This limited sense of separation through the specificity of ends and obstacles to their achievement can be found in another foundational work in the literature on games, Bernard Suits' dialogue *The Grasshopper*. In that work, he presents the simple example of a track race in which the runner engages with more uncertainty of outcome by agreeing to run around the track in competition with other runners rather than pursuing the more efficient means of attaining the goal of crossing the finish line by cutting across the field. He gives the name of “lusory attitude” to the approach necessary to engage in such a practice in the way prescribed by the game.⁷⁴ There is a fundamental relationship between the way that games structure activity, through the pursuit of particular ends with specific constraints that increase the uncertainty of obtaining said ends, and how games

⁷⁴ Bernard Suits, *The Grasshopper: Games, Life and Utopia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978). I prefer to use disposition rather than Suits' “attitude” in order to relate how we attend to acting within game contexts to the attention that we bring to all of the ways that we act in the world. Disposition, through the Aristotelian framework, better captures the relative stability of that orientation.

affect the dispositions of attention that they elicit. The core of this ludic experience that we find in the genre of games is one of liminality; it is both serious and playful, but not fully either.⁷⁵

The genre of games is only defined by features insofar as they produce a context marked by the fluid and contested liminality of the ludic experience that drives what I call ludic attention. In this sense, games are rhetorical constructs – which is to say, structures that enable and attempt at persuasion – because they are shaped by the work of humans and shape the action of humans in ways that are contestable and invoke contestation. Games never exist for us as one thing, nor is their meaningfulness settled, but they serve as human-devised structures within which we experience aspects of political life differently. In this case, the designation of “differently” here relies on the fact that there are other activities that we experience as ordinary and generally uncontested in seriousness or playfulness. The amphibolous qualities found within the generic conventions of games more readily open a space for contestation over how one should attend to that particular activity. The dispositional possibilities remain relatively unsettled and thus rely on the intersubjective assessments asserted by those involved to establish a standard of appropriate attention. This is not to say that these other contexts are never contested –recall the earlier examples of someone who playfully engages with an appearance in court or who seriously engages with a child’s sporting event– but games serve as contexts within which a fluidity of disposition becomes particularly pronounced through the structure of the activity. This ludic attention facilitated by games allows for a peculiar type of contestation between individuals.

Therefore, it is a central part of understanding games through a generic lens to consider the way that the structure of games is always embedded within a group of individuals that

⁷⁵ Cf. Huizinga on play: “Any game can at any time wholly run away with the players. The contrast between play and seriousness is always fluid. The inferiority of play is continually being offset by the corresponding superiority of its seriousness. Play turns to seriousness and seriousness to play.”

recognize, maintain, and appreciate the action that their structures enable. It is this intersubjective quality that catalyzes the indeterminacy of appropriate attention and the contested meaningfulness of the activity. Every game operates within a range of dispositions through which players take the rules and structure of the game seriously enough to act while simultaneously recognizing that same activity as an act apart insofar as the instrumentality of the pursuit of ends in the game is never identical with the instrumentality of the surrounding world. The immediacy with which the dispositional tension is felt within the context of games helps to distinguish games from other sites of action in the political lives of humans, but it also serves to exercise the same forms of attention that we use as reflective political beings.

As recognizable means of structuring human activity – as a genre – games serve to simplify and codify the expectations of those who participate in them with respect to the appropriate types of, and approaches to, action that ought to occur within the space of the game. Instead of a social contract, we might call this a ludic contract, because it always bound up in those particular approaches that comprise the ludic attention experienced in games.⁷⁶ It is this ludic component that distinguishes the action in games from the other ways that we think about the order and political relations defined by the social contract.⁷⁷ Those who involve themselves in the structure of the game adopt its constraints in order to act among others for whom the action will be intelligible and meaningful. The separation enabled by that acceptance of structure facilitates the possibility of ludic attention – a confluence of both intentionality and para-intentionality. The dispositional amphiboly is both built into the structure of games and can be upheld or challenged by those who recognize the structures.

⁷⁶ I am indebted to Elizabeth Wingrove for this framework of modifying the concept of the social contract to recognize different generic forms

⁷⁷ It is, however, central to the understanding of order presented in *Homo Ludens*. When Huizinga describes what he calls “the play-element in culture,” he draws on examples of the ways in which activities that we might call play, or that are engaged in playfully, permeate human culture.

The experience of uncertainty in the pursuit of ends is central to characterizing how games facilitate ludic attention, but the structural features that govern that experience are obstacles and outcomes. Outcomes are explicitly part of Malaby's definition, while the role of obstacles in generating contingency is left implicit. In Suits' *The Grasshopper*, the Socratic character of the Grasshopper offers the "voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles" as one definition of games.⁷⁸ The combination of these two broad structural characteristics provides a generic foundation upon which we can assess how games function rhetorically as structures for human activity. Obstacles introduce or increase the uncertainty derived from the pursuit of an end, while outcomes resolve – or, at least, attempt to resolve – the uncertainty.⁷⁹

It is the "unnecessary" modifier to the obstacles in Suits' account of games that renders the coincidence of both seriousness and playfulness to be found with the structure of games. There is a pressing lack of necessity that animates an engagement with the particularity of the obstacles in the pursuit of specific outcomes that set games apart; these structural elements prescribe the actions that comprise the playing of the game. Obstacles beget uncertainty, but it is an uncertainty that is contained by the control gained through opting into the pursuit, and the possibilities afforded by that control govern the way that we attend to the uncertainty found in the context of games. As such, ludic attention is more readily experienced and expressed in the context of games. Suits' emphasis on the "voluntary" and the "unnecessary" reminds us of how we distinguish between the obstacles encountered in games from the other obstacles that one might encounter in "ordinary life." It remains essential that games only function as sites through the tenuous separation enabled by their structure, and that separation has to be maintained by

⁷⁸ Suits presents the work as a dialogue in the style of Plato. The character of the Grasshopper plays the philosophical role usually occupied by Socrates in Plato's dialogues.

⁷⁹ Outcomes certainly remain contestable and might not always conclude the contrived experience of uncertainty. The chariot race in the funeral games for Patroclus, covered in the next chapter, illustrates this point.

those who recognize the game structure as potentially meaningful. Malaby emphasizes the social qualities of games through an awareness of games as ongoing processes; playing games is always generative of new possibilities and practices. While this claim is consistent with the above account of games as sites of action, it is equally important to recognize the ways in which the structures that frame those ongoing processes must be maintained by a community.

XIII. The Ludic Community

The argument about games as structures only holds insofar as those structures matter to the people who engage with them. The amphibolous character of the experiences found within games depend on the tension between meaningful action and its simultaneous lack of instrumentality, and the social recognition of meaningfulness in game structures facilitates that tension. In light of this relationship, it is helpful to think about the community of individuals and groups that enable and sustain the structures and activities that make up games, which I call ludic communities. Even prior to the issue of ludic attention, games are fundamentally interactive; they require the action of players to be realized and do not simply stand alone as artifacts.⁸⁰ Games exist as *potential* sites of action, and are relatively meaningless absent a ludic community that can both actively play and understand the activity that the game structures. Beyond the minimum requirement of players who recognize and participate in the activity, a game often involves more parties that add to the ludic community that sustains a particular game.

Any number of particular examples might stand out as particularly salient depending on one's own experience with different games. There are some general categories of people that contribute to a ludic community without necessarily playing a game themselves. Games may be designed and marketed by companies, promoted by professional organizations with celebrated

⁸⁰ This idea is central to Gadamer's understanding of play insofar as he posits play existing outside of human experience, so that play is only represented by the players.

players or passionate family members, or shared by word of mouth. They may have developed over centuries, years, or months, and as the result of the input of whole cultures or a few people. Games may require any number of fabricated or purchasable items to play – from everything contained within a marketed board game to a ball and a net. The rules might require or suggest a referee, or the adjudication of rules might be up to the players themselves. Those rules might be formally written down and sold, maintained by an international governing body, or announced as play begins. The scope, magnitude, and character of the ludic community make a significant difference in the activities and dispositions found within any particular game, and those differences may be multiplied across the various play sessions and contexts in which individuals experience the game. A professional organization might amplify the seriousness with which a particular game is approached by its players, while self-refereeing might suggest greater playfulness (although informality does not necessarily equate to playful).

The scope of interactions and affordances that facilitate a ludic community is expansive and blurry along the edges. Some games require that players are physically present in the same place, while new forms of interactive technology have expanded the possibility of connecting members of ludic communities across territorial expanses. These means of facilitation serve as a helpful reminder that games do not simply exist when a group gets together to play them. Games are maintained by a network of individuals, groups, and cultures that in some way or another participate in play activities or contribute to the sense of meaningfulness that perpetuates the ludic attention found in otherwise ephemeral action. The ludic community associated with American football makes the Super Bowl into a national, perhaps international, event, but also makes learning to throw a football into a culturally-meaningful experience. The same goes for chess, or tag, or Super Mario Brothers, or any other number of games that we play; these games

are all embedded in contexts that rely on a multitude of variously-interested members of a ludic community, whose contributions inform the intersubjective conditions through which others make determinations about the value of play activities found within those games. The dispositions of players are always refracted through the lens of the ludic community.

Just as those dispositions are affected by these contexts, they are also contested insofar as the different actors involved experience and assess the value of particular activities differently. This is, of course, true of any sort of valuation – whether in the context of a game or not – but the amphibolous quality of the disposition, prompted by the pressing lack of necessity experienced in games, renders the discrepancies within the ludic community all the more pronounced. The colloquial use of serious and playful continues to be relevant as a way of capturing how the ludic community expresses the contestability of disposition. Again, there may be examples of particular play experiences that stand out to any individual that illustrate this point, but it is likely that one can think of an example in which someone “took the game too seriously” or “was not taking it seriously enough.” The framework of a ludic community helps to make sense of how these discrepancies with respect to appropriate attention emerge out of the experience of ludic attention. The possibility for contestation over appropriate attention to more or less meaningful activity is embedded within a social setting. These are the conditions through which one identifies how activities that might otherwise be dismissed as insignificant or distractions from what matters – a critique that is based on intensity and dedication of time – become compelling to players.⁸¹ Games only function in this way in light of being socially situated.

⁸¹ At the same time, the heterogeneity of perspectives and interests found within the ludic community provides the opportunity for that same compelling activity to be used towards persuasive ends by others within the ludic community. In the third and fourth chapters, I do more to explore the implications of game structures and ludic communities on the persuasive possibilities of games.

XIV. Separation and Specification through Structure

The observations about the structural and communal factors that make games distinct sites of action function together to produce the context in which ludic attention is possible. The ludic community recognizes, adopts, valorizes, and maintains the structures through which the action found within games occurs. By virtue of this combination of structure and ludic community, it is possible for human beings to experience ludic attention through action. The conditions for games discussed above culminate in two primary modes of shaping, and being shaped by, human activity: tenuous *separation* and *specification* of relevant action. This sense of separation, as we have seen, denotes the contested way that games are signaled as outside of ordinary life, while specification refers to the limited set of possibilities for intelligible action established by the rules of the game. These two conditions for action are intentionally broad and not intended to lead us towards a return to a definition like Malaby's, but rather to get us thinking about how games function as sites of action that bring together human beings in notably different ways from other sites. Separation and specification facilitate new ways of attending to action that matter to political beings.

Initially, I discussed separation in terms of an "attempt," gesturing at the impossibility of the idealized form of separation desired for both play and Arendtian action. And yet, the continued importance of the concept of separation indicates that it is as much of a constitutive necessity as it is an impossibility. The separation will always be partial, temporary, and vulnerable, but those are precisely the conditions of the effectiveness of games at being able to account for the ludic possibilities that they hold. Special rules, which permit and proscribe certain actions, define the structure within which it is appropriate for players to act in particular ways, and then give way to the encroachment of the "ordinary world" that consistently pressures

the boundaries of Huizinga's "magic circle" upon the resolution of the uncertainty introduced by the game. The contested sense of appropriate attention, imparted by the structure of a game, is consistently figured and refigured by these precarious conditions of the activity. Even as players actively participate in that structure, they also always have the potential to become detached from that experience, to have their particular attention upset by some challenge that disrupts the vulnerable separation. A player may still be physically on the field or at the table, but an event that happens to them or someone else – a physical injury, for example – draws them out of a sense of separation. The vulnerability of that separation fuels the ludic attention found in games, even as it threatens it, and is accentuated by the way in which different members of the ludic community might respond differently to the separation and its potential violations.

The other condition through which games enable ludic attention is specification. The obstacles and outcomes that produce the structure in which uncertainty can be introduced and resolve also serve to draw the attention of members of a ludic community to the possibilities of action in context. The particular focus afforded by games allows for the peculiar sense of intentionality that is characteristic of ludic attention – the amphibolous quality of embodying both intentionality and para-intentionality at once. The work of Csikszentmihalyi on "flow" addresses the possibility of the particular challenges of an activity to predispose particular psychological responses in individual, and the specification found in the structure of games can serve a similar function. The structure of games also narrows the scope of actions to be considered by the ludic community, and by doing so, they render action more readily intelligible and estimable by those who recognize their structures. This specification interacts directly with the sense of separation; they are mutually dependent. As a means of orienting attention,

specification facilitates the sense that this activity is “an act apart,” but one can only attend to the specificity of the activity under basic conditions of separation.

With respect to the increased intelligibility of action, games do more than just approximate the separation aspired to by Arendtian action. They also function in a similar way to Arendtian spaces of appearance insofar as they facilitate disclosure before the ludic community. Chess only asks us to consider the ability of a player to outthink and outmaneuver an opponent through a specific set of potential moves of game pieces, while Olympic diving requires an assessment of difficulty and execution of precise falling movements and entry into the water. We might note other things about players and performance, but the game specifies how the ludic community ought to marginalize other concerns through the pursuit of a particular end. Here again is a constant refrain of this chapter: games structure our attention. Garry Kasparov never bested an opponent in tuck position, nor did Greg Louganis ever have to memorize chess openings to win a gold medal. Specification is an important condition established through the structure of games, because it provides the focal points upon which the experiences of, and claims about, meaningfulness can be founded, asserted, and contested relative to the experience of ludic attention. One might need to be already invested to some degree in a ludic community before being able to articulate distinctions between actions – as with chess and diving – or it might be relatively easy to make such distinctions. In either case, any such judgements will occur relative to a contested sense of how much those specified actions ought to matter that emerges out of the amphibolous character of the experience found within the game itself.

XV. Uncertainty as Compelling

Another fundamental effect of separation and specification for ludic attention is that they provide the conditions in which human beings experience uncertainty as compelling. Rather than a general experience of uncertainty – one that is characteristic of the human condition – players of games experience uncertainty relative to a specified and temporary set of goals and constraints. Games, in this regard, recall the power of the Arendtian promise through their ability to establish a refuge within a sea of uncertainty.⁸² However, games do not do so by offering something like certainty as an alternative, but rather they work through a reorientation of uncertainty. The experience of uncertainty moves from the existential concerns of *animal laborans* to the peculiar concerns of the ludic community, allowing for ludic attention. In doing so, games render uncertainty not only bearable, but pleasurable or compelling.⁸³ This transformation is possible by virtue of the conditions of separation and specification.

Even acknowledging that separation found through the structure of games is partial – which is to say even in contexts in which there are real stakes in the play activity, such as gambling– the possibility of attending to ends differently drives the engagement of players in the activity. These altered experiences of uncertainty are central to the structures we call games, from chess to poker to Super Mario Brothers to basketball, and they are enabled by a corresponding reorientation towards temporary ends and obstacles. It is facile to think of games as being non-instrumental insofar as their effects are often – although not exclusively (again, see gambling) – limited to their particular contexts, since games have their own instrumentality that emerges out of their separation and specification. These are the conditions of ludic attention and its peculiar intentionality. While shooting a rubber ball through a raised hoop might be viewed

⁸² Arendt, 244

⁸³ The term “compelling” will gain more specific meaning in later chapters that explore the persuasive aspect of games, but the general meaning of the term works fine here.

as relatively inane outside of the context of the ludic community of basketball, the same end can be meaningful and instrumental when placed in context. Whether it is a kid playing with friends outside of the school or a professional basketball coach, we can find particular senses of the intentionality attached to games that exist across a wide range of concern and investment.

Games, in this regard, are distinguished by the way that the conditions established by their structures and contexts permit for an altered relationship to uncertainty and ends for political beings. Despite several helpful overlaps with Arendtian thought about the ideal of separation and the space of appearance, it is on this point about uncertainty that games are most notably distinguished from Arendt's conception of politics. In *The Human Condition*, Arendt describes how uncertainty is a burden that we bear for the sake of action.⁸⁴ For her, uncertainty is the necessary, but lamentable, side effect of the process character of acting in public. It is only through the faculties of promising and forgiving that we are able to manage the consequences of uncertainty in action, but we still suffer it as a burden. It is uncertainty that opens up action to be tragic. In contrast, games structurally introduce uncertainty that is distinct from either existential insecurity or the process character of action, which permits for players to seek uncertainty in their activity in ways that distinguish it from the Arendtian conception of action.

In fact, it is precisely the uncertainty that drives the engagement with the activity and makes that compellingness possible. One common example of this phenomena is the childhood game TicTacToe, which quickly loses the interest of anyone who realizes that the game always ends in a tie when the two players understand the correct strategic moves. Without the uncertainty of outcome, the game ceases to engage with any aspect of the playful, and it becomes hard to convince anyone to play the game, except in the case of someone, like a child, who has never encountered the game before. Similarly, there would be little interest in watching me

⁸⁴ Arendt, 190

compete against a Garry Kasparov in Chess or a Michael Jordan in a game of H-O-R-S-E. Even though I may be convinced about the meaningfulness of excellence in either endeavor, games rely on uncertainty relative to particular ends to drive the attention to, and continued engagement in, an activity that makes them compelling. Ludic attention is tightly bound to the particular experience of uncertainty, one that persuades people to act in particular ways on account of the compelling qualities of the activity itself.

XVI. Games, Ludic Attention, and Political Life

The framework of seriousness and playfulness as extremes of a disposition of attention helps to distinguish the variety of ways that we attend to acting, as well as the role that context plays in shaping our dispositions. Games are not sites of absolute playfulness that only permit the rejuvenation found in Aristotelian *anapausis*, just as political institutions are not sites of absolute seriousness. Ludic attention is a new way of characterizing a particular way of thinking about attention that matters to both of these sites, but that is particularly recognizable in the case of games. The study of politics involves a recognition that the ways that we structure human activity matter for how we live together in political community. Aristotle, as a central preoccupation of this chapter, famously states that we come together for the sake of living, but the *polis* exists “for the sake of living well.”⁸⁵ The broader goal of this dissertation is to consider the role of ludic attention, and the structures that affect it, in living well, and how we might develop a capacity for ludic attention. Out of Aristotelian ethical thought, we see how dispositions vary across individuals and contexts, and this chapter developed a framework for beginning to think about those variations with respect to attention.

Moving forward, I will apply this basic framework to demonstrate how these dispositions of attention, and the games that provide the contexts for activating those dispositions, matter for

⁸⁵ Aristotle, *Politics*. 1252b30

political life. In particular, two related issues emerge out of the concepts introduced in this chapter: the contested sense of appropriate attentiveness and the persuasive qualities of ludic attention. As suggested above, people make claims across various contexts about how one ought to attend to any particular activity. I explore this fundamental observation in more depth by considering how attention gets deployed across different sites of action in Homer's *Iliad*. Then, I move to an account of how Plato organizes claims about the relationship between attention and persuasion in the *Laws*. Plato's insights into the persuasive effects of attention clarify how the relationship between context and attention has important implications for political beings. These two issues related to attention are inextricable insofar as a claim about propriety is also a judgment about how one is affected by context, but each issue will be emphasized on its own terms in the next two chapters.

Chapter 2: The Funeral Games and Sites of Action in the *Iliad*

“Meriones, when you are a brave fighter, why say such things? – See, dear friend, the Trojans will not give back from the body for hard words spoken. Sooner the ground will cover them. Warfare’s finality lies in the work of hands, that of words in counsel. It is not for us now to pile up talk, but to fight in battle”

– Patroclus, *Iliad*⁸⁶

I. Patroclus’ Admonition, Appropriate Attention, and Sites of Action

Amidst the fighting over the body of Sarpedon in Book XVI of the *Iliad*, Patroclus chastises his fellow warrior Meriones for exchanging taunts with Aeneas following an errant spear-throw. Patroclus makes the claim that there are different arenas for different faculties, drawing the distinction between two prominent sites of contest in the poem: the battlefield (warfare) and the assembly (counsel). His rebuke focuses on Meriones’ inapt judgment of what is appropriate for the situation. Words are not the weapons of the battlefield, and Patroclus has just demonstrated as much with his quiet and efficient defeat of Sarpedon. And yet, Patroclus only finds himself in this position on the battlefield because of the consequence of a contest of words in the assembly. As powerful as Patroclus, Hector, Achilles, and others prove to be on the battlefield, it is the initial assembly in which Achilles challenges Agamemnon that drives the action of the poem. Achilles almost ends that encounter by drawing his sword against Agamemnon. We are left to wonder what would have happened if Achilles would have gone against Patroclus’ dictum about appropriate sites and used violence in the assembly, an act that is only avoided by Athena’s intervention.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Richmond Lattimore, trans., *The Iliad of Homer* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 16.627. All translations come from the Lattimore version and citations refer to his pagination.

⁸⁷ *Iliad*, 1.188

These sites of action and contest both permit and forbid certain actions; there are costs for acting inappropriately, and there may be costs for acting at all, or not acting at all, as with Achilles. The conditions of action are established and maintained by the Achaean warriors on their decade-long conquest. The contexts of the battlefield and the assembly not only shape, and are shaped by, the actions of the heroes, but also the dispositions that they bring to their activities. Homer often invokes beasts or forces of nature to describe warriors in combat and the masses in the assembly (although animalistic simile is more prominent in battle).⁸⁸ Nevertheless, he also portrays these sites as places in which human beings act in meaningful ways. The tension between these two portrayals helps to bring out an engagement with a disposition of attention and the ways that human beings make sense of appropriate dispositions for acting in the world.

There are various moments in the *Iliad* in which understandings of appropriate actions and dispositions are asserted, contested, and violated with different degrees of consequence for those who act. After admonishing Meriones about his taunts, Patroclus quickly forgets his own advice and taunts the corpse of Kebriones, Priam's bastard son who served as his half-brother Hector's charioteer, with uncharacteristic bile that is much harsher than Meriones' words.⁸⁹ Patroclus soon falls to Hector, bringing Achilles back to the battlefield to avenge his fallen companion. Although Patroclus' last words identify Apollo and Euphorbos – for stripping his armor and piercing his shoulder with a spear, respectively – as his primary vanquishers, one divine and the other human,⁹⁰ we also get indications that the poet blames Patroclus in his moment of taunting hubris. Following Patroclus' words over Kebriones, the poet addresses Patroclus directly, saying: "He spoke so, and strode against the hero Kebriones with the spring of

⁸⁸ Michael Clarke, "Between Lions and Men: Images of the Hero in the *Iliad*," *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 36,2 (1995): 137-159.

⁸⁹ *Iliad*, 16.745

⁹⁰ *Iliad*, 16.843

a lion, who as he ravages the pastures has been hit in the chest, and his own courage destroys him. So in your fury you pounced, Patroklos, above Kebriones.”⁹¹ Hector also taunts Patroclus as he stands over his dying body, which in turn leads Patroclus to foretell Hector’s death at the hands of Achilles. In this series of deaths and retributions, the audience gets repeated accounts of the battlefield as a particular site of action, with its own proper approach to conflict.⁹² Violation of that appropriate conduct seems to come at high cost, either provoking divine involvement or simply putting the warrior in an overwhelming situation that they cannot handle, with or without divine interference. This section of the poem presents an important insight into how the battlefield frames human action for the Greeks, with its opportunities and consequences. Although Patroclus only identifies two sites of contest when addressing Meriones, his death brings about a third potential site of action: games.

Both the battlefield and the assembly are sites dominated by seriousness and concerns over intentional, effective action. Although these sites do not exclusively deal in material interest, they generally operate through the language of distribution (as in the case with honor, which also has a material component for the Achaeans). There is a significant component of the games that also deals with distributions and material interests – competitors finish in ranked place and are awarded prizes to honor their excellence – but there is also something different about the dispositions in the context established by the games that permits something more. The *Iliad* presents a complex portrayal of dispositions and acting in context while indicating an important role for games in its understanding of political life. In this chapter, I emphasize that we gain an appreciation of how prominently the funeral games figure in the presentation of the action of the poem through a close reading of the games relative to other key events. The way in

⁹¹ *Iliad*, 16.751

⁹² I use the term “audience” throughout for what might otherwise be called the “reader” in order to recognize that the original audience would have been a hearer and not a reader.

which the Achaeans act in the games refigures conflict like that found in the initial quarrel between Achilles and Agamemnon, but it also stands on its own as a presentation of a different structure for human activity. Both of these characteristics of the games rely on the way in which they exist as an alternative site of action that permits for the ludic attention that separates the games from the assembly and the battlefield. Even as the differences that enable ludic attention are essential, the similarities ensure that the funeral games remain very much a site of political action for the Achaeans.

This chapter takes up the issue of the political character of attention by elaborating on how the funeral games for Patroclus clarify the role of this contested sense of propriety in the poem, and how the structural aspects of the games enable the observed differences in attention. Much of the scholarship on the *Iliad* that treats the funeral games dwells on how the games provide resolution to the political problems intimated in the initial quarrel between Achilles and Agamemnon;⁹³ this scholarship privileges the outcome of this recapitulation of the initial quarrel over the importance of the context in which the potential resolution of that conflict is found. By treating the games on their own terms as part of Homer's work, the structure of the games can be shown to provide a vulnerable, yet meaningful, site in which the Achaeans are able to act in ways that differ (even if only ever-so-slightly) from how we see them act relative to other structures in the poem. The character of Patroclus rarely receives much consideration in understanding the significance of the games held in his honor. However, a treatment of Patroclus as a lens for the distinct thematic importance of games in the poem provides a novel account of how the games matter, one that emphasizes ludic attention and the contested sense of

⁹³ Dean Hammer, *The Iliad as Politics*. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002).

N. Postlethwaite, "Agamemnon Best of Spearmen," *Phoenix* 49,2 (1995): 95-103.

Matthew W. Dickie, "Fair and Foul Play in the Funeral Games in the *Iliad*," *Journal of Sport History* 11,2 (1984): 8-17. Dickie provides an account that emphasizes the games as a place where various characters learn lessons about their appropriate place in the political order

appropriate disposition that human beings bring to their action. The games certainly continue to reflect the dominant heroic ethos of the epic, but the notable differences from the presentation that we find in other parts of the poem demonstrate the possibilities afforded by games as sites of action.

I begin by situating the place of the games in the broader work, including in juxtaposition with the initial quarrel, as is common in the literature. I then focus our attention on the structural qualities of the games and the various events, emphasizing components of the framework developed in the previous chapter, in order to provide an account of how ludic attention appears in the context of the funeral games. The differences in attention and action demonstrated within the funeral games provide for ample points of comparison to illustrate the implications of ludic attention for a political community. In particular, the chariot race and the debate about prizes that follows its completion show the potential for conflict that exists as a result of different senses of appropriate attention in context, but all of the events demonstrate the possibilities afforded by games as sites of action. With respect to the similarities between games and the Arendtian space of appearance, the fact that the games are held in honor of Patroclus also underscores the recognition of individuals and their action in ways not permitted by other sites of action in the poem. I conclude with some thoughts about how the funeral games are both exceptional and limited in their impact on the Achaeans. In this way, they capture the possibility for ludic attention while deemphasizing the extent to which ludic attention provides the conditions for the development of a capacity in political beings.

II. The Separation of the Funeral Games

The funeral games for Patroclus present a distinct set of practices within the broader context of the epic. Even as there is a distinct separation of the games, the *agon* that takes place

between many of the prominent Achaean heroes also serves to reinforce many of the heroic norms of the epic.⁹⁴ It cannot be ignored, for example, that Thersites – the reviled figure who is beaten by Odysseus for speaking in the assembly – does not appear as a potential competitor in the games.⁹⁵ The competitors are mostly familiar figures that demonstrate familiar excellences and receive familiar acclaim. Nevertheless, the games enable an experience that is partially separated from the broader context of the Trojan War, and the heroes treat it that way. Therefore, although the games reflect the political context in which we find them, the reflection is an altered one. Even as the context of the funeral games so closely tracks the seriousness and the stakes of the surrounding war for the heroes, there is an unmistakable recognition that the games are a separate practice with its own sense of what is appropriate for the Achaeans.

As previously noted, theorists of games and play, starting with Huizinga, note some degree of the tenuous separation from “ordinary life” that comprises the magic circle of play. The case of the *Iliad* provides a case of separation that seems initially clear, but actually presents a world in which the boundary is notably vulnerable; one finds the need to squint to recapture the separation. On the initial account, the games present a clear break from the surrounding conflict of the war. The poem surges to the peak of its violence in the deaths of Sarpedon and Patroclus through to Achilles’ vengeance upon Hector. The subsequent cessation of fighting for the sake of the funeral rites comes as a reprieve from that violence, establishing a clear degree of separation for this activity. This understanding of the function of games is fairly standard; it grounds the way that we talk about the Olympic Games in the tradition of Greek games. The Olympic model of the function of games posits games as a separate outlet for violent human

⁹⁴ *Agon* is used by Homer to describe the games. Spariosu 1991 gives a helpful account of the semantic associations with the word, and how it fits alongside other ways of thinking about play.

⁹⁵ It can be argued that the character of Epeius plays a similar role in the games, but there are some distinct differences in the two cases, as I will discuss later in this chapter.

impulses that distracts the warrior spirit and helps alleviate conflict by providing an alternate forum that redirects its aggressive impulses. It brings human beings together in a more controlled form of competition that avoids the destruction visited upon Patroclus, Hector, and many others.

There are problems with understanding the funeral games as this type of separation. Most obviously, these games only happen within the community of Achaean warriors (and a very small subset of those assembled, although we might assume that most of them engage as spectators). If the games are meant to show the audience of the pacific effect of games, they present a limited case at best. If anything resembles the ritualized conflict of the Olympic Games in the epic, it is likely to be the symbolic fight between Paris and Menelaus for Helen. Although the intent was to have that contest end in the death of one of the men, it was also meant to serve as a means of avoiding further war.⁹⁶ This, of course, does not work, as Aphrodite removes Paris from the fight, forestalling an end to the conflict. There is certainly something game-like in the ritualized combat of the battlefield. Nevertheless, the Olympic model does not capture fully the meaningfulness of the games as sites of action, and the funeral games offer us a more robust demonstration of the political importance of games than this model allows.

Another important consideration with respect to the separation of the funeral games is the similarities between the ends pursued by the warriors in the context of the games. The rewards of the games themselves – the prizes (*aethla*) and honor (*time*) from one's peers – are the same as the ends for the warriors on the field of battle. These similarities are further accentuated by the above-mentioned ritualized character of combat, as illustrated in the poem. The display

⁹⁶ "For warlike Menelaos and Alexandros are to fight with long spears against each other for the sake of the woman. Let the woman go to the winner, and all the possessions. Let the rest of them, cutting their oaths of faith and friendship, dwell, we in Troy where the soil is rich, while those others return home to horse-pasturing Argos and Achaia the land of fair women" (3.253).

surrounding the contest between two comparable combatants in battle carries similar concerns over the winning of prizes and honor, and does so in ways that set the conflict apart. These similarities blur the distinctions between the battlefield and the games. However, the dispositions of attention that we find in the different contexts help to clarify how these different sites of action function differently in the political community. The funeral games permit a measure of playfulness that cannot be found in either the battlefield or the assembly, and enables the ludic attention of the heroes.

I will return to a discussion of how the structure of the games achieves this below. For now, I simply note that Achilles, as the one who challenges the instrumentality of Agamemnon, serves to reorient the attention of his fellow warriors by summoning them to engage in a different set of practices through which to structure their activity. Of course, this reorientation is deeply embedded in the surrounding context, and the particular events have culturally-situated origins; they are maintained by a ludic community. The ludic community recognizes the events and valorizes the action in the games. The competitors have already been established in their heroic qualities – save Epeius, whom we will consider later – by the time we arrive at Book XXIII, and those qualities are celebrated by the types of contests in the games.⁹⁷ Nevertheless, the *Iliad* gives us several indications that these games enable a measure of the playful para-intentionality that allows for ludic attention through the separation and specification of their structure.

III. The Structure and Context of the Games

The tenuous separation of the funeral games establishes a context that distinguishes them as a site of action. The funerary rites help to initially introduce a degree of separation. Huizinga notes the similarities between the context of play and the role of ritual in establishing a sacred

⁹⁷ Most of the events seem to have an unspoken pre-selection based on expected performance, and competitors only stand to participate if they expect to excel. Achilles asks before the boxing and spear-fighting events that “the best among you” (ὦ περ ἀρίστῳ) rise to compete (23.659 and 802).

space for play to occur, and the account of the funeral games demonstrates that connection. It is not simply the association with the funeral that aids in the attempt to set the games apart, however. Achilles holds the Achaeans by the funeral pyre and brings out prizes for the various events as he calls those assembled to the *agon*.⁹⁸ Each event is preceded by some remarks about the contest and the prizes to be won, drawing the attention to the particular dimensions of the activity. The Achaeans are clearly familiar with the events as well, as indicated by discussions of strategy and reactions to the events, which helps establish and maintain the particular attention to the specification provided by the games. The battlefield and the assembly are ritualized sites as well, but the obstacles and outcomes of the games enable something different.

The events occur in the following order: chariot race, boxing, wrestling, foot race, spear-fight, pig-iron toss, archery, and spear-throw (although the final event never actually occurs). Willis 1941 notes that this order deviates from a standard order by putting the most prominent event first instead of last, which has interesting implications for how one reads the importance of the spear-throw as the final event.⁹⁹ In terms of specification, each event focuses on a particular demonstration of martial skill. The context for the display of these martial skills is similar, yet clearly different from the battlefield. Again, it is worth reiterating that this tenuous separation is always vulnerable and conditional, but that vulnerability is constitutive of the activity. Homer reminds the audience of this vulnerability when, for example, he describes Oilean Ajax slipping and falling in the cow dung from the same cattle that had been slaughtered as part of the preceding ritual – achieving full separation from the surrounding context is impossible. Similarly, the Achaeans call out for Achilles to stop the spear-fight as they feared for

⁹⁸ *Iliad*, 23.257-273

⁹⁹ William Hailey Willis, "Athletic Contests in the Epic," *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 72 (1941): 392-417. Willis also notes how the games differ from the account of the same games found in Hyginus, including different outcomes to several events.

Telamonian Ajax's safety when Diomedes' spear threatens his neck, reminding the audience that the risks taken not able to be detached from the world. Both instances mark the tenuous separation and the violability of Huizinga's magic circle in different ways, but they also remind us of the possibilities for action permitted by that structure. Ajax and Diomedes are able to act in the way that they do because of the ludic experience provided by the games.

Various characteristics of the funeral games for Patroclus suggest that their context ought to be treated as different from others in the poem. As with the unsettled ordering of the games themselves, the Homeric account of the games emphasizes the potential unsettling of customary expectations and practices. This unsettling begins with the presentation of Agamemnon and Menelaus, the sons of Atreus, in the context of the games. Both men participate, but do so in ways that show their power to be limited in ways that it is not in other contexts. Achilles opts out of participating as a contestant in the games, but does set the rules, offer and award the prizes, and settle disputes within the contests. In this way, Achilles presents us with an alternative to the problems associated with the rule of Agamemnon, with which the central struggle of the poem begins. As Dean Hammer notes in *The Iliad as Politics*, the poem presents the crisis of authority with the conflict between Agamemnon and Achilles to which the rule of Achilles at the funeral games provides a response. Although his argument about authority in the poem introduces an important perspective on the poem, it does not pay sufficient attention to how it is precisely the context of the games that permits these altered possibilities found in the games. The context of the funeral games for Patroclus enables Achilles to take the position in which he rules in the dispute between Menelaus and Antilochus following the chariot race and suggests that Agamemnon forego competing in the spear-throw. The context of the games enables the change in political interactions through the socially-recognized differences in how one attends to acting

in that context; the games does not merely represent a new order, they are the conditions of its possibility.

This argument is consistent with interpretations in the literature that read the conclusion to the final event of the games as a restatement of the challenge made by Achilles in the initial quarrel with Agamemnon in Book I. As Agamemnon and Meriones rise for the spear-throw, Achilles stops them and suggests that they distribute prizes without holding the event, citing the incomparability of Agamemnon's excellence: 'Son of Atreus, for we know how much you surpass all others, by how much you are greatest for strength among the spear-throwers, therefore take this prize and keep it and go back to your hollow ships; but let us give the spear to the hero Meriones; if your own heart would have it this way, for so I invite you.'¹⁰⁰ Some scholars understand this to be a gesture of deference on the part of Achilles, a sort of apology for his behavior in the initial quarrel.¹⁰¹ Others understand it to be a restatement of Achilles' initial contention that Agamemnon is willing to take a prize without earning it himself when he threatens to take another prize in return for giving up Chryseis to appease the gods.¹⁰² The following account of the initial quarrel follows in the spirit of this latter group, but with a focus on what it is about the games themselves that enable this challenge to occur without the consequences of the initial quarrel.

IV. Dispositions of Attention in the Initial Quarrel

As most of the literature on the funeral games for Patroclus does, I turn to the initial quarrel between Achilles and Agamemnon as the conflict that frames the subsequent action in the poem. Important concepts that appear in the context of the games are emphasized from the

¹⁰⁰ *Iliad*, 23.890

¹⁰¹ Kenneth John Atchity, *Homer's Iliad: The Shield of Memory*. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978). Also see Dickie 1984

¹⁰² Postlethwaite 1995

outset of the poem, such as the relationship between human action, uncertainty, and fate. In response to the plague that has overwhelmed the Achaeans, Achilles calls an assembly in which he promptly requests that a prophet interpret the cause of their misfortune. Kalchas, “far the best of the bird interpreters,” hesitates and insists on having the assurance of Achilles’ protection before speaking, since he is about to accuse Agamemnon of dishonoring a priest of Apollo, Chryses, by refusing to return his daughter for ransom.¹⁰³ This moment is a nexus of uncertainty that heightens the intensity of the crisis – uncertainty about whether Kalchas is safe to speak out in the assembly as the group faces the uncertainty of whether or not they will die of the plague, and the uncertainty about the best plan of action for the Achaeans in the face of the plague.

This existential uncertainty is notably different from the controlled uncertainty of the games themselves. It is relative to this uncertainty that the assembly demonstrates a context with its own expectations of appropriate actions and dispositions, one that frames the relationship between the Achaeans as they make appeals in speech as to what is just. There is a pervasive seriousness that accompanies the intentionality with which the speakers act. Agamemnon, after chastising Kalchas as incompetent, agrees to return the daughter of the priest, Chryseis, but only if he gets another prize from someone else, since he refuses to be the only one to go without a prize. In doing so, he is making a claim about his value and what he deserves – a justice claim based on distribution. Achilles responds by pointing to a conflicting justice claim by which they cannot meet Agamemnon’s demand: “But what we took from the cities by storm has been distributed; it is unbecoming for the people to call back things once given.”¹⁰⁴ The issue at hand is one of distribution; Achilles appeals to an established principle of distribution (*damos*) among

¹⁰³ *Iliad*, 1.69

¹⁰⁴ *Iliad*, 1.126

the Achaeans, and makes a claim about the appropriateness of that principle that refutes Agamemnon's claim.

At this point, the actions and dispositions of the two men are consistent with the context in which their conflict occurs. It is the moment when Agamemnon asserts that the prize will be taken if not given freely that sets off the initial quarrel. Both parties hurl insults at one another, Achilles threatens to leave, and Agamemnon makes up his mind about whose prize he will be taking: Achilles' prize, Briseis. In doing so, it is Agamemnon who takes the first step toward the violation of what is appropriate to the assembly. His decision follows not from the *dasmos*, but from his appeal to forceful taking. This appeal on Agamemnon's part gestures towards what Patroclus will later remind us is designated as appropriate to the battlefield, not the assembly. The seriousness of the intentionality with which Agamemnon approaches this moment leads him to violate the structure of the assembly and the recognition of what is appropriate to its context.

Achilles' reaction to Agamemnon's aggression at this moment sets the stage for further consideration of seriousness and playfulness as encountered in the context of the assembly:

*"And the anger came on Peleus' son, and within his shaggy breast the heart was divided two ways, pondering whether to draw from beside his thigh the sharp sword, driving away all those who stood between and kill the son of Atreus, or else to check the spleen within and keep down his anger. Now as he weighed in his mind and spirit these two courses and was drawing from its scabbard the great sword, Athene descended from the sky"*¹⁰⁵

Agamemnon has made a demand that both violates the *dasmos* and issues a direct threat to Achilles by choosing to take his prize, so Achilles is caught between two resolutions to this demand: violence or withdrawal. Either way, at this moment, Achilles can no longer participate in the appropriate action for the assembly; no one can, as the context has been undermined. He registered his objection and Agamemnon retaliates with an illegitimate response. Homer makes it clear in his account that Achilles chooses violence – or, we might say, continues the transition

¹⁰⁵ *Iliad*, 1.88

from action appropriate to the assembly to that of the battlefield – before Athena intervenes and persuades Achilles to sheath his sword.

It is this moment of decision and intervention that sets up the relationship between the dispositional orientations of seriousness and playfulness in the politics of the *Iliad*. Achilles presents us with the struggle between the intentional pursuit of ends that matter to him (and to the political community as a whole) and the ability to abandon the pursuit of those ends – to abandon that intentionality. These two possibilities reflect the necessary political tension that we find in a disposition of attention. The surrounding contexts of the war, the plague, and the conflict in the assembly all lend themselves to the seriousness of the moment through a particular experience of uncertainty. Agamemnon is willing to contradict the customary principle in pursuit of his desires by threatening Achilles, and Achilles is willing to draw his sword in retaliation. Seriousness manifests here through the intentionality of the actors – as an orientation towards particular outcomes that seeks to minimize uncertainty in their pursuit. It is portrayed as approaching its extreme, as the willingness to use the corpse-making power that we find so clearly articulated in Simone Weil's understanding of force in the poem.¹⁰⁶ It is only through Athena's intervention that Achilles' seriousness is attenuated.

The intervention of Athena demonstrates how playfulness might enter into even the most serious of conflicts. The gods introduce a perspective of playfulness and ludic attention through their eternal nature, as juxtaposed with the human condition of those assembled by the walls of Troy. As the gods repeatedly intervene and recede from the human conflict on the ground, one cannot help but note the confluence of intentionality and para-intentionality inherent in their actions. They attend to temporary interests with human affairs, but there are no lingering consequences to such engagement. There are resonances between the representation of the gods

¹⁰⁶ Simone Weil, "The Iliad, or The Poem of Force," trans. Mary McCarthy, *Chicago Review* 18,2 (1965): 5-30.

in the *Iliad* and the Athenian Stranger's characterization of human beings as playthings of the gods.¹⁰⁷ Put differently, Athena and the other gods participate in human affairs with a similar attention as we find the Achaeans act in the funeral games for Patroclus; they consistently invest themselves in the outcomes on the battlefield with commanding seriousness, but the outcomes – even as they outrage and inflame divine conflict – matter not to the endlessness of the gods. The gods provide us with a model of ludic attention that establishes a counterpoint to the seriousness of the war.

In the case of Athena in the initial quarrel, her engagement pushes Achilles ever so slightly away from the intentionality of seriousness – enough to get him to abandon his immediate focus on ends that would have led to Agamemnon's death at his hands, to stay his anger. She does so, in part, by refocusing Achilles' attention and deemphasizing the seriousness of his immediate ends: "Some day three times over such shining gifts shall be given you by reason of this outrage. Hold your hand then, and obey us."¹⁰⁸ The conditions of Athena's intervention point out how the degrees of seriousness and playfulness of disposition can both constitute and potentially threaten political order. Achilles stands with the option of violence at his disposal for the effective pursuit of his ends in this conflict, but doing so would entail the breakdown of political order. On this account, the extreme of a disposition of seriousness is antithetical to politics. It is only when Athena intervenes that Achilles' disposition displays sufficient playfulness so that the assembly does not become a battlefield.

This crucial moment of the initial quarrel, in which Achilles accedes to Athena and sheathes his sword, defines the political struggle of the work. Achilles is set between the seriousness that would lead to killing Agamemnon and the playfulness of the gods that leads him

¹⁰⁷ *Laws*, 644d

¹⁰⁸ *Iliad*, 1.213

to withdraw entirely from political life. One also may be reminded of Aristotle's claim about a man without political community is either a beast or god;¹⁰⁹ it is in this moment that Achilles shows himself to be neither, even as he temporarily retreats from the community. He refuses to pursue his end at all costs, or to deny the value of ends altogether, but instead negotiates between perspectives of seriousness and playfulness. Despite other arguments that might read Achilles as either a beast or a god at various points in the poem, Achilles needs the political community and the political community needs Achilles, which is also to say – in the terms of this argument – that the political community needs the capacity for a disposition that negotiates these two polar extremes of attention.

The assembly of the initial quarrel ends with the following words: “So these two after battling in words of contention stood up, and broke the assembly beside the ships of the Achaians. Peleus’ son went back to his balanced ships and his shelter with Patroklos.”¹¹⁰ This description of “battling in words” presages the distinction between sites of conflict that Patroclus identifies in his harsh words to Meriones in Book XVI. Although there are further cases of “battling in words” throughout the poem, it is the battling with hands that overwhelms the subsequent books until Hector’s death, which marks the final death of the epic and opens up the possibility of the games. The games, then, present a distinct context within which the heroes can act, but one that is indelibly affected by the action that precedes it.

V. The Games in Honor of Patroclus

The existing literature that discusses the funeral games focuses on a few key moments in Book XXIII as part of an argument that it resolves the initial quarrel: Achilles’ decision not to participate in the chariot race, his involvement in distributing prizes and the dispute between

¹⁰⁹ *Politics*, 1253a

¹¹⁰ *Iliad*, 1.304

Antilochus and Menelaus following the race, and the way he addresses Agamemnon when the Mycenaean king rises to participate in the final event of the spear-throw.¹¹¹ There are good reasons to pay attention to these moments in the games, since Achilles' role in the games remains central even as he abstains from competing, as he does when he withdraws from the fighting on the battlefield. However, the minimization or exclusion of the other action in the events as part of trying to understand the role of Book XXIII in the poem undermines some of the fundamental ways in which the funeral games appear as their own site of action. Looking to Patroclus instead of Achilles as the lens for understanding the importance of the games and why they appear in the poem – the man for whom the games are held rather than the man who holds the games – provides a different account of the games, one that emphasizes how they matter to members of the ludic community as they compete in and assess the action of the games. In this way, the detail given to the games includes, but is importantly not limited to, the interactions between Achilles and the sons of Atreus.

By acknowledging what is different about the games as a site of action in the poem, this reading still confronts these key moments for Achilles, but also recognizes the appearance of different heroes – made possible by Achilles' abstention, as he claims before the chariot race –¹¹² and the ways in which others are honored by the ludic community. It is noteworthy, then, that Achilles abstains from competition in the name of his fallen companion, since Patroclus' character represents aspects of what make the games a distinct site of action. As already noted, one aspect of his character is his awareness of the appropriate ways of attending to action in context, illustrated by his admonition of Meriones on the battlefield. Patroclus calls the audience's attention to the different contexts in which we engage in conflict, and how that

¹¹¹ *Iliad*, 23.271, 537, and 887

¹¹² *Iliad*, 23.274

context matters for how one attends to and experiences that action. There are appropriate types of actions for different sites, and the action of the games demonstrates how certain actions are inappropriate for the games in the same way that Meriones' taunts were inappropriate for the battlefield.

The second aspect of Patroclus' character comes from the development of how he appears in the poem, which leads him to the moment on the battlefield when he chastises Meriones. Patroclus and Meriones are both *therapontes* (companions or henchmen) of great warriors – Achilles and Idomeneus, respectively – and, thus, are overshadowed by their counterparts in the hierarchy of the Achaeans, despite being formidable warriors themselves.¹¹³ As a result, neither Patroclus nor Meriones are as honored on the battlefield or in the assembly as Achilles or Idomeneus. The games are very much a space in which *therapontes*, like Meriones, can be honored, and that is illustrated in Book XXIII. Peter Ahrensdorf, in his recent work on virtue in Homer's work, provides a detailed account of Patroclus' transformation from silent companion to being directly addressed by the poet (which is relatively rare in the poem) and becoming a central figure in the epic. He makes particular note of the conversation between Nestor and Patroclus in Book XI and how it reveals the extent to which Patroclus is unsatisfied living in the shadow of Achilles.¹¹⁴ It is this conversation that gives Patroclus the words that he uses to persuade Achilles to let him take his place on the battlefield, leading to his overreach in pursuit of glory – by pushing the attack, against the counsel of Achilles, to the gates of Troy – and his demise. Patroclus' desire is largely consistent with the heroic ethic, although it might be better thought of as a *therapontic* ethic, since it strives to emerge from the shadow of one's

¹¹³ See Stagakis 1966 for an argument that *therapontes* does not indicate a hierarchical relationship, but carries the same meaning as *hetairoi*, or companion/friend. I am content to rely on the common understanding that the relationship seems to have some hierarchical basis, but it is worth noting that there could be some ambiguity.

¹¹⁴ Peter J. Ahrensdorf, *Homer on the Gods and Human Virtue*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 165.

revered companion. This same type of emergence happens for the characters of Antilochus, Epeius, and Meriones in the context of the games.

This desire to appear and excel before the political and ludic community also indicates the difficulty of sharing honor in the heroic model and the risk of that pursuit to the hero. Patroclus' brief appearance on the battlefield in the *Iliad* indicates the problems with that model. He reminds us that human experience – as opposed to the omniscience of the gods in the epic – is bound up in uncertainty, and that honor in the heroic ethos comes through the engagement with that uncertainty before the political community. Uncertainty has a dominant presence in the action in the assembly and the battlefield. It is uncertainty that prompts Patroclus' entry into the battlefield as the Trojans threaten the Achaean camp, and it defines the risk he takes by pushing back to the walls of Troy in pursuit of glory. Patroclus' death is one of the many reminders of the consequence of the battlefield as a site of action, and why we attend to acting in that context with such pervasive seriousness. Uncertainty continues to have a distinct influence in the context of the games that are held in his name, but the structures for that activity figure the experience of uncertainty differently, which facilitates ludic attention in the action of the games.

It is through the character of Patroclus that we can understand how the funeral games are not simply a convenient bardic trick for ending the poem with Achilles winning one over Agamemnon without offending the Agamemnons of the Hellenic world (although it may do some of that as well), but that the games exist as a separate site of action in the poem that permits the pursuit of honor differently than the battlefield or the assembly. They do so because of the way in which the structure and context of the games alters how the Achaeans attend to their action. A close reading of the games with respect to aspects of seriousness and playfulness as they appear in the action of the various events demonstrates how the poem presents the different

possibilities afforded by that context in addition to refiguring some of the key thematic elements of the poem.

VI. Structure and Attention in the Funeral Games

In *The Iliad as Politics*, Hammer challenges the emphasis in the literature on the required presence of the institutional organization of the *polis* as being a precondition for political action when considering what is political about the *Iliad*. He encourages us to think about the “political field” as the realm in which questions about communal existence are raised and addressed – emphasizing the performance of politics over its structure. This argument presents the funeral games as one place where this performance of politics occurs in the poem, and Achilles’ presence is figured as a response to the crisis of authority articulated in the initial quarrel.¹¹⁵ My understanding of games as sites of action relies heavily on a similar claim about the performance of an activity as political, but I also argue that we must recognize how the structure of the games provide a distinct frame for human action; the structure of the games affects how the heroes act, even if those structures are not as formalized as they would be in the *polis*.

While retaining Hammer’s insights about the performance of politics in the context of the games, I want to return our own attention to the structure of the games and how they alter the ways that the Achaean warriors attend to conflict in that context. As suggested in the account of the initial quarrel, the first important consideration is the way in which the conditions of uncertainty are framed differently by the separation and specification of the funeral games. The relationship to uncertainty that is characteristic of ludic attention is achieved by virtue of the reorientation of attention through the temporary ends of each event. As introduced in the previous chapter, these aspects are shown to affect the experiences of the heroes in ways that distinguish the games as structures for activity. The following close reading traces how the

¹¹⁵ Hammer, 135

poet's description of the games emphasizes these aspects alongside the differences in the ways that the Achaeans act. The differences are slight, especially since the types of activities that we find in these games so closely reflect the activities and virtues that are taken seriously and celebrated by the heroic ethos. Nevertheless, it is still possible to note the ways in which Homer marks the different events as distinct sites of action.

One of the clearest instances of the issue of attention relative to the structure of games and a sense of appropriate disposition is not found in the actual contest of a particular event, but rather in the spectators' dispute between Idomeneus and Oilean Ajax about the leader of the chariot race. The two men make different observations about the leader as the chariots return after rounding the turning-post, which escalates into insults, a challenge to wager on who is right, and Ajax rising to meet Idomeneus with "hard words" before Achilles intervenes:

*"And now the quarrel between the two of them would have gone still further, had not Achilles himself risen up and spoken between them: 'No longer now, Aias and Idomeneus, continue to exchange this bitter and evil talk. It is not becoming. If another acted so, you yourselves would be angry. Rather sit down again among those assembled and watch for the horses, and they in their strain for victory will before long be here. Then you each can see for himself, and learn which of the Argives horses have run first and which have run second'"*¹¹⁶

Achilles' criticism resembles the way that Patroclus chastises Meriones about the appropriate context for harsh words. Achilles also adopts a position similar to that of Nestor, who tries to calm the tempers of Achilles and Agamemnon in the initial quarrel,¹¹⁷ but with more success. The context established by the games helps his appeal to resonate differently than these counterpoints did on the battlefield or in the assembly.

It is possible that Achilles simply carries more authority than Nestor, but this does not hold up to Agamemnon's response to Nestor's plea for him to leave Achilles' prize – "Yes, old

¹¹⁶ *Iliad*, 23.489

¹¹⁷ *Iliad*, 1.253

sir, all this you have said is fair and orderly.”¹¹⁸ It seems more likely that the measured conclusion to this dispute in front of the ludic community relies on the different stakes that we find in the context of the games. Achilles rightly notes that the uncertainty is soon to be resolved – “they in their strain for victory will before long be here” – with no great consequence to either Ajax or Idomeneus. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that the men still do invest themselves momentarily in that fleeting outcome, as the men who are holding the reins do to an even greater degree. The uncertainty of the event is as alluring as it is imminently resolvable, and the action is compelling by virtue of those characteristics. Both in this example and consistently in Book XXIII, the structure of the games provides for a relationship to uncertainty that is founded on the specification of outcomes, which enables the ludic attention experienced by the ludic community.

VII. Uncertainty and Ludic Attention

There are pronounced differences in how uncertainty appears in the funeral games. Uncertainty drives a lot of the descriptions of the action of the various events; it shapes the engagement of the players, but also the spectators and even Homer’s audience for the epic. The poet makes use of differing levels of uncertainty across these various positions as part of the dramatic account of the games.¹¹⁹ I elaborate on the chariot race because of the detail that it provides for the presence of uncertainty as it is shaped by the structure of the games, but uncertainty shows up in other events as well, which will be apparent from further discussion below. Since the rules and logistics of the chariot race require a greater distance for the competition, the spectators are unable to see the entire event, which leads to the above confusion

¹¹⁸ *Iliad*, 1.286

¹¹⁹ One level that will not be treated with depth here is the role of the gods in introducing what appears as uncertainty or misfortune – as with Eumelus in the chariot race – as the uncertainty (as well as claims to certainty by those who attribute fortune and misfortune to the gods) about the will of the gods cuts across the different contexts for action in the epic.

between Idomeneus and Ajax about who is in the lead on the return stretch following the turn. Idomeneus believes that he is first to identify Diomedes as the leader based on his voice and unique marks on one of his horses. Oilean Ajax objects because Eumelus had been in the lead as the chariots passed out of sight on the opening stretch.

The question of sight recalls the “seercraft” of Kalchas and the origin of the initial quarrel.¹²⁰ Both experiences are bound up in uncertainty, but the context established by the games alters how the Achaeans attend to it. The audience of the poem knows by this point that Eumelus has indeed been thwarted by the intervention of Athena – as she wrecks his chariot in response to the intervention of Apollo – so there is a discrepancy between the audience and the spectators as to the level of uncertainty experienced in the chariot race. The effect of these levels is a demonstration for the audience of how the uncertainty in the events comes to be experienced as compelling – rather than as frightening, or infuriating, or disruptive – just as we find reflected in the characters as well. Of course, as Idomeneus and Ajax skew towards too much seriousness in their ludic attention, Achilles chastises them for not attending to that compelling action in a way that is appropriate to the context. This interaction reminds us that experiencing uncertainty differently does not negate the possibility of a contested sense of appropriate disposition.

The players experience the uncertainty of the contest itself, which occurs relative to obstacles and their efforts to overcome them through actions that are simultaneously familiar yet experienced in markedly different ways than in other contexts. The reorientation of the experience of uncertainty for the players begins with the drawing of lots for starting positions and runs through the detailed description of the race for second place between Menelaus and Antilochus. The drawing of lots places Diomedes, described as “by far the best of them all,” on

¹²⁰ *Iliad*, 1.68

the outside lane and “last for the driving of horses.”¹²¹ Finding the best horses in the worst position introduces additional uncertainty into the running of the race, and that is the result of the random drawing of lots. In the detailed accounts of head-to-head moments of the race – between Eumelus and Diomedes, then Antilochus and Menelaus – Homer emphasizes the uncertainty of the final outcome: “And now he might have passed him or run to a doubtful decision...” and “If both of them had had to run the course any further, Menelaos would have passed him, and there could have been no argument.”¹²² Both of these instances illustrate the uncertainty relative to the outcome that is experienced by the players. The former suggests the possibility that there might have been a “doubtful decision” – or what we might now call a “photo finish,” and attempt to resolve the uncertainty through technology – while the latter describes how the outcome would have been different but for the length of this particular race. These examples speak to the importance of outcomes as a way putting an end to uncertainty by marking and asserting a measure certainty at the end of the contest. The resolution of its own contrived contingency is central to how a game functions to enable a particular type of attention.

The poet’s description cleverly navigates the boundaries of certainty and uncertainty as expectations are established and undermined for all of the competitors (except, seemingly, Meriones, who is hardly mentioned in the chariot race, and only really appears in later events). Eumelus is said to surpass in horsemanship at the outset of the race, so Achilles laments that the “best man is driving his single-foot horses in last” through the misfortune that strikes when Athena smashes the yoke on his chariot.¹²³ Diomedes is also considered the best in some of the account – due to the swift horses he took from Aeneas, instead of the specific claim to horsemanship that we get with Eumelus – but he confronts uncertainty through his unfortunate

¹²¹ *Iliad*, 23.356

¹²² *Iliad*, 23.382 and 526

¹²³ *Iliad*, 23.289 and 536

place in the drawing of lots and the near-upsetting intervention of Apollo that causes him to briefly lose his whip. Antilochus is counseled on a “certain” path to victory by the well-intentioned advice of his father, Nestor: “For if you follow the others but get first by the turning-post, there is none who could sprint to make it up, nor close you, nor pass you...”¹²⁴ Antilochus is notably unable to enact his father’s strategy; even so, the outcome that Nestor promises is not as certain as he claims, since Eumelus does, in fact, lead on the return stretch and fails to win the race.¹²⁵ Menelaus experiences uncertainty as he almost overtakes Antilochus at the finish line, and also faces the acute uncertainty of the fear for his safety in the key moment in which Antilochus’ aggressive maneuvers cause him to give way to the slower horses. In that moment, the uncertainty that Menelaus experiences relative to the temporary end of taking second place in the race gives way to the uncertainty for his physical safety. He attends to both of these ends with relative seriousness, even as he defers to the importance of the latter in the moment, which informs the vehemence with which he protests the eventual outcome. These different treatments of uncertainty demonstrate how the games enable different modes of attention, while also emphasizes how that orientation is temporary, fragile, and consistently challenged.

Across the different experiences of uncertainty in the games, even (or, perhaps, especially) in those instances in which tempers flare and injuries to pride and body are possible, there are new possibilities for action in comparison with the rest of the poem. There is certainly still conflict – whether it is Menelaus and Antilochus during and following the chariot race, Odysseus and Telamonian Ajax in the wrestling match, or Idomeneus and Oilean Ajax as spectators – but the actions and reactions of the conflict take on a different character in the games. This

¹²⁴ *Iliad*, 23.344

¹²⁵ Roisman 1988 notes that Homer cleverly shifts the exciting action of the race away from where it was traditionally thought to happen: “Indeed, it is a tribute to the inventiveness of the poet that he has skipped over what was considered the most exciting part of the race and succeeded in creating suspense and excitement when these were least expected, namely, in the straight home-leg,” 119.

difference demonstrates the particular attention found in relation to the structure of the games. The separation and specification set by the games help the ludic community to experience the uncertainty as compelling. An important part of that relationship is the way in which the ends of the games – that which provides for their intentionality – are transient and able to fall away when pressured by a competing seriousness from the world outside of the game and the necessities of existence, as with Menelaus' decision in the chariot race.

VIII. Ends and Outcomes

Almost any definition of games that comes from the scholarship on games and play identifies the importance of clearly defined outcomes or conditions for success as important for understanding them as practices.¹²⁶ There are different ways of talking about those outcomes: Salen and Zimmerman use the term “quantifiable,” while Avedon and Sutton-Smith use “disequilibrium.” As has been noted, the purpose of the outcome is to resolve the conflict established by the obstacles introduced by the game. Outcomes are the intersection between uncertainty and ends; they direct the intentionality of actors, introduce the uncertainty of success or failure, and serve to conclude the uncertainty. In the context of the funeral games, we observe different ways in which this occurs in all of the events (except the lack of a contest between Meriones and Agamemnon in the spear-throw). As is the case with uncertainty, this range of outcomes in the various events directs the audience towards the difficulty with determining outcomes, even within the prescribed structure of games, and the way that we attend to that difficulty differently when it happens in games.

¹²⁶ Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman, *Rules of Play*. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003).
Elliot M. Avedon and Brian Sutton-Smith, *The Study of Games*. (New York: Wiley, 1971).
Jesper Juul, *The Art of Failure*. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2013).
Greg Costikyan, *Uncertainty in Games*. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2013).

Again, the chariot race gives the audience its first and most robust engagement with the issue of outcomes in the context of games. As noted with respect to uncertainty, Homer explicitly remarks on how precarious the final outcome is in this event. Menelaus would have overtaken Antilochus if only the race was a little longer; Diomedes would have fallen behind like Eumelus had he not regained control of his whip with the help of Athena. Homer initially suggests the possibility of a “doubtful decision” for first place between Diomedes and Eumelus, before the gods intervene. In these cases, we see how uncertainty is directly related to the determination of a particular outcome, one that draws the attention of the competitors and establishes the parameters through which uncertainty can be experienced and understood by the ludic community. For an audience in the 21st century, the uncertainty introduced through outcomes has become an issue of technology in the contests we have that resemble the chariot race. Homer’s “doubtful decision” likely would have an explicit winner in a modern horse race. Nevertheless, issues related to outcomes persists in many of today’s games. Players and spectators yearn for clearly-defined outcomes as resolutions to the uncertainty of the contests, and there are times when games cannot fully deliver on that promise. Nevertheless, that desire to know – to resolve the uncertainty – demonstrates the power of ends to draw and shape attention, even the temporary ends that we find within games.

Before falling back into the trap of only considering the richness of the account of the chariot race, this discussion permits an appreciation of the diversity of outcomes portrayed by the games and how those outcomes affect the Achaeans. One could argue that only the boxing match and the pig-iron toss have undisputed victories. In the boxing match, Epeius makes good on an opening taunt and knocks out Euryalus in one punch, only to be laughed at soon after because of his unimpressive throw in the pig-iron toss. In the latter event, Polypoetes out-throws

everyone “by as far as an ox-herd can cast with his throwing stick which spins through the air and comes down where the cattle graze in the herds” – which, of course, we all know is a great distance, but those inexperienced with ox-herd stick-throwing are helped to recognize the throw as impressive when the description is followed up by “and all the Achaians applauded.”¹²⁷ The foot-race is more or less an undisputed victory for Odysseus, but he remains behind Oilean Ajax for the entire race until Athena intervenes to cause Ajax to slip.

The remaining four events all present some sort of peculiarity with respect to outcomes, which both emphasizes the desire for resolution to uncertainty through outcomes and provides the audience examples of how outcomes are treated with ludic attention in the context of games. The conditions for victory in the wrestling match are not specified by Achilles –they appear to be known by the community to involve getting certain parts of the opponent to touch the ground in certain ways – but the poet makes it clear that neither competitor achieves victory according to the known rules.¹²⁸ Ajax proposes to Odysseus that they try to throw one another in turn as alternative conditions to break their stalemate, but neither is successful.¹²⁹ In the failed attempts to lift, Odysseus’ technique seems to get the better of Ajax, as Odysseus causes him to fall twice, but not in a way that leads to a recognized victory. Before a third attempt, Achilles stops the competitors, saying: “Wrestle no more now; do not wear yourselves out and get hurt. You have both won. Therefore take the prizes in equal division and retire, so the rest of the Achaians can have their contests.”¹³⁰ Achilles facilitates the recognition of the ludic attention demonstrated by the two wrestlers by expressing concern for the physical safety of the participants; the outcome

¹²⁷ *Iliad*, 23.845

¹²⁸ *Iliad*, 23.718: “Neither Odysseus was able to bring Aias down or throw him to the ground, nor could Aias, but the great strength of Odysseus held out against him.”

¹²⁹ Willis 1941 notes a passage from Hyginus in which Ajax is said to have won the wrestling match in Patroclus’ funeral games, which further complicates Homer’s presentation and its undefined outcome.

¹³⁰ *Iliad*, 23.735

of the contest is sacrificed to concerns about the bodies of the warriors, even as they both commit themselves to the contest with significant seriousness. Instead of an outcome in accordance with the original rules of the event, Achilles declares them both winners and splits the prize with no objections from the assembled Achaeans. There are clear differences in the way that the outcome of the wrestling match is able to be decided when compared with the initial quarrel and its indivisible prize.

There is a different resolution in the spear-fight, even though we find similar concern for the health of the warriors, as there is an indivisible prize. In that contest, it is actually the spectators who call out for the Diomedes and Ajax to stop for fear that Ajax might be hurt:

“The son of Tydeus, over the top of the huge shield, was always menacing the neck of Aias with the point of the shining spear, but when the Achaians saw it in fear for Aias they called for them to stop and divide the prize evenly. But the hero Achilles carried the great sword, with its scabbard and carefully cut sword belt, and gave it to Diomedes”¹³¹

Although Diomedes does not achieve the stated victory condition – to “reach the vitals” and draw blood –¹³² he is awarded first prize by Achilles. It is left unclear whether this decision is because the prize cannot be divided, since it is a sword, or because Achilles determines that Diomedes would have won but for the concern for Ajax’s safety (or both factors combined). The ludic community fully supports this truncated outcome to the spear-fight.

This particular event has even more pronounced resonances with the beginning of the poem and the lack of an outcome in explicitly non-game contexts of the assembly and battlefield: the initial quarrel in Book I and the duel for Helen between Menelaus and Paris that would have ended the war in Book III. In the initial quarrel, Achilles concedes to Agamemnon’s demand to give up Briseis and withdraws from battle, to great consequence for the Achaeans. In Book III, the duel ends early as well, but through the intervention of Aphrodite and against the desire of

¹³¹ *Iliad*, 23.820

¹³² *Iliad*, 23.804

the people, which prolongs the war and its toll.¹³³ The spear-fight in the funeral games, then, demonstrates a similar contest for an indivisible prize that is ended prematurely, but with a structure that allows for those involved to understand the conflict differently. In the games, there is nothing more said about the awarding of prizes for this outcome, while the conclusions of the initial quarrel and the duel doom both sides to further violence. In part, these differences in the outcomes of the wrestling and spear-fighting derive from the differences in attention permitted by the structure of the games. The final two events – the archery and the spear-throw – both have exceptional outcomes, but I will discuss those relative to the prominent figure of Meriones. For now, I return to the chariot race as a way of seeing how the relationship between outcomes and attention figures into the justice claims that are articulated in the disagreement that follows, and the continued differences from the initial quarrel that can be attributed to ludic attention.

IX. The Vulnerability of Separation in the Challenges following the Chariot Race

Hammer's treatment of this noteworthy conflict focuses on the way that Achilles tries to navigate the question of justice and desert with respect to the awarding of prizes and his sense of the correct outcome.¹³⁴ Commentators rightly pair the scene with Agamemnon's handling of his reconsideration of the prizes from the *dasmós*, which incites the initial quarrel. When Achilles proposes that Eumelus be given second prize for his merits as a horseman despite his misfortune in the race, Antilochus challenges Achilles' decision in the same way that Achilles challenged Agamemnon's decision to take a new prize after the initial distribution. A key difference between the two conflicts is the way in which Antilochus expresses his objection to the proposed changes to the distribution. Antilochus clearly separates the context established by the game

¹³³ There are overlaps between the separation of the magic circle, which some scholars attribute to a notion of safety, and multiple cases in which the gods intervene to carry off a chosen hero in the face of certain doom – as with Paris and Aeneas – but it is important to note that games are the product of human device, while the gods are the ones accounting for the safety in these other contexts.

¹³⁴ Hammer, 138-143

from the order of the world outside the games when he counters that Achilles is welcome to award any other prize of his choosing to Eumelus – even a superior prize to his own – but he deserves what he was promised by the outcome of the contest. Antilochus appeals to the structure of the game as the justification for what he deserves. Despite having inferior horses – as is established by his father Nestor and the poet directly – Antilochus still earned second prize in the context of the chariot race, with its particular ends, obstacles, engagement with uncertainty, and outcome. In a different context, the acknowledgment of Eumelus’ excellence could have carried the day, but by appealing to the structure of the game (and by having Achilles be a more just arbiter of established rules than Agamemnon), Antilochus convinces Achilles.¹³⁵

The relative simplicity with which this initial debate over the distribution of prizes gets resolved is upended when Menelaus registers his complaint about Antilochus’ tactics, which allowed for Antilochus to take second place narrowly ahead of him. The resultant disagreement is complex – and easily misconstrued – as Antilochus appears to concede to Menelaus in a way that he was unwilling to do for Eumelus and Achilles, which leads others to read Antilochus as simply deferring to the established order as a counterpoint to Achilles’ obstinacy in the initial quarrel.¹³⁶ However, Antilochus continues to insist on the distinction between the action that occurs within the structure of the game and that which occurs relative to other structures that govern the surrounding context of the war. When Antilochus agrees to give his prize to Menelaus, it is only a concession to his power in the assembly and on the battlefield and not a recognition of the justice of his claim in the context of the games. By keeping this distinction in mind, a close reading of the justice claims and responses given in this disagreement brings the issue of attention and context into stark relief.

¹³⁵ Achilles instead gives Eumelus a bronze corselet that he took from Asteropaeus after killing him in Book XXI.

¹³⁶ Dickie 1984; see also Roger Dunkle, “Nestor, Odysseus, and the *metis-bie* Antithesis: The Funeral Games, Iliad 23,” *The Classical World* 81 (1987): 1-17.

From the outset, Menelaus' challenge takes the form that it would take in the assembly, as he initially gestures towards the spectators with an appeal that they judge between the two men based on their merits as horsemen. He asserts that Antilochus could only have won by deception based on this discrepancy in apparent merit. It is difficult to know to what extent Menelaus' claim actually draws on a valid understanding of what would and wouldn't be allowed in a chariot race or if it is simply an attempt to mend his pride by diminishing Antilochus. The best indication we have in the poem comes from Nestor, who, by his age and respect in the community, is a credible character to look for a traditional account of permissible action in the context of the games. Nestor begins the strategic portion of his advice by saying: "But the man, though he drive the slower horses, who takes his advantage, keeps his eye always on the post and turns tight" and "make your left-hand horse keep hard against the turning-post."¹³⁷ Although Nestor's advice is specifically with respect to the turn-post – the traditional location of the exciting action –and not the sinkhole on the return stretch where Antilochus actually makes his move, it seems clear that there is nothing wrong with aggressive racing in the narrowest part of the race.¹³⁸ It just so happens that Antilochus finds another spot in the race to take advantage of this advice. If this reading of Nestor's advice holds, then Menelaus' claim is illegitimate in the context of the race itself; his objection reflects concerns with how he will be perceived by the Achaeans beyond the scope of the event because of the outcome of the race.

¹³⁷ *Iliad*, 23.322 and 338

¹³⁸ Nestor also gives another account of victory achieved by "advantage" instead of strength in his speech accepting the fifth-place prize from Achilles. He describes how he was out-maneuvered by the sons of Aktor, who were thought to be conjoined twins with the ability to divide the tasks of the charioteer. Dickie 1984 reads this as a critique of being over-zealous in pursuit of victory (for both Antilochus' tactics and the later description of the the Aktor twins. Dunkle 1987 considers this to be a critique of the use of *metis* to try to overcome *bie* that is played out in the games. However, it is not clear that Nestor necessarily presents that critique, especially in the context of his advice to Antilochus.

Menelaus betrays a concern that his challenge will not be well-received when he notes his worry about what the Achaeans will say if he takes Antilochus' prize like Agamemnon took Achilles' prize: "Come then, o leaders of the Argives and their men of counsel: judge between the two of us now; and without favor; so that no man of the bronze-armoured Achaians shall say of us: 'Menelaos using lies and force against Antilochos went off with the mare he won, for his horses were far slower but he himself was greater in power and degree.'"¹³⁹ Through the way that he addresses the ludic community, Menelaus collapses the distinction between the games and the surrounding political order – shattering whatever tenuous separation was made possible by the structure of the games. Of course, the separation of the games was always vulnerable, but Menelaus' violation here demonstrates the extent of the possibilities afforded by ludic attention by showing the audience what it looks like when a similar appeal is made without an appeal to the structure provided by the games.

This violation is reinforced when Menelaus abandons his appeal about deception that he was making to the ludic community and instead emphasizes the political power that he wields outside of the games. He continues: "Or rather come, I myself will give the judgment, and I think no other man of the Danaans can call it in question, for it will be right. Antilochos, beloved of Zeus, come here. This is justice."¹⁴⁰ At this point, Menelaus has completely moved the conflict beyond making an appeal to the structure of the game, unlike Antilochus in his challenge to Achilles, and attempts instead to appeal to justice or custom (*themis*). The transition from a concern with deceptive tactics to a proclamation of justice attempts to refocus the attention of the assembled Achaeans as to what ought to matter for the resolution of this dispute. Menelaus needs the appeal to conventional political power in order to make his claim.

¹³⁹ *Iliad*, 23.573

¹⁴⁰ *Iliad*, 23.578

It is because of this transition that it is inaccurate to read Antilochus' response to this challenge as a simple acknowledgment of Menelaus' claim as being correct – which Antilochus blames on his youth – or as a recognition of his authority in the matter. A more appropriate assessment of this conflict is as an acknowledgment of the vulnerable separation established by games, and how quickly ludic attention can become overwhelmed by challenges to its context. The boundary of Huizinga's magic circle – or however we want to signify that separation – has been shattered; this dispute is no longer about the chariot race. As far as the conflict resembles the initial quarrel, it is because Menelaus has made it that way through his insistence on addressing his concerns about how he appears before his peers, and those concerns are laden with unequivocal seriousness. Unlike all of the other events, the intentionality that is inspired by the pursuit of the ends of the games – crossing the finish line, out-throwing the opponent, or hitting the target – does not fall away in the same way in this first event. Menelaus insists that the result of the race informs some more enduring form of seriousness that translates from the ludic community to the political community, which may very well be true for this community.¹⁴¹

It is only by Antilochus' response that we avoid another quarrel. When he offers to give Menelaus his prize and more if that is what he wishes, Antilochus diffuses the situation while still clarifying the distinction between an appeal to the structure of the games and the type of appeal that Menelaus is making. He says, "I myself will give you the mare I won, and if there were something still greater you asked for out of my house, I should still be willing at once to give it to you, beloved of Zeus, rather than all my days fall from your favour and be in the wrong before the divinities."¹⁴² Even as he defers to Menelaus in reference to his age and status, Antilochus holds that the second prize is "the mare I won," as he does to Achilles when he tries

¹⁴¹ It is worth reflecting on how the identity of ludic community and political community – that they are one and the same here – limits the ability of games to establish separation of context.

¹⁴² *Iliad*, 23.591

to give it to Eumelus. This deference allows for a resolution that is different from the initial quarrel between Achilles and Agamemnon, but not because it was justified in the context of the games. Menelaus refuses to allow the decision to be made relative to the structure of the game, just as his brother did in the assembly by threatening the unjust taking of a prize by force.

Even though Antilochus ends up with the prize – Menelaus “gives” the mare (back) to Antilochus “though she is mine” –¹⁴³ there is little else that distinguishes the two violations of propriety initiated by the sons of Atreus. Menelaus’ challenge is a reassertion of political power by one who wields it outside of the structure of the games, and, if Nestor’s advice about appropriate tactics is any indication, it is a reassertion of political power to attempt to justify an unjust taking in the same vein as his brother’s initial transgression. Comparing the initial quarrel and the chariot race demonstrates the issues of attention that follow from the structure of games as sites of action, as well as the latent possibilities for transgression inherent in that structure.

X. The Context of the Games: Contested Appropriateness of Disposition

The introduction and resolution of uncertainty, which occur through the obstacles and outcomes prescribed by the structure of the game, are central to what makes games peculiar as sites of human action. These structures permit for distinct forms of conflict through the particular reorientation of attention, but that same reorientation also destabilizes established senses of what the appropriate disposition of attention is in that context. The funeral games continue to demonstrate the insights from the first chapter that the seriousness found in the temporary pursuit of the contrived ends of a game exists simultaneously with a playful awareness of the peculiar context within which that pursuit occurs. The paradoxical position of the intentionality with which one attends to acting in that context underlies the problem of attention found in the embodied experience of the player. The unsettled position of the player amplifies

¹⁴³ *Iliad*, 23.610

how the way that one attends to the activity is contestable in itself; the sense of what is appropriate is not experienced in the same way as it might be on the battlefield, for example, even if both remain contestable. In the funeral games, the action and outcomes of the various events succinctly indicate how this contested sense of appropriateness appears relative to those structures. As such, the games provide the audience with a counterpoint to other sites of action in the poem as to what types of action and attention to action are possible.

Returning to the dispute between Idomeneus and Oilean Ajax, Achilles scolds them for the inappropriate seriousness with which they escalate their disagreement. He cites the looming resolution of the uncertainty about the front-runner as the reason that their argument is unbecoming. The structure of the event suggests to Achilles that the uncertainty ought to be met with a greater measure of playfulness, not the harsh words that they share, and the two heroes soon assent to that claim. In comparison, Nestor also unsuccessfully attempted a similar tempering of disposition in the initial quarrel. Both of these cases demonstrate conflict about the appropriate way of attending to action relative to different structures; Achilles is as convinced of the inappropriateness demonstrated by Idomeneus and Ajax as Nestor was in the initial quarrel. However, ludic attention occupies a strange place amongst the range of possible actions and dispositions available in the context of the games, and remains distinct from that which we find in the rest of the poem. Antilochus and Menelaus raise objections that reveal immense seriousness, while Antilochus treats his defeat in the foot race much more playfully, a playfulness that is buoyed by Oilean Ajax's fall in the cow dung. These heroes still intentionally pursue success in these events, but the structure of the games allows for different expressions of disposition and different grounds for contested dispositions.

Thus, it is particularly noteworthy when Meriones and Agamemnon agree not to compete in the spear-throw at all. Neither the potential competitors nor the audience objects to Achilles' proposal to bypass the goal of out-throwing an opponent in the event and award the prizes without a contest. The intentionality with which the heroes compete before the ludic community is all but abandoned. The dispositions displayed here are vastly different than those demonstrated relative to the chariot race, in which the Achaeans treat the specific awarding of prizes relative to achievement with great seriousness. Postlethwaite further complicates the conclusion of this final event when he notes that "even if Agamemnon's military career in the poem has indeed established him as the best spear-thrower, his acceptance of the prize without competing runs counter to the spirit of friendly competitiveness which pervades the other games."¹⁴⁴ Although the "spirit of friendly competitiveness" probably overstates the point, as noted following the chariot race, it is worth considering how Agamemnon's response might also reflect a sort of seriousness – a willingness to accept a prize without engaging with the uncertainty through which it was meant to be won.¹⁴⁵ Postlethwaite also cites Bassett in identifying the potential playful irony to be found in asserting Agamemnon's surpassing excellence when he misses a spear-throw in Book XI. This concluding event, even as it never actually occurs, emphasizes how peculiar games are as sites of action with regard to intentionality. The difficulty of pinning down how we ought to read these acts that conclude the games serves to emphasize how games evoke an amphibolous quality of disposition, one that is always open to contestation.

¹⁴⁴ Postlethwaite, 99

¹⁴⁵ Postlethwaite further notes how this reflects a return to Achilles' claim in the initial quarrel that Agamemnon is willing to take something without doing the work to earn it.

XI. The Context of the Games: A Sword Sheathed and a Spear Unthrown

In addition to the inscrutability of the ways that characters attend to the final event, there is also the notable silence of Agamemnon as Achilles introduces an issue of distribution. The literature on the *Iliad* that addresses the importance of the games tends to consider them as a convenient setting for reintroducing themes of the work. Postlethwaite's argument about the spear-throw contravenes arguments like that of Dickie, in which the games are seen as a context for Achilles to learn his lesson about his rage.¹⁴⁶ Both accounts treat the games as a return to the initial quarrel, while differing on how we ought to read Achilles' action. Similarly, Hammer focuses on the question of legitimacy that pervades the beginning of the work, which he reads as being resolved at the end of the games. His reading also relies on the idea that the Greeks recognized games as microcosms of the political order. Achilles' assertion of his rule over the games, for there to be resolution of the crisis of authority, must present a coherent alternative to the insufficient claims to authority that form the foundation of the initial quarrel with Agamemnon. At the end of the games, Agamemnon is shown to be ruled by Achilles under this new model with the games as his community.¹⁴⁷ These readings, while helpfully attentive to the thematic importance of the games, ignore how the specific structure of the games enables Agamemnon to respond in the way that he does. When Agamemnon agrees to leave his spear unthrown at the end of the games, it is a function of the context established by the political and ludic community, which is markedly different from the divine intervention required to get Achilles to sheath his sword.

When Achilles initially challenges Agamemnon about returning Chryseis in the assembly, the seriousness of the context overwhelms the argument. People are dying from the plague after

¹⁴⁶ Dickie 1984

¹⁴⁷ Hammer, 142

nine years of war, and Achilles has called for a formal political assembly to discuss the matter. The games occur fewer than three weeks following the initial assembly, and the external situation is not necessarily less pressing – Achilles has returned to battle to avenge Patroclus, and Hector was defeated, but the Achaeans barely survived the intervening period. Beyond the collective concern for their position against the Trojans, each warrior also now must confront the death of a great warrior and more clearly contemplate his own mortality with renewed clarity. Nevertheless, the games present the characters as embodying dispositions that belie that broader context. One could argue that this difference is more of a result of the approach that Achilles takes to governing the contests, but there are too many other indicators that the games are treated differently than the surrounding context for it to simply be that Achilles now exhibits a different form of rule.

Instead, there is a profound sense that this space is intersubjectively maintained as a separate one in which playfulness and seriousness can blend together in ways denied to the warriors by the surrounding context of the war. Achilles himself is one of the clearest indications of this difference, as his calm oversight of the games is bracketed by sleeplessness, weeping, and rage. Immediately after the games, Achilles returns to his lamentations and the desecration of Hector's corpse. The context of the games has a direct impact – to the point of being drastically overstated – on the ways of attending to action that are possible at this moment in the poem, and the structure of the games enable what happens to a degree not fully recognized in other accounts. The ludic attention found through the structure of the activity permits for various unexpected outcomes, alongside a rearticulation of the challenge to Agamemnon's authority from the initial quarrel.

Consistent with Hammer's reading about the crisis of legitimate authority in the poem, there are multiple instances in which the poet shows subversions of established hierarchies that are more readily permitted – which is to say, attended to differently – by the ludic community than they would be in other contexts. Antilochus, Epeius, Meriones, and Achilles all act in variously subversive ways by rising in the games to challenge figures of authority. Their actions do not go unattended, to be sure, but they are treated differently. The closest the audience gets to the pervasive seriousness of the initial quarrel is through Menelaus' frustration at the outcome of the chariot race and the insolence of Antilochus. In that case, the boundary of the supposed magic circle is shown in its full vulnerability, and yet its violation demonstrates the distinction. Conversely, Epeius' role as an outsider who rises to strike Euryalus inverts the infamous striking of Thersites by Odysseus in the assembly in Book II. Insofar as the games present us with a response to the crisis found in the initial quarrel, they do so by virtue of the ludic attention afforded by their structure, and the effects of that attention extend beyond simply demonstrating the problems with Agamemnon's authority. Another way in which the games unsettle the established order is by presenting a context for the appearance of characters that are not afforded the same opportunities in other contexts; again, these are Patroclus' games.

XII. The Context of the Games: A Space of Appearance

The alternative possibilities for attending to conflict and the rearticulation of the initial quarrel are demonstrated effects of the games on the poem; but an overemphasis on that point, like that which appears in the existing literature, tends to eclipse the importance of the other Achaeans who play prominent roles in the games. Meriones, for example, is not merely an afterthought to the chariot race and the spear-throw who gives way to the prominence of the sons of Atreus, but has his own remarkable performance in the archery contest. When we consider

Patroclus as an alternative lens for understanding the funeral games, we acknowledge the ways in which others can appear relative to the activity that is specified by the structure of the games. It is not that these competitors do not appear elsewhere in the poem – as noted at the outset, Patroclus scolds Meriones on the battlefield – but there are different possibilities for their appearance in the games. Epeius self-consciously identifies the peculiarity of his appearance in the games and he does not appear elsewhere in the poem.¹⁴⁸ The possibilities for appearing before the ludic community are an exceptional quality of the games.

As mentioned above, part of Ahrens Dorf's account of virtue in Homer emphasizes the incompatibility of virtue and friendship in the poem, as seen through the friendship of Achilles and Patroclus. His argument highlights the way in which Patroclus is overshadowed by Achilles early in the poem, and only emerges following his encounter with Nestor in Book XI, as the old man ignites Patroclus' desire to display his virtue and win honor before the Achaeans. The virtue of Achilles is so great that his action in both the assembly and the battlefield in the poem eclipses the participation of others – as he devises the necessary course to save the Achaeans from the plague, fights back the Trojan army, and slays Hector – denying the rest of the community a space in which they can show their own virtue.¹⁴⁹ In the games, however, Achilles intentionally abstains from competing, which permits for the games to be a site in which different individuals are able to be seen for their virtues through the different context that the games allow – a context that mirrors the values of the Achaeans, but specifies action in a different way than the assembly or the battlefield. In doing so, the figures of Antilochus, Epeius, and Meriones appear in ways that they would not otherwise; the separation and specification of the game establish a space of appearance.

¹⁴⁸ *Iliad*, 23.669. Epeius is mentioned again by Odysseus in the *Odyssey* as the builder of the Trojan Horse.

¹⁴⁹ Ahrens Dorf, 161

In discussing the legitimacy of Menelaus' complaint, I noted briefly how Antilochus' performance in the chariot race actually differs from the advice of his father Nestor. The discrepancy again becomes important for how the games enable a different type of action. Nestor's advice is that clever navigation of the turn-post will ensure that he cannot be beat on the return stretch.¹⁵⁰ Nestor exaggerates the efficacy of his wisdom, since Eumelus falters on the return stretch; it is Antilochus' own cleverness, insofar as he identifies another place to take advantage in the course through the sinkhole, that wins him second place. In doing so, Antilochus challenges both Menelaus and Nestor – two conventional sources of authority – by virtue of an action that is only available to him in the specified context of the games.

Antilochus must defend the former challenge, as detailed above, in front of the political community, as Menelaus acknowledges the challenge and augments its significance through an appeal made outside of the magic circle; the latter, however, remains unmentioned in the aftermath of the race. Nestor's speech – following Achilles' honorary presentation of the unclaimed fifth place prize, as Eumelus has been given an alternative prize – reinforces the recognition of his traditional excellence in the games. In fact, he claims that the only competition in which he lost at the funeral games for Amarynkeus was the chariot race, when his competitors – the twins of Aktor – also used aggressive racing tactics that Menelaus accuses Antilochus of using.¹⁵¹ Antilochus' tactics, therefore, upset the existing order of the community through the way that his unconventional approach challenges these two conventional loci of power – king and father – and yet we find these challenges to be relatively accepted in the games. Insofar as Menelaus recognizes the seriousness of the games, and associates it with seriousness outside of the games, he responds to Antilochus' challenge. Although the boundary of the magic

¹⁵⁰ *Iliad*, 23.334

¹⁵¹ *Iliad*, 23.637

circle proves to be fragile with respect to king, it appears to have an even greater mediating effect with respect to father, as we find no reproach from Nestor about Antilochus' tactics. The context established by the games provides a site in which challenging the wisdom of one's father appears to bring little consequence, or even notice. As a result, Antilochus appears before the community in a way that would otherwise go unappreciated.

The participation of Epeius in the boxing match is perhaps the clearest indication of the possibilities afforded by games as a site of action. Epeius is a relative outsider compared to the other participants in the games, in part due to his lack of prowess on the battlefield. Epeius acknowledges this himself as a part of his opening taunt: "I claim I am the champion. Is it not enough that I fall short in battle? Since it could not be ever, that a man could be a master in every endeavor."¹⁵² His position as an outsider, and his specialized talent for boxing, is further suggested by his failure in the pig-iron toss and the laughter from the audience that greets his failed attempt, which is the only effort that inspires laughter besides Oilean Ajax's slip in the cow dung in the foot race. Even as the treatment of Epeius isolates him as a competitor, his excellence at boxing is impressive and uncontested. He knocks out Euryalus in one punch such that he needs to be carried off by his companions, just as he claims that he will in his taunt. As illustrated by this event, the specification provided by games serves to isolate an understanding of excellence – by limiting the scope of activity with particular rules and ends – and enables individuals to appear before the community in a way that values and honors that particular form of action.

Both the violence of the boxing – surpassing both the wrestling and spear-fight, which were stopped early – and Epeius self-awareness of his position as an outsider presents the possibility for conflict that surpasses any of the other events. Despite this possibility for

¹⁵² *Iliad*, 23.669

seriousness emerging through the challenge of Epeius rising to fight, the underlying context of the games still allows for Epeius to participate in the games in a way that we do not see elsewhere. The most notable counterpoint to this moment of interruption is the much-discussed objection by Thersites in Book II and his subsequent abuse by Odysseus. It may be a bit on the nose to point out that it is Epeius who does the striking in the context of the games, but the way in which his appearance in the games receives a different reception than Thersites' appearance in the assembly emphasizes another difference in the possibilities opened up by the games. Epeius is certainly not accepted by the community of heroes in the same way as an Odysseus is, and yet his action is still recognized by the ludic community.

The most noteworthy exploration of appearance in the games, however, comes through the character of Meriones. His participation is marginal to the account of the chariot race, so one might overlook his importance to the games, but his appearance in the final events is central to seeing the funeral games as a different site of action. When the drawing of lots determines that Teucer shall shoot first in the archery competition – and he hits the string, letting the bird fly free – there is another clear engagement with uncertainty as it is approached differently through the games. When Meriones follows up this misfortune by taking the bow from Teucer and shooting the bird out of the sky, “the people gazed upon it and wondered.”¹⁵³ The poet uses the same phrase to describe the reaction to Odysseus' clever counter to Telamonian Ajax's attempt to throw him, but, unlike the eventual draw of the wrestling match, Meriones' awe-inspiring act fully satisfies the outcome of the event and wins him first prize.

In doing so, Meriones realizes the possibilities for appearance afforded by the games; the fluidity with which he improvises his action in pursuit of the relatively arbitrary goal set forth by the competition demonstrates the fullness of ludic attention, and he does so in front of a group of

¹⁵³ *Iliad*, 23.881

peers who both recognize the merits of the activity and the exceptional way in which he acts. The confluence of these aspects – the seriousness of the pursuit of the ends of the game, the relative separation with which Meriones can engage the uncertainty of the bird flying away, and the playfulness of his response to the change of circumstances in the game – gives us a model of games that emphasizes the possibilities of dwelling in-between perspectives of seriousness and playfulness. One is left to wonder whether Achilles avoids the final event in order to prevent Meriones from upstaging Agamemnon and further testing the vulnerability of the magic circle, even if excellence in archery does not indicate skill at spear-throwing. Regardless, the effect of concluding without the final event is that Meriones' effort remains as the lasting image of excellence in the funeral games.

XIII. The Funeral without Games

Even so, the moment of Meriones' triumph is fleeting, as the games conclude and Achilles quickly returns to his mourning, to the overwhelming seriousness of the surrounding contexts and their consequences that are reflected by the death of Patroclus. Just as the games demonstrate the possibilities that are facilitated by ludic attention, so, too, do they remind us of their necessarily temporary character and the fragility of their separation. In his brief essay, "The Light That Never Was," Duncan Nelson writes:

*"the games of Patroklos represent an artificial exercise, a controlled experiment, as it were, in which the random and ruthless realities of actual experience are distilled into an idyllic quintessence - an exquisitely balanced formula in which tension and conflict, the necessary elements of glory, may ever live and ever be resolved. The games represent the great 'what might have been,' which, in the very nature of things, could never be."*¹⁵⁴

The games enable this different relationship to "tension and conflict," as Nelson so aptly describes, but their temporality does not mean that the experiences are any less real or meaningful for the participants. While the conflict of the games occurs at some measure of

¹⁵⁴ Duncan Nelson, "The Light That Never Was: Book 23 of the Iliad," *The Classical Journal* 59,6 (1964): 275-276.

separation from the conflict of the assembly and the battlefield, it nevertheless engages the same issues of our political existence, albeit in such a way that allows for the increased prominence of the amphibolous character of attention.

Still, the clear contrast in Achilles' behavior before and after the games emphasizes the way in which the games are truly figured as separate by the poet. Nelson captures a sense in which the games are almost dream-like in their transformative ability relative to the surrounding war, just when the ghost of Patroclus appears before Achilles earlier in Book XXIII. Much of the presentation of the games reflects this sense that they represent "the light that never was" in the pursuit of glory for these heroes. Nevertheless, Patroclus' ghost reminds us that games are not mystically separate sites of action, even if Homer presents their effects as contained. In his final words, Patroclus recounts how he came to live with Achilles: "by reason of a baneful manslaying, on that day when I killed the son of Amphidamas. I was a child only, nor intended it, but was angered over a dice game."¹⁵⁵ Games can provide for intensely affective human experiences, both praiseworthy and detrimental. They are real sites of real action with real effects on their ludic communities; these effects have the potential to linger in the character of political beings, even if Achilles does not retain the drastic transformation he undergoes in the games as he returns to desecrating Hector's body. The return of Hector's corpse instead requires an immensely serious confrontation with uncertainty on the part of Priam, as he sneaks into the Achaean camp to supplicate before Achilles.

Priam's action secures the return of his son's body, and the poem ends with another funeral and the words: "Such was their burial of Hektor, breaker of horses."¹⁵⁶ The description of the burial rites of Patroclus and Hector are quite similar, but the poem ends without games.

¹⁵⁵ *Iliad*, 23.86

¹⁵⁶ *Iliad*, 24.804

There is no Achilles here to hold the people for the *agon* or provide the prizes. What remains will be the death of Achilles and the sack of Troy. The audience is left with a funeral without its games, a reminder of seriousness to come and its consequences. The poet leaves us longing for the possibility of “playing the noblest possible games,” as expressed by the Athenian Stranger in the *Laws*.¹⁵⁷ Thus, the *Iliad* concludes with an awareness of how “a certain seriousness” must always weigh on the actions of men, living lives filled with uncertainty, bound by constraints and obstacles, but unable to attend to their actions with the same playfulness that emerges through the ludic attention to games.¹⁵⁸

XIV. Compelling Action in the *Iliad*

This close reading of the funeral games has the potential to fall into the trap of analyzing a joke only to ruin its humor. Therefore, it is worth reiterating by way of conclusion that the action of the funeral games is compelling – it is compelling to the participants, to the spectators, and to Homer’s audience. The above account of the uncertainty experienced relative to the structure of the games relies on the way in which the poet relates the variety of experiences of uncertainty to drive the action of Book XXIII, and that action is compelling. Idomeneus and Ajax are drawn into the second half of the chariot race, and the assembled Achaeans cry out in response to the intense competition of the spear-fight. There are two different moments in which the Achaeans are said to be in awe, and there are rounds of applause for displays of excellence. Millennia later, a reader of the *Iliad* can identify these same moments of compelling action in the games that we now play, including some of the same contests of physical excellence found in the funeral games. Games like these provide sites of actions that matter to ludic communities. They

¹⁵⁷ *Laws*, 803c

¹⁵⁸ Suits’ *The Grasshopper* is an interesting point of comparison, as the Grasshopper relates a dream it had in which human beings would disappear when the Grasshopper told them that the activity that they took seriously was actually a game that they were giving serious attention. Suits, 10.

are compelling; it is important to continue to reflect on the ways that human beings attend to compelling action, and what the role that attention has in political life.

The *Iliad* presents an account of that compelling action, but it is left to the audience to interpret its implications from the way that the games are presented within the poem; Homer does not editorialize. In the next chapter, Plato also refrains from presenting us with a treatise. However, the characters in the *Laws* more clearly discuss a relationship between games and political order as part of their own type of compelling activity. Three old men from different cities walk together on a religious pilgrimage, using a conversation about constitutions and laws to pass the time as they walk. Through that conversation, I argue that Plato demonstrates an argument about the particularly persuasive implications that follow from how we attend to action, as well as how the ways that we structure our activity affects that attention. Homer teaches us that games are distinct sites of action through which aspects of political life can be approached with a different form of attention; Plato provides a more detailed account of how attention across contexts matters for political beings.

Chapter 3: Attention and Persuasion in Plato's *Laws*

"But since you and this man here were reared in such conventions and habits, I expect it would not be unpleasant for you to pass the present time discussing the political regime and laws, talking and listening as we go on our way."

– The Athenian Stranger, *Laws*¹⁵⁹

I. The Diatribe of the *Laws*

One way to frame a discussion of the *Laws* might be to note that the text begins with the question posed by the Stranger as to whether the laws come from a god (*theos*) or a human being (*anthropos*) and has *theos* as the first word. This opening question establishes one of the significant tensions that hangs over the discussion of laws and political order among three old men on their walk to the cave where Zeus is said to have handed down the Cretan laws to Minos.¹⁶⁰ However, there is another distinct, but unrecognized, way in which Plato frames the dialogue. In the epigraph above, we find the Athenian Stranger's description of the proposed activity for the dialogue, a discussion of the *politeia* and *nomoi* as they walk, which he describes as *diatribe*. Pangle translates *diatribe* as pastime or, specifically here, as a way to "pass the present time." The Greek word *diatribe*, and its verbal form *diatribō*, can simultaneously suggest two different, but conceptually related, senses of attention that are useful for thinking about how the dialogue frames a relationship between attention and persuasion. The combination of *dia-* (indicating motion through) and *tribō* (to rub or wear out) forms a word that

¹⁵⁹ *Laws*, 625a

¹⁶⁰ Pangle, 379.

Seth Benardete, *Plato's 'Laws': The Discovery of Being*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 3.

Leo Strauss, *The Argument and the Action of Plato's Laws*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 2.

suggests either an intense occupation or waste of time, which resonates with the understandings of seriousness and playfulness that form the basis of ludic attention.¹⁶¹ The discussion of the *Laws*, it turns out, is capable of its own amphibolous qualities through its *diatribe* as well.

Understanding how Plato frames the *Laws* through this awareness of the dynamic possibilities of attention, which colors the discussion of questions about regimes and laws, will help to guide an interpretation of Plato's insights into the relationship between attention, persuasion, and structure at various points in the dialogue. This relationship helps to develop a sense of ludic attention as being a particularly persuasive way of attending to action that has implications for political life.

First, a few more thoughts on the significance of the framing of the dialogue as *diatribe* before demonstrating the importance of that opening framework for the insights in the text.

Diatribes, in this context, is not a recognized rhetorical strategy or genre of speech in the way that it might later be,¹⁶² so it is possible instead to focus on how the amphibolous potential found in the use of the term can also be found specifically in the project of the *Laws* as the Stranger presents it.¹⁶³ The goal here is not to associate Plato necessarily with diatribe as a form of inquiry or persuasion (although Euthyphro does use the same term to critique Socrates' activity in the Lyceum as well), but rather to begin an inquiry into the way that the *Laws* portrays a relationship between games, attention, and political life by underlining the attentive possibilities that the reader finds articulated in the dialogue as a whole. Through the ambiguity of the two types of attention that *diatribe* can suggest in Attic Greek, Plato provides another way of

¹⁶¹ "LSJ. The Online Liddell-Scott-Jones Greek-English Lexicon," Thesaurus Linguae Graecae, accessed March 9, 2016, <http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/lsg/#eid=1&context=lsj>.

¹⁶² George L. Kustas "Diatribes in Ancient Rhetorical Theory," *Protocol of the Twenty-second Colloquy of the Center for Hermeneutical Studies in Hellenistic and Modern Culture* (1976). Kustas begins his comments with a quote from Cicero in *De Oratore*: "What is sillier than to talk about talking, since talking in itself is ever a silly business, except when it is indispensable." The quote demonstrates a sense of amphibolous qualities found within the possibilities of *diatribe* from a Roman perspective as well.

¹⁶³ In this chapter, I will tend to use "the Stranger" as shorthand for the character of the Athenian Stranger

articulating the sort of relationship that we find between seriousness and playfulness in ludic attention.

The dominant meaning here, as Pangle's translation indicates, is the more playful one; the three men will pass their time with conversation as a pleasant distraction from the arduous journey. This meaning of *diatribe* emphasizes that the intentionality associated with the discussion of the *politeia* and *nomoi* is merely tangential to the aim of passing the time.¹⁶⁴ However, the contrasting sense of an intense occupation also becomes realized in the action of the dialogue, and is marked by early moments of contentious argument between interlocutors about beliefs and practices. This serious intentionality of discussion emerges even before Kleinias introduces the goal of founding a Cretan colony as an explicit goal of their conversation. In fact, the scholarly reception of the dialogue tends to take for granted the seriousness of the conversation that transpires by considering the *Laws* as something of a practical counterpart to the idealism of the *Republic*.¹⁶⁵ I claim that we gain better purchase on the dialogue as a whole by embracing the coincidence of both possible meanings of *diatribe* as a way of framing the work. The *Laws* is a fundamental text for thinking about the role of attention in political life because of the way that ludic attention is built into the structure of the dialogue – much like what occurs in games themselves – and the amphiboly that follows from that structure is situated relative to major themes of the dialogue in a way that can help illuminate an argument about the persuasive implications of attention.

Even after noting that the dialogue is primed to treat issues of how, and to what, we give our attention, there remains the task of demonstrating how that dramatic context affects how we

¹⁶⁴ This sense recalls Apter's use of the term "paratelic" to describe playfulness in *Reversal Theory*.

¹⁶⁵ In addition to Pangle's interpretive essay, see:

Glenn R. Morrow, *Plato's Cretan City*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960).

R.F. Stalley, *An Introduction to Plato's Laws*. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1983).

read the dialogue and the claims made within it. It is on this point that several of the important themes and claims made by the Athenian Stranger become relevant to how he addresses issues of attention and approaches the problem of persuasion. In considering persuasion, the Stranger does not express an intention to persuade his interlocutors from the outset; he does not begin by saying “let me convince you why the orientation towards war is a flaw in the revered Cretan and Spartan laws and customs,” even if though it appears that he intends to do so. Again, in a manner consistent with a measure of playfulness, his emphasis from the outset is on the pleasure of conversation and the diversion from the effort required for their walk.

Of course, the reader soon becomes aware that the Stranger already has a sense of the answers to the initial questions that he asks, and so it appears that his initial move to ask about common meals, gymnastic training, and weapons might just serve as an introductory gambit in what becomes an attempt to persuade his interlocutors about the problems with the orientation towards war that these practices inculcate in their people.¹⁶⁶ As such, the Stranger does, in fact, adopt an intentionally persuasive position rather quickly, and that orientation continues as they begin to discuss the specifics of the prospective laws for Magnesia.¹⁶⁷ Nevertheless, an underappreciated dramatic element of the *Laws* is the way in which the Stranger gets his interlocutors to adopt a particular disposition towards their conversation, with the effect being that they are more willing to adopt some radical suggestions within the context of this *diatribe* on the way to the Cave of Zeus.

¹⁶⁶ Benardete notes that the Stranger actually allows various aspects of militarization to return as they introduce the laws of Magnesia (Benardete 237), which suggests that the main persuasive goal of the early discussion is to disabuse his interlocutors of the importance of an explicit focus on preparation for war (as opposed to the need to be prepared for the possibility somehow in the regime).

¹⁶⁷ Zuckert 2004 notes the difference between the Athenian Stranger and Socrates with respect to the manner in which they correct or chastise interlocutors about their practices. I am not convinced about the assessment that the Stranger consistently withholds direct challenges to his interlocutors, while Socrates does not, but this reading is consistent with the way I am thinking about the Stranger’s use of attention here.

The coincidence of this ludic attention in a peculiarly persuasive context helps to draw out a central tension between conservation and innovation that pervades the project of the *Laws*. Structure and disposition inform the challenges to conventional order that are expressed through the interrogation of established custom, a recognition of the need for amendment, and the possibility of founding anew, which consistently colors the various claims that the Stranger makes and the ways in which the interlocutors assent or object to them. By recognizing the ways in which this dialogue, written by Plato, and conversation, guided by the character of the Athenian Stranger, establish and work with these tensions, the following account of the *Laws* simultaneously reinvigorates exegetical work on the dialogue while elaborating on our understanding of the different ways that we structure attention.

This chapter takes up the ways in which some of the central thematic elements of the *Laws* make it a valuable resource for this inquiry into games, attention, and political life. A close reading of the interaction between dramatic context and the discourse itself helps to paint a clearer picture of how Plato understands the relationship between attention and persuasion. After laying out these textual insights, the implications of Plato's depiction of that relationship allow for further observations about games and political life by building on the previous chapters. These observations lay the groundwork for the consideration of the persuasive possibilities for attention manifest in the context of contemporary examples in the next chapter. As with the preceding chapter, the bulk of the work here is a close reading of how these concepts appear in the *Laws*, followed by an elaboration on the argument about games, persuasion, and politics using the Platonic insights. I begin by continuing to demonstrate how the dramatic elements of the dialogue serve to buttress the conceptual argument about the persuasiveness of dispositions of attention as they appear at key moments in the dialogue.

II. The Dramatic Context in the Prelude of the *Laws*

The conversation and journey of the *Laws* happens over the course of the longest day of the year and begins at dawn, as indicated by some of the statements in the dialogue.¹⁶⁸ It is around high noon that the Athenian Stranger introduces the idea of using preludes to the laws, drawing upon another dual meaning in Greek of *nomoi* as both “songs” and “laws.”¹⁶⁹ As with songs, the Stranger claims, these *nomoi* ought to be preceded “by preludes – almost like warming-up exercises – which artfully attempt to promote what is to come.”¹⁷⁰ The importance of orienting someone towards something that he or she will need to consider or do is a consistent theme in the dialogue; proper orientation is as important to the conversation of the three old men as it is in the arguments that they make. Furthermore, the Stranger notes that these preludes are “composed with amazing seriousness [θαυμαστῶς ἐσπουδασμένα],”¹⁷¹ emphasizing issues of attention and intentionality through the use of *spoude*. As was the case with Aristotle, the Stranger frequently pairs *spoude* with *paidia*, although he does not do so here, when speaking of attention.

It is at this point that the Stranger claims that their conversation up until that point has been such a prelude – which one can infer was also “composed with amazing seriousness” – for the task of setting forth the laws of their city in speech, Magnesia. The claim about the seriousness of the prelude stands in contrast to the apparent lack of intentionality with which the conversation haphazardly begins. By invoking the seriousness of the prelude, the Stranger (and Plato) refocuses the interlocutors’ (and readers’) attention on the importance of the preceding discussion; Plato invites the reader to reassess the question of attention as it emerges in this

¹⁶⁸ *Laws*, 683c and 722c

¹⁶⁹ Another duality to consider as informing how we read the dialogue can be found in the *xenos* in the name of the Athenian Stranger and the way in which it signifies both “guest-friend” and “stranger.”

¹⁷⁰ *Laws*, 722c-723b

¹⁷¹ *Laws*, 722e

prelude. By attending to the prelude of the dialogue itself as an important part of the *diatribe* of the *Laws* for orienting the interlocutors before they discuss the laws for Magnesia, we get a better sense of how Plato structures this dialogue in order to draw out important themes relative to a sense of disposition.

As noted above, this prelude begins as three older men agree to walk together and keep each other company on the way from Knossos to the Cave of Zeus. Initially, the suggestion comes from the Stranger that they discuss *politeia* and *nomoi*, which he begins by asking a question about the common meals, gymnastic training, and choice of weapons of the Cretans.¹⁷² Much is made in earlier interpretations of the dialogue of the idea that the *Laws* engages in the practical goal of setting forth the constitution as part of the founding of the new Cretan colony of Magnesia, especially relative to the thought experiment that is Kallipolis in the *Republic*.¹⁷³ The aim of founding Magnesia, however, only appears late in this prelude to the discussion of laws; the Stranger wishes that they had a test for the arguments that they have been making in speech, and Kleinias reveals that he is part of a delegation with the task of establishing laws for a Cretan colony. Until this point, their conversation is still ostensibly about the initial goal of “passing the time.” The constitution of Magnesia draws the attention of the men to a particular end that the remaining discourse pursues, often in painstaking detail, but it is important to remember the contrast from the initial attentiveness that this move illustrates.

Immediately following the introduction of Magnesia, the Stranger again addresses the issue of attention by proposing how they ought to discuss laws for this colony – that all of the laws must aim at complete virtue. “For I assert that the only law correctly laid down is this: one

¹⁷² Importantly, these topics are all framed relative to an orientation towards war. Kleinias emphasizes that their customs exist “with a view to war,” which becomes the central point of contention for the beginning of the dialogue: what is the end of political community? Towards what should its structures aim?

¹⁷³ Again, see Pangle, Morrow, Stalley

which, just like an archer, aims each time at what alone is constantly accompanied by something noble, one which leaves all the rest aside.”¹⁷⁴ The Stranger reminds his interlocutors at this point to be on guard with respect to anything that would go against this aim, thereby making this attentiveness to complete virtue into the guiding principle for their activity and providing a discrete goal. It is, of course, dubious as to whether or not this aim actually motivates the interlocutors in any way, but it remains important that the Stranger attempts to frame their discussion in such a way. Through this reflection on the aims for the discussion, the implicit issue of attention becomes an explicit concern in the dialogue.

The cumulative effect of the dramatic framing established by the prelude reinforces the amphiboly found within the identification of the conversation as a *diatribe* and the importance of considering how the interlocutors attend to the journey. The discussion variously occupies positions of intensity and repose, much like the elderly men who both walk in the harsh sun and rest under the shade of cypress trees. The conversation of the *Laws* is not physically leisured in the same way as is suggested by the setting of the *Symposium*, *Phaedrus*, or *Republic*, even as Kleinias, Megillus, and the Stranger proceed with a measure of leisure. Their activity is both intentional in its movement towards the temple at the Cave of Zeus – and, eventually, towards the founding of a city in speech – while also preoccupied with the consideration of the various points of discussion along the way. The conversation that occupies the men is dotted with both clear objectives and tangents. These dramatic elements through which Plato presents the dialogue help to guide how we assess the arguments made within the dialogue and will be useful for drawing some conclusions about how the *Laws* presents an argument about the relationship between attention and persuasion.

¹⁷⁴ *Laws*, 705e-706a

III. Puppets, Playthings, and Uncertainty of Worth

This framework of the *diatribe* interacts with the standard reading of the opening question about the origin of law. The conversation opens with an expression of uncertainty associated with things that are human relative to things that are divine, an uncertainty about the value of things and how we ought to attend to them. This uncertainty hangs over the entire discussion and finds echoes in an uncertainty about how they ought to treat their own words. When Kleinias wonders after the truth of the Stranger's claim about the value of drinking wine, the Stranger responds: "Stranger, to be sure of truth in these matters, when so many disagree, would belong to a god."¹⁷⁵ The Stranger juxtaposes his human understanding with that of the divine relative to a capacity for certainty before continuing to give an account of how things appear to him and his limited understanding. His approach suggests the need for a critical engagement with his claims, one that, as is common to Platonic dialogues, his interlocutors often fail to achieve. This early expression of humility on the part of the Stranger demonstrates an underlying argument about appropriate attention that is made more explicitly in other parts of the dialogue. I will treat some of these explicit claims as a way of exploring the dialogue's presentation of the relationship between persuasion and attention beginning with the metaphor of the soul at the end of Book I; the Stranger relates questions of uncertainty, pleasure, and attention through the image of the divine puppet.

Unlike the tripartite soul of the *Republic*, which privileges *nous* over *thumos* and *epithumia*, the Stranger describes the divine puppet as having a thin golden cord of *logismos* and thick iron cords of passions that guide the puppet. In this way, the puppet metaphor is closer to the chariot metaphor of the *Phaedrus* in which *logos* attempts to drive *eros* and *thumos*, although

¹⁷⁵ *Laws*, 641d. Here the Athenian Stranger refers to Kleinias as "*O Xene*." I tend to refer to the Athenian Stranger as simply "the Stranger" for shorthand, but do not want to introduce confusion here.

the divine puppet more explicitly suggests a lack of control on the part of *logismos*, as the thin golden cord is described as being too weak to influence the thick iron cords of passions. Instead, the Stranger argues that these passions need to be brought to follow the golden cord on their own terms; education in virtue must be concerned with a type of persuasion that affects the iron cords. As such, the image of the divine puppet serves a distinctly different purpose from other Platonic metaphors for the soul. The golden cord is figured as *logismos* here, which Pangle translates as “calculation,” and it reflects the preceding conversation about the relationship between the passions, pleasure/pain, and uncertainty as a sort of calculation made through expectations about the future. It will be helpful for linking these concepts to spell out how the Stranger builds this argument, which emerges out of the goal of understanding the importance of education, before elaborating on how this account of the soul bears on the subsequent arguments about persuasion and attention throughout the remainder of the dialogue.

There are four steps to the argument that the Stranger uses the puppet metaphor to clarify, building on the desire to define education for their discussion: 1) People tend to become good from correct education; 2) Those who become good are capable of ruling themselves, those who are bad cannot; 3) Although each individual is only one person, each person has two opposed internal counselors of pleasure and pain; 4) Each counselor finds expression through opinions about the future – fear, or expectation of pain, and boldness, or expectation of pleasure. It is with respect to this last point about competing expectations that the Stranger says: “Over all of these there is calculation (*logismos*) as to which of them is better and which worse – and when this calculation becomes the common opinion of the city, it is called law.”¹⁷⁶ In doing so, the Stranger fundamentally links education, law, and political order to a calculation that occurs relative to the experience of uncertainty. Both Kleinias and Megillus express difficulty with

¹⁷⁶ *Laws*, 644d

following the Stranger's argument, and so the Stranger presents the metaphor of the divine puppet and its cords as an aid.

The Stranger intends for the divine puppet to help demonstrate how education aims at helping people become good, which requires a particular orientation towards pleasure and pain through boldness and fear. That particular orientation, the Stranger implies, can be articulated as law once it is held in common. Law, on this account, is a common sense of the proper orientation towards an expectation of future pleasure and pain. The Stranger grounds this early account of the role of the *nomoi* – in this dialogue of the same name – in the promotion of an appropriate response to uncertainty relative to the future, and so bases his understanding of education and virtue on achieving such an orientation. It is on this fundamental commitment that the *Laws* provides such an important treatment of the role of disposition for political life, and one that accounts for the role of pleasure in doing so. Pleasure (*hedone*) is not identical to being compelling, but Plato's framework can help to think in those terms. The importance of this passage only increases because the choice of image, and the Stranger's description of it, emphasizes the centrality of the problem of attention that such an argument represents.

In the drama of the dialogue, the Stranger uses the divine puppet in order to help clarify the difficulties that his interlocutors are having with following the argument, but the specific metaphor reinforces the recurring theme of the underlying uncertainty about the worth attributed to different types of human activity. The puppet (*thauma*) is figured as a plaything (*paignon*) of the gods, and the Stranger emphasizes that we cannot know whether that plaything and its actions ought to be taken seriously: "let's consider each of us living beings to be a divine puppet, put together either for their play or for some serious purpose – which, we don't know."¹⁷⁷ This claim about the uncertainty of purpose is similar to the later one about dancing, singing, and

¹⁷⁷ *Laws*, 644d

playing games in Book VII that incites such an impassioned response from Megillus.¹⁷⁸ In both cases, the Stranger introduces uncertainty into the assessment of the value of human action by adopting the perspective of the divine (although the case in Book VII more directly denigrates activities that Megillus considers worthy of seriousness, which might account for the difference in response). Each of these moments, which unsettle the established value of conventional forms of attending to action, provides for a renewed challenge along the lines of the Stranger's initial observation that the laws of the Cretans and Spartans ought not to be revered for their orientation towards excellence in war.

The divine puppet serves as a potent means for the Stranger to reintroduce that challenge within an argument about education, and the image seems to capture the attention of his interlocutors to some degree, which gives it persuasive force. However, an even more effective link between pleasure, attention, and persuasion follows immediately from the image of the puppet, when the Stranger asks "if we introduce drunkenness into this puppet what effect shall we produce?"¹⁷⁹ In doing so, the Stranger returns the discussion to an argument about the role of *symposia*, drinking parties, as unconventional sites that matter for the way that we think about the development of political beings, development that occurs in relation to the experience of those twin counselors of pleasure and pain. In the discussion of symposia, the Stranger simultaneously makes an argument about how structures help to develop a capacity for particular types of attention while also demonstrating the persuasive power of compelling activity, as his interlocutors are engrossed by the idea of justifying the drinking of wine.

¹⁷⁸ *Laws*, 803d

¹⁷⁹ *Laws*, 645d

IV. Pleasure, Persuasion, and Symposia

The discussion of symposia maintains a measure of conversational consistency with the opening discussion of customary practices, like common meals for the Spartans and Cretans, but it also helps to orient the interlocutors to a disposition for engaging with an assessment of foreign practices in dialogue. There are similarities between the Stranger's contention that well-ordered symposia have a proper place in political community and later claims about the importance of attending to the games that citizens play, and there are plenty of other foreign practices that the men will consider for Magnesia. Symposia provide a topic that the Cretan and Spartan seem to find particularly compelling, which predisposes them to lending it their engaged attention.

At its core, the Stranger's argument hinges on the ability to test one's character through a heightened experience of pleasure through wine, but he also addresses the additional benefit that wine can encourage old men, who tend to become obstinate with age (perhaps like those present in the discussion), to be forthcoming with making and accepting critiques to established beliefs and practices. As such, the argument is about developing a capacity for both proper endurance of pleasurable experiences and willingness to depart from established patterns of action. The structure of the symposia is important for both of these capacities. This argument is consistent with the understanding of ludic attention that enables particular types of action in the context of the funeral games in the *Iliad*; wine facilitates a willingness to deviate from settled practices and aims by inducing a sort of playfulness and altered relationship to intentionality through structure. As Pangle notes, Kleinias and Megillus are drawn in by this foreign argument, tantalized and emboldened (as if ever-so-slightly drunk themselves) by the pleasure associated with the possibility that there could be a justification for such a practice.¹⁸⁰ Building on the image of the divine puppet, the focus here is on considering the role of pleasure in the ordering of the soul –

¹⁸⁰ Pangle, 404

how to instigate good practices by working with one of the iron puppet cords. Pleasure becomes an essential part of the persuasive goals of education towards virtue.

Towards the end of Book I, the Stranger refers to the value of “the test and play associated with wine [ἐν οἴνῳ βασάνου καὶ παιδιᾶς].”¹⁸¹ The idea that symposia provide a structured context within which one experiences and confronts heightened pleasure is central to what makes them a beneficial test for the Stranger. This claim harkens back to the first mention of games in the dialogue (as *gymnopaedia*) in Megillus’ account of the Spartan practices that promote courage in their people.¹⁸² Megillus’ examples all gesture at the endurance of pain as central to courage, but the Stranger once again inverts the conventional understanding of what we need to attend to with respect to endurance when he suggests that they also consider the endurance of pleasure. This exchange presages the pairing of the iron puppet strings of fear (pain) and boldness (pleasure). The Stranger goes on to conclude that “about human beings who inquire into laws almost their entire inquiry concerns pleasures and pains, in cities and private dispositions. These two springs flow forth by nature, and he who draws from the right one, at the right time, and in the right amount, is happy.”¹⁸³ Even before the introduction of the divine puppet, pleasure and pain are the relevant guides, and thus they need to be the focus of a discussion on the role of law.

Alongside this dominant thread about pleasure and pain in the first book is the way in which human beings become oriented through repeated practices, and that is the other advantage

¹⁸¹ *Laws*, 649d

¹⁸² *Laws*, 633a-d

¹⁸³ *Laws*, 636d. This conclusion follows the Stranger’s reference to sexual pleasure and the myth of Ganymede, which includes the first pairing in the dialogue of *spoude* and *paidia* with respect to how we ought to approach the claim that zealous pursuit of gymnastic training leads to pederasty: “καὶ εἴτε παίζοντα εἴτε σπουδάζοντα ἐννοεῖν δεῖ τὰ τοιαῦτα.” The passage can be read as a problematic condemnation on the part of the Stranger, although this invocation of the possibility that the claim might be made playfully calls for us to consider alternatives. For example, the Stranger seems intent on disabusing Megillus of his estimation of the unassailability of the Spartan orientation towards war in its practices. Unpacking this particular passage, however, remains tangential to the current argument.

to “the test and play associated with wine.” Symposia are regular, structured contexts for a particular type of experience that the Stranger finds educative. The opening question that the Stranger poses is about the establishment of common meals, gymnastic training, and weapons as practices that focus on success in battle. That question heralds a concern with the persuasive effect of these regular practices and the dispositions they inspire, a concern that the Stranger maintains throughout the dialogue, both before and after the introduction of the laws for the new colony of Magnesia as an end for their discussion.

As part of a regular practice that is relevant to the education of political beings, the Stranger argues that wine enflames the experience of pleasure, and that the (well-regulated) experience of that pleasure in the context of (properly ordered) symposia develops a capacity for approaching that pleasure more moderately. The emphasis on structure highlights the particular tension between order and disorder suggested by symposia as sites of action, a tension that mirrors the pairing of seriousness and playfulness in ludic attention. The experience of drunkenness is associated with a return to childhood and lack of self-mastery, which was the opposite of the goal of education, but the Stranger likens it to a medicine that leaves one debilitated in the short-term while ultimately improving the condition of the person who uses it. The resonances between childhood and playfulness emphasize them both as important, if misunderstood, elements of education and the development of political beings. Drunkenness, children, and playfulness introduce disorder, and yet the Stranger argues in favor of a place for these parts of our lives as political beings in terms of developing a capacity for acting virtuously.

As noted above, later in the dialogue wine is prescribed relative to age in order to encourage the singing in choruses – encouraging drinking as a cure for the “austerity of old age,”

while forbidding it to youths.¹⁸⁴ These two persuasive effects of wine in the Stranger's account – developing a capacity for moderate experience of pleasure and enabling otherwise ossified characters to act differently in certain contexts – lay the groundwork for an engagement with the way in which practices that facilitate ludic attention as a part of common human experience can be integral to the cultivation of virtue. Symposia and games are both sites that frame the possibility of such experiences, and the Stranger builds an argument that ties these sites to the education of citizens towards the virtues of citizenship.

It is further on in the discussion of education that pleasure becomes explicitly tied to both games and persuasion in the activities of human beings: “Whatever a man intends to become good at, this he must practice from childhood; whether he's playing or being serious, he should spend his time with each of the things that pertain to the activity... The attempt should be made to use the games to direct the pleasure and desires of children toward those activities in which they must become perfect.”¹⁸⁵ In this passage, we get one of the clearest coincidences of games, attention, pleasure, and persuasion. Games are structures that can be used to direct attention through pleasure towards particular types of activity and ways of acting so that one finds the activity compelling. The initial examples of activities provided are crafts and professions – builder, farmer, carpenter, soldier – but the Stranger quickly reminds his interlocutors that their discussion of education is not concerned with the acquisition of these skills, but with virtue: “We mean rather the education from childhood in virtue, that makes one desire and love to become a

¹⁸⁴ *Laws*, 666a-c. There is a connection between what the Stranger says about the role of wine here and the divine puppet metaphor when he asserts: “Its effect is that we are rejuvenated, and the soul, by forgetting its despondency of spirit, has its disposition turned from harder to softer, so that it becomes more malleable, like iron (σίδηρος) when it is plunged into fire.” The reference to iron recalls the puppet strings and suggests that human beings have ways of manipulating those strings despite their intransigence, as with the use of wine here.

¹⁸⁵ *Laws*, 643b-c

perfect citizen who knows how to rule and be ruled with justice.”¹⁸⁶ The claim is that education for citizenship involves engaging in activities that, whether playfully or seriously, direct our pleasure towards both ruling and being ruled. The Stranger ascribes importance to the repetition of particular types of activity while remaining agnostic on how one attends to doing that activity, as long as that attention is pleasurable and, thus, persuasive with respect to engaging in a particular type of activity that leads to virtue. It is in this formulation that attention is most closely associated with a sense of compellingness; it does not matter whether one is “playing or being serious,” but rather that one finds the activity compelling. Ludic attention takes the indeterminacy of appropriate attention for educating citizens and provides a way of attending to action that simultaneously inhabits a position of both seriousness and playfulness.

V. ‘Whether He’s Playing or Being Serious’

The *Laws* rearticulates the argument about attention that is latent in Aristotle’s *Ethics*: it is an error to equate particular activities with a predetermined sense of a necessary or appropriate disposition. The way in which we attend to any activity arises out of the combination of individual, social, and structural factors that form the context of that particular activity. The example of the political importance of symposia, as an attempt by the Stranger to initiate a transition away from the interlocutors’ focus on practices that are oriented towards success in war, is one instance of how the *Laws* treats this problem. The Stranger’s account of symposia provides an alternative that his interlocutors appear interested in from the start, one that ushers in a different set of practices and goals for the development of citizens. The persuasive effects of these differences in context continue to be a refrain that goes alongside a disposition of attention in the dialogue, as when the Stranger makes his claim about the seriousness of games and education. In the Stranger’s accounts of both symposia and games, there is nothing essential

¹⁸⁶*Laws*, 643e

about the disposition that we bring to any particular activity. Furthermore, we would do well to look beyond those contexts that we currently treat as serious if we want to understand the interaction between human beings and the way that we structure our lives in common.

The Stranger's frequent admonitions of Megillus, which challenge his adherence to the conventional opinion that a view to war between cities is the standard by which practices ought to be considered serious, prime the reader to acknowledge the importance of the fluidity of the possibilities of what is worthy of seriousness. The Stranger eventually is more explicit about this message: "I assert that what is serious should be treated seriously, and what is not serious should not, and that by nature god is worthy of a complete, blessed seriousness, but that what is human, as we said earlier, has been devised as a certain plaything of a god, and that this is really the best thing about it."¹⁸⁷ It is this line of thought that leads to the agitation of Megillus and his contention that the Stranger is belittling the human race, which is how I introduced this project. The explicit attempt by the Stranger to emphasize and use the indeterminacy of appropriate attention at this moment reminds the reader of the contested character of attention that is at stake within the context of a plural understanding of appropriate dispositions.

The agitation experienced by Megillus at the Stranger's claim is instructive; people do not like to be challenged with respect to the worth of those things that they take seriously. This reaction is an amplified version of the challenge made by Achilles about the dispositions of Idomeneus and Ajax in the *Iliad*. Megillus perhaps demonstrates this point more vehemently than Kleinias, but both men provide the reader a view of the difficulty and risk undertaken in challenging the accepted sense of what ought to matter and, therefore, what is worthy of particular types of attention. The drama of the discourse bears out the way in which the intentionality and investment, which are cultivated by those very practices that became the topic

¹⁸⁷ Laws, 803c

of conversation at the outset (and the multitude of similarly-minded practices that are discussed), have profound effects on the Spartan's and Cretan's senses of what is worthy of seriousness. In showing us that sense of importance, and the tension caused by challenges to that sense, Plato acknowledges precisely how powerful and meaningful the attention elicited by these practices are for the political lives of citizens, and why attention becomes a central part of education. Megillus and Kleinias take for granted that certain things are unassailably worthy of particular attention. Through the reactions by the old men to these types of challenges made by the Stranger, the reader observes how the contours of the impacts formed by repeated practices can harden and become part of the iron cords that guide the divine puppet.

Even so, the dialogue also demonstrates the considerable malleability that can be evoked relative to different structures, like this “moderate old man’s game concerning laws,” as the Stranger refers to their conversation.¹⁸⁸ With respect to symposia, the Stranger declares that wine has the effect on the soul that, by “forgetting its despondency of spirit, has its disposition turned from harder to softer, so that it becomes more malleable, like iron when it is plunged into fire.”¹⁸⁹ This malleability of disposition continues to have its own sort of attention, and that is characteristic of the experience of ludic attention. The complexity inherent in attention and its persuasive effects become particularly pronounced in one of the most commonly identified features of the *Laws*: the introduction of the colony of Magnesia as a practical test for the ideas that they have been developing in their conversation. The articulation of the regime and laws of a city in speech for a potential colony certainly qualifies as an end for their activity, but, in light of the dramatic and thematic commitments of the dialogue, there is a consistent amphibolous quality to the pursuit of that end that marks the ludic attention of the *diatribe*.

¹⁸⁸ *Laws*, 685a

¹⁸⁹ *Laws*, 666b-c. The reference to the malleability of iron recalls the iron cords of the divine puppet.

VI. Magnesia as an End for a Moderate Old Man's Game

At the risk of overemphasis, I reiterate that the *Laws* is often understood as the practical counterpart to the philosophical project of the *Republic*. Pangle, for example, introduces his interpretive essay with the claim that “in the *Laws* we learn what Socrates *would* have said and done if his quest for self-knowledge, and his friendships, had ever allowed him the leisure to engage in giving advice to political reformers – and if he had ever found himself in appropriate circumstances.”¹⁹⁰ On this type of reading, the practical goal of founding Magnesia grounds the discussion in the *Laws* in a way that Kallipolis does not because of Kleinias' task. The implications of the introduction of that task are immediately felt in the text, as the discussion quickly turns to the implications of the particular geography of the site for the new colony. Even as the colony becomes the focal point for discussion, however, the conversation remains the discussion of three old men walking to the Cave of Zeus. Magnesia becomes a focal point that orients the discussion, and it enables possibilities for their activity that might not have otherwise been accessible in the same way that the funeral games for Patroclus achieve separation through the specification of their structure. Nevertheless, this particular dialogue remains a *diatribe* in which the activity has a new focal point for orienting the attention of its participants. A discussion of the role of Magnesia in the conversation must keep this in mind.

The importance of this sort of focal point for the attention to the activity of the interlocutors is accentuated by its proximity to the account of Megillus' inability to provide a direct answer as to why they are discussing the particular topic of free and despotic regimes at the end of Book III. The Stranger says, “In my view, at least, it's clearly necessary to pull up the argument like a horse, every now and then, and not allow oneself to be carried along by force as if the argument had no bridle in its mouth. To avoid the proverbial fall from the ass, one needs to

¹⁹⁰ Pangle, 379.

insist on the question just asked – for the sake of what have these things been said?’’¹⁹¹ Megillus is unable to provide a response of his own, but rather hesitates before following and assenting to the Stranger’s rationale.¹⁹² Magnesia, on the other hand, provides an end that Megillus can grasp; it bridles the horse of the argument, for the time being. This is not to say that the discussion becomes perfectly directed, but there is a different intentionality than we find in the discussion of Cretan and Spartan practices, symposia, and the origins of political regimes in the first three books. It is also important that this does not indicate that the discussion now becomes unequivocally serious. This distinction is the primary departure from the implications of the notion that the *Laws* provides us with an account of what Socrates would have said under the right circumstances. The effect of introducing Magnesia as an end is similar to the type of effect produced by games – it provides structure within which the interlocutors can act, parameters of intelligibility that help enable an assessment of the value of actions in that context, and the ludic attention that renders that action compelling. The interlocutors now act, and can be judged, relative to the intention of testing their arguments with a city in speech.

As such, the indeterminacy of appropriate disposition remains. It is clear in the text that the Stranger understands the discussion of Magnesia to be a test in speech of their conversation, which is a markedly different goal than the actual founding of the city; the latter is what Megillus and Kleinias express as their intention at the end of the dialogue, as they look to compel the Stranger to help them see it done in a manner reminiscent of the threat made to Socrates at the beginning of the *Republic*. The intentionality of the dialogue following the introduction of Magnesia as an end is pronounced, but it nevertheless remains ambiguously worthy of serious

¹⁹¹ *Laws*, 701c-d

¹⁹² The discussion in Book III of two extremes of regime – monarchy and democracy – and the related extremes of slavery and freedom also mirrors the discussion of polar dispositions in interesting ways that are beyond the scope of the current argument. However, it is worth noting that this thematic overlap happens alongside the focusing of attention on the Cretan colony.

attention, at least from the perspective of the Stranger. It is worth noting explicitly here that one need not treat the dialogue as a game in order to identify the conceptual affinities with the structures for these activities, even though the Stranger does make use of that language: “But this is what we must now investigate and inquire into, playing at this moderate old man’s game concerning laws [περὶ νόμων παίζοντας παιδιὰν πρεσβυτικὴν σόφρονα], and proceeding on our way without discomfort, as we asserted we would do when we began our walk.”¹⁹³ Instead of insisting on the loaded language of a game here, I emphasize the particular relationship between structure and attention established within the dialogue and the varied dispositions that the interlocutors bring to that activity.

The introduction of Magnesia may raise a particular expectation of seriousness of attention on the part of the interlocutors that does not necessarily come to fruition in the context of how these three elderly men pass their time on their way to the Cave of Zeus. The Stranger continues to reinforce issues of attention throughout the discussion, and the framing of the first three books – the prelude – that leads up to Kleinias’ disclosure of his task demonstrate to the readers that we ought to notice these issues of attention as they emerge, even if the interlocutors do so unreliably. Magnesia is one of several ways that attention gets invoked in the dialogue. Recall the way in which the conversation begins as a distraction from the difficulty of the walk, or the reminder that they ought to discuss the laws with an eye to only complete virtue; the dialogue operates through layers of ways in which one might attend to any particular activity. The different claims to attention used by the dialogue help to emphasize the varied and contested character of attention.

In a curious moment immediately following the introduction of Magnesia and the basic details about the site of the colony, the Stranger shares with his interlocutors that he almost

¹⁹³ *Laws*, 685a

asserted that there is no room for human action in lawgiving, but rather that all legislation is the consequence of chances (*tyche*) and accidents (*symphora*).¹⁹⁴ He expresses concern that he does not wish to belittle lawgivers with this notion, and he also goes on to qualify that there is also room for another “gentler” thing that matters alongside god, chance, and opportunity (*kairos*): *techne*. The appeal to an art or skill of legislation in this context opens up a place for human action. *Techne* provides a bastion for seriousness and intentionality against the unpredictability of circumstance and fortune, but, as with the image of the divine puppet, it articulates a strong caution against taking their activity too seriously. The Stranger reintroduces the conditions for serious attention even as he continues to emphasize the relative playfulness of their activity of founding a city in speech; it is a “moderate old man’s game” to him. The attention that comes through the specification of ends can be both serious and playful, as exemplified by this moment in the *Laws*. Throughout the dialogue, the Stranger demonstrates a keen awareness of the persuasive possibilities for types of attention.

VII. The Stranger’s Use of Attention

The juxtaposition of serious and playful attention, as already suggested, is made frequently by the Stranger in the dialogue. He often uses the two concepts to suggest an indeterminacy of appropriateness or to directly advocate for an inversion of expectations, often appearing as an attempt to challenge his interlocutors. The Stranger also explicitly suggests the appropriate attention for particular moments in their own discussion, beseeching Kleinias and Megillus to pay particular attention to a line of thought. Plato demonstrates the various possibilities, successes, and failures of that attempt in this dialogue; these features are common to Platonic dialogues in general. More often than not, there is little in their responses to suggest that Kleinias and Megillus attend to things when asked to do so. They exhibit the relatively

¹⁹⁴ *Laws*, 708d-709c

passive acceptance of the Stranger's claims that is characteristic of Platonic dialogues, except for in a few distinct moments, as identified with the agitation of Megillus and his objection to the Stranger's claim that "one should live out one's days playing at certain games."¹⁹⁵ However, as noted with respect to the discussion of symposia, these characters are drawn into the early discussion by the pleasure it elicits in the interlocutors. As Pangle puts it in his interpretive essay, the allure of the topic of discussion produces something like the effect of the wine at the symposia that are being advocated, rendering the interlocutors more willing to engage.¹⁹⁶

A similar moment occurs during the introduction of preludes as part of a "double method of lawgiving."¹⁹⁷ Megillus demonstrates an uncommon desire to support a deviation from his experience of conventional practices when he directly pushes for them to continue to discuss this new method of expressing laws: "The Laconic way, stranger, is to give more honor always to the short. Yet if someone were to ask me to be the judge who decides which of these writings I would want used in the written statutes of my city, I would choose the lengthier."¹⁹⁸ Kleinias agrees and then also demonstrates his enthusiasm for the idea that their conversation has been its own sort of prelude.¹⁹⁹ Attention and pleasure combine to produce a persuasive effect in the old men, as they come to enjoy the discussion of new possibilities for political communities. Plato presents the reader with a sort of playground for observations about the varied expressions of the links between attention and persuasion, just as the interlocutors experience their own context for exploring new ideas and practices.

¹⁹⁵ *Laws*, 803d

¹⁹⁶ Pangle, 403. Earlier in his essay (385), Pangle notes another dramatic element with respect to how the Stranger reframes the distinction between Athenian and Dorian lawgivers by putting an argument about Dorian law in the mouth of an Athenian-born poet. The claim is that this move on the part of the Stranger seeks to keep Kleinias engaged in the argument by not forcing him to adopt arguments that are critical of Dorian law.

¹⁹⁷ *Laws*, 720e-722a

¹⁹⁸ *Laws*, 721e

¹⁹⁹ *Laws*, 723d-e

On the other hand, there are also examples of the failures of attention, such as when they begin their discussion of the conditions of Magnesia when the Stranger says things like “Be on your guard with me, you demonic man! Keep in view what was said back at the beginning” and “Now you two in your turn, as you follow the present legislation, must guard against my legislating something that doesn’t aim at virtue, or that aims at a part of virtue.”²⁰⁰ In doing so, the Stranger recalls the beginning of the dialogue – his admonition of laws that only look towards war – in this new beginning of the dialogue with the introduction of Magnesia, beseeching Kleinias and Megillus to attend to that beginning as they move forward. It would be quite the undertaking to hold the interlocutors accountable for such attentiveness for the rest of the dialogue, but, for better or worse, the interlocutors make it easier by failing in the immediate context. The Stranger’s call to attention is made in the context of an argument about the potential wickedness inspired by the focus on naval power, to which Kleinias’ response is that “we Cretans at least assert that it was the naval battle of the Greeks against the barbarians at Salamis that saved Greece.”²⁰¹ In saying this, Kleinias demonstrates that his attention remains firmly on the aim of succeeding in battle as virtuous; he praises precisely the type of partial virtue discouraged at the outset of the dialogue, and that which he had just been cautioned to guard against by the Stranger. This example is not Kleinias approaching the Stranger’s reminder playfully, but rather illustrative of inattention, which renders the Stranger’s attempt at persuasion ineffective. These issues of attention in the dialogue persist up until the point at which Megillus’ challenge to the Stranger in Book VII. Plato, through the words of the Stranger, calls upon the reader to pay particular attention to this moment in the dialogue.

²⁰⁰ *Laws*, 705d-e

²⁰¹ *Laws*, 707b

VIII. Something Strange and Utterly Unaccustomed

These overlapping considerations of attention and persuasion come to a head in the Stranger's bold claim about the role of games in the political community: "everyone is unaware that the character of the games played is decisive for the establishment of the laws."²⁰² He claims that there is a connection between the stability of games and the stability of the *politeia*; the contention is that in political communities where "the same persons always play at the same things, with the same things, and in the same way, and have their spirits gladdened by the same toys, there the serious customs are also allowed to remain undisturbed."²⁰³ As he has done before, the Stranger appeals to notions of seriousness and playfulness before claiming that they both constitute a relationship to order that is consequential. He continues with a critique of innovation and new forms, marking the person who would introduce such changes as someone who would corrupt the youth and stating that there would be "no greater punishment for all cities."²⁰⁴ Pangle notes the way in which the Stranger's language here mirrors the charges against Socrates by the Athenians.²⁰⁵ In this claim, the Stranger poses the problem between conservation/stability and innovation/change through an appeal to games as significant sites of political life, but does so in a way that ought to give the reader pause about the conclusions.

The Stranger heralds his claim, as he has before, with an explicit assertion of the need to lend particular attention to this argument. His argument is bracketed by the following statements: "Listen to me, then; even though you've listened before, still, care must be taken now too, as something very strange and uncustomary is spoken and heard," and "presumably every young man, not to speak of an elderly man, when he sees or hears something strange and utterly

²⁰² *Laws*, 797a

²⁰³ *Laws*, 797b

²⁰⁴ *Laws*, 797b-c

²⁰⁵ Pangle, 530

unaccustomed, would never, I suppose, rush to agree right away with whatever is puzzling in such things.”²⁰⁶ Despite doubly marking this claim about games as unusual and deserving of attention, the argument is not readily engaged by either interlocutor.²⁰⁷ This part of the conversation resembles the attention that the interlocutors give to the issue of martial virtue as incomplete virtue, rather than the ludic attention that they give to symposia and the introduction of preludes. Kleinias and Megillus are perfectly willing to accept that the games of the city need to be prescribed.

It is only when the Stranger more explicitly articulates the consequences that follow from ascribing this importance to games in this strange and unaccustomed claim – i.e., that they become more worthy of seriousness than other activities, such as the attention to war – that Megillus becomes offended. The failure of this moment is two-fold; Megillus can now only concern himself with the affront to his established beliefs about value, and, as a result, the tension between stability and change articulated relative to games and political order goes unexplored in the conversation.

The Stranger articulates a full inversion of appropriate attention relative to human activity in this argument, saying: “Nowadays, presumably, they suppose the serious things are for the sake of the playful things: for it is held that the affairs pertaining to war, being serious matters, should be run well for the sake of peace. But the fact is that in war there is not and will not be by nature either play or, again, an education that is at any time worthy of our discussion; yet this is

²⁰⁶ *Laws*, 797a and 799c

²⁰⁷ It is worth noting, without drawing any specific conclusions, that there is a curious difference between the willingness that Kleinias and Megillus demonstrate with respect to this discussion of the importance of games in comparison to the discussion of symposia and wine. There is something in their characters that is more drawn to that particular form of leisure and eager for justification. Compare the response at 642a to the prospect of a long-winded speech about wine to the minimal responsiveness here.

what we assert is for us, at least, the most serious thing.”²⁰⁸ Megillus’ response denies the chance for genuine engagement with this claim in the text, as the Stranger backs away from this inversion and allows that we can be worthy of a certain seriousness, if that is what Megillus wishes. As a result, the claim is left for the consideration of the reader, to reverberate with the tensions established in the prelude to the discussion of the laws.

The conclusion should not be that the Stranger discards the argument. Instead, it is a provocation to do better than Megillus at inquiring as to what the relationship between games and the *politeia* might be. As I have argued, the dialogue provides several indications that the relationship is one of attention. For all that the Stranger’s use of attention achieves in softening the hardened iron cords of these old men, Plato reminds the reader that the experience is partial. The tension established by the age of the interlocutors appears throughout the dialogue as a barrier to ludic attention, but it also serves as an apt point of comparison for the argument about games and stability. As in the discussion of symposia, there is a relationship between change and stability that informs the way that the Stranger discusses youth and old age. The lens of age helps to clarify the unspoken implications of the Stranger’s claim as part of the trajectory of the dramatic activity of the dialogue, the “moderate old man’s game concerning laws.”²⁰⁹

IX. High Noon and the Characters of Young and Old

In the details of the “strange and unaccustomed claim,” the Stranger asserts the need to officially establish forms of play – i.e., limit the possibility for change – through religious dance and song. He also proposes to indict on charges of impiety the person who would bring in new forms of games, echoing the charges brought against Socrates. Kleinias gives the simple response of “*orthos*” – translated by Pangle as “correctly spoken” – to agree with this assertion,

²⁰⁸ *Laws*, 803d

²⁰⁹ *Laws*, 685a

which provokes the Stranger's response that it is not fitting of men of their age to leave such a strange and unaccustomed claim without attending to that which is puzzling about it further.²¹⁰

The recognition of the age of the interlocutors is a frequent occurrence in the dialogue – starting from the very outset and the need to stop frequently to rest in the shade as they walk – and is figured variously as an asset (by virtue age), an aspiration (as is fitting for a certain age), or an obstacle (on account of age).

Age is invoked, for instance, when the Stranger sets some initial guidelines for how they should attend to their conversation once they begin to discuss particulars of their own laws: “If one of us should blame some feature in the laws belonging to each of the others, being led to this out of a wish to see what is true and, at the same time, what is best, let's accept such behavior from one another not in a harsh way, but gently... For of course, Kleinias, that kind of thing wouldn't be fitting for men of our age.”²¹¹ Although the suggestion here is not specifically framed in terms of seriousness or playfulness, the Stranger associates their common age with a capacity for understanding that we might associate with a measure of playfulness – a recognition of a certain relationship to intentionality. Of course, the reader will recognize that this sort of openness to disagreement and reconsideration is not characteristic of the account of age that the Stranger identifies when discussing the benefits of wine in symposia. In that discussion, the Stranger portrays old age as an impediment to the same disposition that he aspires to adopting for their conversation here. The conversation itself suggests some of both to be true for these men, and this is characteristic of the ludic attention promoted by the conversation.

²¹⁰ *Laws*, 799b

²¹¹ *Laws*, 634c-d

At times they are able to act “like elderly children,” as the Stranger suggests they ought to do, as they fashion the city of Magnesia in speech.²¹² In these moments, the old men are open to the idea of approaching the goals of their discussion from new perspectives. No example of this is more pronounced than the introduction of the prelude as a new form of promulgating law through a double form, one that the Stranger claims mixes both persuasion and violence.²¹³ I conclude the close reading of the *Laws* by returning to the details of this pivotal interaction as a guide for exploring the relationship between games and political life suggested in the strange and unaccustomed claim of Book VII.

The Stranger presents the prelude model as a mixing of the tyrannical and democratic – slavery and freedom – by using the prelude to put citizens “in a frame of mind more favorably disposed and therefore more apt to learn something,” rather than simply commanding through law.²¹⁴ The appeal to disposition here demonstrates the affinities between the role of preludes and the arguments about attention and games.²¹⁵ This manner of presenting laws is novel from the perspective of the interlocutors – “a third way of handling laws, one not at all in use nowadays” – and yet, as noted, Megillus notes how he prefers this method over his own Laconic way and Kleinias agrees.²¹⁶ The receptiveness to the Stranger’s suggestion against their custom is a remarkable moment in the dramatic unfolding of the dialogue.

The Stranger notes that this moment happens at high noon, which suggests particular illumination (even as they rest in the shade). These elderly men have accepted an introduction of a new form of lawgiving – the exact type of act that they soon will not hesitate to condemn in

²¹² *Laws*, 712b

²¹³ *Laws*, 722b-c

²¹⁴ *Laws*, 723a

²¹⁵ The word here for well-disposed is *eumenes*, not the Aristotelian *hexis*, and is closer to “agreeable” than a general sense of “disposition.” Nevertheless, it carries a sense of predisposition that is consistent with the account of how games facilitate ludic attention.

²¹⁶ *Laws*, 721e-722c

their subsequent discussion with respect to the types of games that citizens play. They actively make claims using their own words, rather than expressing mere assent, as with Megillus' praise for the double method of expressing law and Kleinias' affirmation that they start anew with their initial discussion as a prelude.²¹⁷ In this moment, Kleinias and Megillus appear more taken by the ludic attention inspired by their *diatribe* than at any point in the dialogue. As such, it is appropriate that the Stranger asserts that their entire discussion up until this point has been a prelude to their treatment of laws, since the stated goal of a prelude is to assist in being properly disposed to learn. At this moment in the dialogue especially, the interlocutors engage with the separation and specification that they find through their conversation as if they were playing a game, demonstrating the possibilities for games as politically-relevant sites of action – the possibility that they forestall by uncritically assenting to not allowing the introduction of new forms as a part of the games that citizens play.

However, the interlocutors are not disposed to fully embrace the possibility of movement and new forms permitted by games, as marked by the agitation of Megillus, and the separation and specification are only capable of achieving so much. Even as these old men play at their moderate game, there are frequent reminders of the tenuous position from which they allow themselves to critique, reform, and propose laws for the new colony. The conversation cannot escape the importance of the age of the characters as a constraint on what is permitted and proscribed as these men talk. The clear counterpoint in the *Republic* is the departure of Cephalus and Socrates' conversation exclusively with young men. Through this lens of age, there is a certain clarity about the relationship between disposition and persuasion. The prelude may permit for more willingness to move and change than we might expect from these elderly men, but it can only do so much; there is a reason that the Stranger's discussion of education

²¹⁷ *Laws*, 721e and 723e

emphasizes that certain things must be done from an early age. Still, we are reminded of ways of rendering “child-like” even obstinate old men: wine, enticing conversation points, and games. The *Laws* shows that ludic attention can be inspired in multiple contexts, while reinforcing the limitations of such an experience.

The payoff of this transformation through attention is the way that it enables the type of movement that the Stranger associates with education, a movement of the soul. At the end of the first book of the dialogue, the Stranger asserts that education is central to politics and the purpose of law. That insight is carried through to the introduction of preludes and on to the end of the dialogue with the role of the Nocturnal Council. One central condition for education is an openness to move from existing position towards truth, and the Stranger claims that condition can be figured as an erotic drawing of attention that the Stranger associates with the pleasure of games. Education and attention are fundamentally bound together, and ludic attention in particular allows for particular political experiences to be experienced as compelling.

X. Persuasion, Education, and Games

The particular argument about persuasion found within the *Laws* relies on a consideration of the interaction between the arguments and dramatic movement of the dialogue, as I have endeavored to show in this chapter. The manner in which the Stranger looks to persuade his interlocutors mirrors both his recommendations for law-giving and his observations about how games become important structures in political life. The effort to untangle conflicts in the arguments is frustrated by the transparency with which the Stranger engages the problem of attention. How one ought to attend to any given argument is bound up in uncertainty, but that is also precisely the condition that the metaphor of the divine puppet assigns to human beings; the *Laws* demonstrates the necessity of developing comfort with that sort of indeterminacy for

political beings. Education, as Plato presents it, is a process of becoming, a movement towards truth. The uncertainty of that movement requires that we attend to the pursuit of truth while being comfortable with the stops and starts along the way. Similar to the old men on their journey, human beings sometimes must figuratively rest in the shade of the cypress trees before returning to the strain of the journey. Furthermore, it becomes easier to begin the journey if the activity is compelling in its own right, as the conversation is for these men.

Games facilitate the type of disposition that makes such pursuits enjoyable, particularly with respect to the experience of uncertainty found in pursuit of an end. The claims about games remain particularly cryptic as a result of the interlocutors' response to the "strange and unaccustomed" claim of Book VII, but the rest of the dialogue bears out a connection between games and education on the issue of attention. In light of this connection, I return to a consideration of what the Stranger intends when he situates an assertion of the educative value of games alongside a conception of the virtues of citizenship in Book I. The Stranger contends that games assist in making it pleasurable to practice those things that one needs to do well as an adult; games persuade people to develop certain capacities by rendering the activity that promotes those capacities pleasurable. This method of persuasion found in games is the same as the one that the Stranger demonstrates with his fellow elderly interlocutors as they walk and talk about laws and regimes. Both cases operate through the disposition of the to-be-persuaded, and seek to make the activity compelling in itself.

As noted before, the Stranger begins with clear examples of education in carpentry and farming, but it is the issue of education of virtue in citizenship that is the true concern of this line of argument – the end to which it is oriented. The key to making sense of the merits of game structures relative to the Stranger's aims in the dialogue is the goal of the education of good

citizens: “the education from childhood in virtue, that makes one desire and love to become a perfect citizen who knows how to rule and be ruled with justice.”²¹⁸ Games permit for a particular experience of ruling and being ruled that occurs through a context in which a certain measure of playfulness accompanies that experience through ludic attention.

This early assertion about the function of games contradicts the later claim about the prescribed stability of games played. The emphasis on the virtue of citizenship does not permit for the games that citizens play to be invariable in this way. In order for citizens to cultivate a virtue of “ruling and being ruled” through the compelling qualities of the ludic attention found in games, one must encourage the varied experience of adopting new forms of structuring activity and acting within that structure. It is this claim, and not the “strange and unaccustomed” one, that seems consistent with the arguments made by the Stranger and Plato’s dramatic presentation of the dialogue.

XI. Ruling and Being Ruled in Games

Seth Benardete notes in his work on the *Laws* that the goal of knowing how to rule and be ruled with justice is, in fact, the second part of a dual definition of education.²¹⁹ The first part is about how one becomes good at doing anything, while the latter is specifically about the virtue of the citizen. The first part is where the Stranger introduces games as a way to draw playful attention towards a thing that one needs to learn how to do. Benardete deemphasizes the relationship between the two parts of the definition of education by pointing to games in which “playing the game” is inconsistent with “ruling” – rejecting it as a peculiar attempt to fuse player

²¹⁸ *Laws*, 643e

²¹⁹ Benardete, 43-44.

and umpire into one.²²⁰ However, requiring individuals to actively partake in the ruling and being ruled ignores the way in which acts of ruling and being ruled are inherent in the adoption of obstacles through the structure of games and willingly submitting to those rules in order to participate in the activity of the game. One need not be an umpire to experience “ruling” in a game, nor does one need to have an umpire to experience “being ruled.” This structural characteristic of games reconciles the two parts of this double definition and provides a clear sense of how games as structures facilitate the type of education that the Stranger has in mind through the use of ludic attention in the development of the virtue of citizenship.

The ludic attention inspired by the structure of games also helps to develop capacities for treating issues of appropriate attention, as explored in the first two chapters. As citizens, we frequently make decision, conscious or otherwise, about how we ought to attend to various ends. Just as the Stranger argues that symposia provide contexts within which our reactions to heightened pleasure can be experienced and tested, so too can games provide contexts within which we cultivate our attention in a context of heightened indeterminacy of appropriate attention. Human experiences and expressions of attention are open to the same types of disagreement and contestation in games as is found in other aspects of ordinary political lives, but the structures of games provide for a context for that experience that is set apart in some way.

When discussing symposia, the Stranger praises the “test and play associated with wine” for its “cheapness, safety, and speed.”²²¹ While one might quibble with the degree to which this is true for either wine or games, the Stranger’s claim about the value of observing people who are acting playfully holds across these contexts. The way that people act in the context of games

²²⁰ Benardete also points to the possibility that a concept of “sportsmanship” could represent such a fusion, although he quickly dismisses sportsmanship as being a goal of gymnastic, rather than directed at the soul. His separation of games from the second part of the definition of education seems tenuous on this point.

²²¹ *Laws*, 649d-650b

can be instructive to those who observe players responding to the contrived uncertainty and ends found within games. As the Stranger argues that symposia need a sober overseer to observe and structure the playfulness that comes with drunkenness, so too is it important to consider the role of game structures in directing the playfulness through the specification of ends;²²² ludic attention relies on the coincidence of seriousness and playfulness. There is a distinct sense of “being ruled” that follows from the way that the Stranger discusses playful activity, but that must be accompanied by a share in the intentionality of “ruling” through the establishment of the conditions for acting in the game. Games are important for the development of politics beings when the experience of the playful adherence to the structure of games is accompanied by a clear sense of participation in the directedness of that same action.

Insofar as the conversation of the *Laws* itself resembles a game, the interlocutors experience ludic attention that permits them to be actively engaged by some of the Stranger's claims that are new and peculiar to them. This ludic attention begins to be achieved early on by introducing the end of justifying the use of wine and symposia. After Book III, the focus on Magnesia as an end sets the conditions for the relative seriousness that drives the ludic attention of the interlocutors. The introduction and pursuit of that end demonstrates the curious coincidence of ruling – i.e., establishing what to pursue and how – and being ruled – i.e., being driven by those ends and held to agreements made in that pursuit. The variability of attention exhibited in the dialogue emerges from the different ways that the old men approach their conversation, particularly through the way that the Stranger draws their attention to particular topics as focal points, or fails in the attempt. As “players” in a “game,” then, both Kleinias and Megillus demonstrate how one gains experience in both ruling and being ruled through the way

²²² *Laws*, 640c and 671d

in which they participate in the *diatribe* of the *Laws*. The activity is variously effective and flawed in its impact on the men, but such is the vulnerability of the experience of ludic attention.

XII. Throwing Three Sixes or Three Aces

After a lengthy discussion of laws and their guardians, the Stranger's concluding statements remind us once again of the amphibolous character of the activity that these elderly men have been engaging in throughout their walk, and he does so by using a gaming metaphor. After setting forth the idea of the Nocturnal Council, he gives an ominous statement about the plausibility of their project:

*"It's likely, friends, that as the saying goes, 'it lies in common and in the middle' for us, and if we're willing to risk the entire regime and throw either three sixes, as they say, or three aces, then that's what must be done; and I'll share the risk with you, by explaining and giving an account of my opinions, at least, concerning the education and upbringing that have now again become the topic of the discussion. The risk would indeed not be small, nor even comparable to certain others."*²²³

Pangle notes that the scholiast tells us that "three sixes" is a sure winner while "three aces" is a sure loser and the saying that 'it lies in common and in the middle' implies that one must take one's chances with even odds. The strong suggestion here is, once again, that what they have been doing has been relatively playful; any risks they have taken in constructing a city in speech have been undertaken in a context that is distinctly different from what Kleinias would need to do. The attendant seriousness of any of these activities remains contested, but the Stranger certainly suggests that the men be aware of the effects of the change in context.

The success of the proposal to turn over Magnesia's legislation to the Nocturnal Council is premised on their education, which returns the focus to the understanding of education articulated at the beginning of the dialogue. Even in this final moment of the dialogue, Plato reminds the reader of the connection between games and education while recalling the issues of disposition that emerge from any sort of activity. If the establishment and maintenance of the

²²³ *Laws*, 968e-969a

laws of Magnesia are to succeed, then there is a central importance to the capacities developed through their education in the virtue of citizenship, which in turn informs the education of the city. This comment is not meant to launch a discussion of the function of the Nocturnal Council in the work, as that would require its own argument, but rather to point to the lingering concern with the relationship between persuasion and attention that is made through the lens of games.

Perhaps the most playful aspect of the entire dialogue is that a discussion that begins with the firm assertion on the part of Kleinias and Megillus about the divine origin of their laws ends with their insistence that it is the Athenian Stranger who is essential to the founding of the city, even as they ought to be concluding their walk in pilgrimage towards the very place where Minos is said to have received the Cretan laws from Zeus. It is this movement on the part of the Cretan and the Spartan that most clearly marks an overall measure of playfulness to this supposedly seriously-minded dialogue. In this regard, the Stranger appears to have been somewhat successful at structuring the possibility of increased playfulness within their *diatribe*, but it is left in uncertainty – or, more strongly, as a risk – whether or not such playful engagement in this context has helped educate these old men.

XIII. The *Laws* on Attention and Persuasion

There are persuasive consequences to both seriousness and playfulness of attention, as well as the in-between of ludic attention. On the one hand, the intentionality of seriousness can promote a certain investment in outcomes. Individuals might be more easily persuaded to act in certain ways as a result of the seriousness with which they attend to that type of activity. On the other hand, seriousness can also render one obstinate, shutting down the possibility of being persuaded to deviate from an established way of acting. There are resonances of this consequence in the early behavior of Megillus, with his refusal to let go of a constitutional

orientation towards war and the way that the Stranger relates the effects of old age on that intransigence. Furthermore, seriousness need not be exclusively tied to the conservative impulse demonstrated by Kleinias and Megillus. One can seriously attend to the desire to realize change, with explicit changes in mind and an intentionality to see them realized.

A similar variety of persuasive consequences can be identified for playfulness; a playful disposition may or may not inspire an engagement in particular actions by virtue of the perception that the activity is “merely” playful, and playfulness does not necessarily affect change. Just as there is not a necessary disposition of attention for any given activity, so too is there no direct mapping of disposition onto the effect it will have on particular individuals in particular contexts. What becomes important, then, is not a codified understanding of the relationship between particular activities and dispositions – since such a thing does not exist – but rather a facility with assessing, understanding, and articulating the various ways in which human beings relate to ends and uncertainty through their attention. Ludic attention, as an exploration of the dispositional space between these polar forms of attention, is a particular fruitful position from which to explore issues of appropriate attention, but it is no less subject to the variety of persuasive effects.

In the context of the *Laws*, it is likely easy for the reader to assume noble intentions into the actions of the Stranger, which renders altruistic his attempt to persuade Kleinias and Megillus about the merits of particular arguments and principles. However, as suggested by the Stranger’s reminder in Book VII about the way that the introduction of new forms of games into the city might be received, his attempt to get his interlocutors to adopt a more playful disposition in addressing the laws could be read as a type of corruption by others. It does not take much of a leap of faith to connect that concern to the fate of Socrates. Insofar as ludic attention has

persuasive consequences, it remains undetermined as to whether or not those consequences are beneficial or detrimental.

A central example of this point comes from the Stranger's "strange and unaccustomed" claim about needing to fix the structure of the games that citizens play. If stability in games actually translates to stability in political order, as the Stranger implies, then there would likely be both proponents and opponents of that persuasive consequence. The interlocutors agree that it is an ill to have internal fighting in the city, but others might argue that an unjust stability is not worth preserving either. It is not clear that the Stranger is convinced of the veracity of that claim, given his unmet exhortations to discuss what is puzzling about this argument. Nevertheless, the example emphasizes that the facilitation of particular dispositions is not directly tied to any particular normative outcomes. Even as the promotion of ludic attention through the contexts established by games resonates with a sense of the development of an education towards civic virtue in the *Laws*, the persuasive consequences of such a disposition are not necessarily positive. I now move to a consideration of how game structures promote particular persuasive goals as a more direct engagement with such a concern.

Chapter 4: Games and Gamification

“To generate the indispensable excitement there must be something at stake, something momentous and uncertain – like the outcome of a battle or the prospects of a harvest.”

– Dewey, *Art as Experience*²²⁴

I. Games and Game Elements in Contemporary Use

In *Making Democracy Fun*, Josh Lerner details two examples of game-based democratic practices in Rosario, Argentina and Toronto, Canada.²²⁵ Similar to its titular inspiration, Putnam’s *Making Democracy Work*, Lerner’s analysis considers the problem of civic engagement. One of the central insights of Lerner’s argument that distinguishes it from one about social capital is the specific focus on the design and structure of human interactions. Simply put: “Games are designed to be enjoyable, and democracy is not.”²²⁶ Lerner claims that he “found that game design can make democracy fun – and make it work. When governments and organizations used games *and* designed their programs more like a game, they tended to make participation not only more attractive, but also more effective, transparent, and fair. But [he] also found that this approach can backfire – manipulating citizens or trivializing their efforts.”²²⁷ Broadly speaking, Lerner’s observations from Argentina and Canada are about the applicability of games and game structures to political institutions in the interest of making their activities more engaging to citizens.

²²⁴ John Dewey, *Art as Experience*. (New York: Penguin, 1934), 69.

²²⁵ Josh Lerner, *Making Democracy Fun*. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2014).

²²⁶ Lerner, 4.

²²⁷ Lerner, 5.

His political examples follow in the trend of many recent attempts to explore how games might impact the design of other structures, ones that are conventionally approached with prevailing seriousness. Many commentators view the possibilities afforded by these structures with enthusiasm, as Lerner does; however, as Lerner's above summary also indicates, there are also those who express concern about the implications of designing structures in this way. The following chapter elaborates on the preceding insights about ludic attention and persuasion by turning to contemporary examples of the ways that games and game elements serve to structure shared human interactions.

In thinking about the applicability of game structures, gamification is an idea that has gained popularity over the past decade. One influential definition of gamification is: "the use of game design elements in non-game contexts."²²⁸ This definition comes from Deterding et al. 2011, in which the authors provide a framework for situating the diverse attempts to use the structures associated with games to capitalize on the motivational effects associated with games. The authors draw two distinctions – between experiences of gaming/playing and structural wholes/parts – that establish a basic 2x2 grid as its framework. On this grid, gamification is the design of a *gaming* experience framed by structural parts or *elements*. These distinctions are grounded in some of the seminal work in game studies and are consistent with the arguments in the preceding chapters in their analytical separation of structure, activity, and disposition – although there is some conflation of activity (gaming) and disposition (gamefulness), similar to what we get with Aristotle's understanding of *paidia*.

²²⁸ Deterding et al., "From Game Design Elements to Gamefulness: Defining 'Gamification'," *Proceedings of the 15th international academic MindTrek conference* (2011): 10.

For the first distinction, the authors draw upon Caillois' account of *paidia* and *ludus*, which separates free-form play (*paidia*) from rule-bound contest of (*ludus*).²²⁹ They argue, along with gamification proponent Jane McGonigal, that gaming and gamefulness are too readily equated with playing and playfulness, when they are actually distinct types of action and disposition.²³⁰ Within their identification of gamefulness is a sense of the amphibolous qualities that have been identified with ludic attention: "In practice, it can be assumed that they often can and will give rise to playful behaviors and mindsets as well, just as video game players often switch between playful and gameful behaviors and mindsets during play."²³¹ As such, this argument is consistent with the claim that ludic attention simultaneously exhibits the possibility for seriousness and playfulness, something Deterding et al. bake into their concept of gamefulness.²³²

The other part of the framework is that both gameful and playful experiences can occur relative to structural wholes or parts. Games and toys are gameful and playful wholes, respectively. However, structures can be designed that only use some of the elements that would otherwise be found in a game (or toy) in order to bring gameful (or playful) experiences to non-wholes. The whole/part distinction is the crux of what makes the idea of gamification appealing across a variety of fields: the benefits tied to gameful interaction might be elicited by designing with game elements. Businesses look to fuel engagement with their products, while educators look to enhance engagement in classroom activities. Increasingly, there is interest in the

²²⁹ It is worth noting that this is not reflective of the Aristotelian understanding of *paidia*, which includes structured play experiences as well. Caillois uses the Greek and Latin terms to develop his own framework.

²³⁰ They do not use the same language as this dissertation, but disposition seems to fit with their understanding of gamefulness and playfulness. The established binary is problematic here as it was in the first chapter, and a continuum of dispositional possibilities would seem to fit better than the assertion of a hard distinction.

²³¹ Deterding et al., 11

²³² Again, the point of this chapter is not to return to the argument of the first chapter about the problems with a dichotomy of seriousness and playfulness, but rather to introduce contemporary ways of thinking about gamification.

persuasive possibilities of both games and game elements, perhaps buoyed by the continued growth of revenues in the video game industry.²³³ Proponents of gamification aspire to have game elements achieve something like Dewey's "indispensable excitement" in order to motivate particular activities. It is an argument about a desired disposition of attention. At the core of Deterding et al.'s framework for understanding games and gamification is a claim about the relationship between structures – both wholes and elements – and attention. This relationship forms the foundation of the promise of, and concern with, the use of games and gamification in contemporary contexts. In this chapter, I will consider both wholes and elements, games and gamification, as an extension of the argument about the persuasive implications of ludic attention that is suggested by Plato's *Laws*.

In order to treat games themselves, I turn to a recently-popular model for monetizing videogames that thrives on the heavy investment of a relatively small percentage of individuals who play the game. These games are coherent, separate sites of action, in the sense that the funeral games were in the *Iliad*, but they are also peculiar in the way that they allow for a sort of transgression of the magic circle; they allow, or rather exhort, players to pay for advantages in the game in order to make money. As such, these games serve as interesting subjects for the arguments that have been developed thus far. They help to explore the difference between something that is compelling and something that is used to compel. The former has important resonances with the experience of ludic attention, while the latter exploits it. Both, however, are fundamentally connected to the persuasive possibilities of ludic attention that we find through the structure of games.

²³³ Chris Morris, "Level Up! Video Game Industry Revenues Soar in 2015," *Fortune*. Last modified Feb. 16, 2016 <<http://fortune.com/2016/02/16/video-game-industry-revenues-2015/>>

The implications of ludic attention for persuasion will then be brought to bear on claims in contemporary scholarship and thought about gamification as well. Arguments from proponents and opponents figure the issue of persuasiveness differently as a part of claims about the value, dangers, or shortcomings of gamification. Ultimately, I return to the argument that ludic attention is better understood as part of a human capacity, in the spirit of the Athenian Stranger's understanding of the relationship between games and citizenship, rather than as a tool in service of other ends. The current debates surrounding gamification and persuasion miss the mark by focusing on the possibility and ethics of applying game elements to motivate action. We can gain new purchase on the gamification debate by considering the relationship between structure and attention in the lives of democratic citizens. The development of a capacity consistent with the role of attention in political life – developing a capacity rather than prescribing desired ends to be pursued – is an overlooked effect that can be achieved relative to the structures of games.

II. F2P Games and Whales

In 2014, both the Office of Fair Trading (OFT) for the United Kingdom and the European Commission issued statements about regulatory efforts with respect to a specific category of mobile videogames, categorized as “free-to-play” (F2P) games, which are predominantly distributed through virtual stores owned by Apple and Google. In the OFT's “Principles for online and app-based games,” they specify “concerns that there were industry-wide practices that were potentially misleading, commercially aggressive or otherwise unfair,” which is echoed with a similar sentiment in the EU common position.²³⁴ Both institutions direct their primary

²³⁴ “The OFT's Principles for online and app-based games,” accessed Feb 7, 2016, <https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/288360/oft1519.pdf> “In-app purchases: Joint action by the European Commission and Member States is leading to better protection for consumers in online games,” accessed Feb 7, 2016, <http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-14-847_en.htm>

regulatory concern towards the targeting of children with predatory business practices. These two efforts may not be particularly novel in their regulation of marketing practices towards vulnerable populations – nor as restrictions on gaming practices, like gambling – but they do present the first governmental efforts towards these F2P games.

One way to frame the question about the political import of games would be to consider the relationship between corporations and consumers alongside the regulatory interests of the state, as these European examples suggest. However, the case of these F2P games allows for a different analysis due to the relationship between the nature of the play activities found within these games and the broader ludic communities within which they occur, a relationship that relies on a relatively small percentage of the ludic community to meet the financial incentive of the game companies. These games are fundamentally aimed at persuading players to spend money, despite ostensibly being available to play for free, and thus present interesting overlaps between the experience of ludic attention and persuasion.

It is worth reflecting first on the peculiar position of these F2P games in the world of games, even as they share so many of the game characteristics from the previous chapters. Videogames already occupy a small portion of a long history of games and gaming as parts of human activity. *Clash of Clans*, the top grossing mobile F2P game in early 2016 (at over \$1 million per day), was initially published in late 2012,²³⁵ forty years after the founding of the pioneering home console videogame company, Atari. Nintendo, perhaps the most enduring and prominent name in the short history of videogames, began in the late 19th century selling *hanafuda* playing cards, well before it released its first home videogame system in 1983. These cards were developed in the context of strict gambling laws in order to circumvent those

Jas Purewal, "EU regulation of free to play games: hot topic or hot air?" *Gamer/Law*, accessed Feb 7, 2016, <<http://www.gamerlaw.co.uk/2014/eu-regulation-of-free-to-play-games-hot-topic-or-hot-air/>>

²³⁵ "Top Grossing iPhone Games," *Think Gaming*, accessed Jan 30, 2016.

restrictions, which is but one example of the enduring association between games and gambling.²³⁶ Over two millennia before Nintendo started making playing cards, Herodotus relates his story about how the Lydians invented games in order to endure eighteen years of famine.²³⁷ In the 40-plus years of videogames, a dominant model for consumers has been purchasing a copy of the game software that the player could run using a personal computer or specialized systems produced by companies like Atari and Nintendo. However, before the time of home consoles, videogames made money in arcades by convincing players to play by paying one quarter at a time.

In the context of this short history of videogames, these mobile F2P games enhance the portability of the home console while returning to something like the “coin drop” monetization model of the arcade. These F2P games make money by offering an initial play experience that is available for free to anyone with a mobile device that can run the application (“app”) and then relying on purchases offered within the game itself in order to monetize the game for the developer/publisher. The basic logic of the monetization model is that players are more likely to be willing to start playing a free game than if the same game had even a modest up-front cost; the free initial experience gets them in the game and playing. Attracting and maintaining enough players is important to the success of this monetization model, even if they do not spend much or anything on the game, because it establishes a ludic community in which the activity of the game might be meaningful. The data on these games show that some players invest heavily in these games through “in-app purchases” (IAPs), which demonstrates a particular type of attention to the game and its ludic community.

²³⁶ Florent Gorges, *The History of Nintendo (1889-1980) From playing-cards to Game & Watch* (Triel-Sur-Seine: Pix'n Love, 2012).

²³⁷ Herodotus, trans. David Grene, *The History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1988).

These IAPs come in a variety of types – and I will delve into that detail below – but all of them are intended to improve upon the basic play experience for the player in some way, enough to persuade the player that the monetary value is justifiable. The players who invest immense resources into these games are known in the industry as “whales” – a term borrowed from the context of casino gambling. The investment of these players provides an important example of how persuasion happens in the context of games. Unlike in the era of the arcade, when the play experience was locked behind the payment of coins, these whales could play without spending at all, but instead choose to spend money on these IAPs. The persuasive effect of these games on their players happens on two levels: 1) providing a play experience that is compelling enough for the player to continue to play, and 2) persuading players that their experience is worth enhancing by spending money. The former remains within the context of the magic circle of the game, while the latter crosses that boundary in order to affect a particular persuasive goal.

III. Compellingness and Compulsion

In order to distinguish these two levels of persuasion, I draw a difference between compellingness and compulsion. Compellingness denotes the ability of something to convince an actor to engage in an activity, and continue to engage in that activity, through experiencing a desire to do so. It is the sense that I have been using with respect to the compelling experience of uncertainty in the account of ludic attention thus far. This emphasis distinguishes the sense of finding something compelling from the notion of being compelled. The former operates through the engagement of the actor, while the latter only requires submitting to the motivation that originates from an external source. This distinction resonates with the central argument in the *Laws* about the importance of preludes in structuring law, so as to not rely solely on violence as the force of persuasion. Compulsion relies on an outside motivator that looks to ensure that one

performs a particular action. Another way of talking about the distinction is relative to autotelic activity, which one engages in for its own sake. Autotelic activity is compelling in itself, while compulsion only becomes relevant when the actor would not otherwise act in that way.

In the context of these F2P games, the developers look to persuade players to spend money on their game despite the ability to play for free. Although this persuasion likely requires that the developers make their game compelling, the primary focus is on the need to compel players to do what the developers wants, which is for them to spend money. The question, then, is about the sort of persuasion we find with spending money in a F2P game. Is spending money in F2P games compelling or compelled? There is an issue of agency at the core of this question, but there is also a distinction about how persuasion happens – whether it is built into the structure of the activity or relies on some external force. In practice, the distinction is not as clean as one might like for it to be in order to make moral judgments, but the coincidence of the two possibilities is theoretically interesting. The term compulsion can be used as an alternative way of talking about the relationship between play experiences and addiction; playing games can be a compulsive behavior.²³⁸ These ways of talking about games reinforce the centrality of issues related to attention when we consider games, and they also demonstrate how compellingness and compulsion can readily become intertwined. The distinction between these forms of persuasion will continue to be blurred in the account of F2P games, but this framework will be helpful in distinguishing emphases.

On this point about persuasion, the association with children as the vulnerable population in the statements by the UK and EU is worth dwelling on for a moment. While it is not unusual

²³⁸ Extra Credits, “Game Addiction (Part 1).” YouTube video. Published May 16, 2012.

<<https://youtu.be/Y5RSngCFpsc>>

Rob Cover, “Gaming (Ad)diction: Discourse, Identity, Time and Play in the Production of the Gamer Addiction Myth,” *Game Studies* 6 (2006), accessed March 2, 2016, <<http://gamestudies.org/0601/articles/cover>>

to make the link between children as players of games and children as particularly vulnerable subjects, the focus of the laws appears to be on moments of accidental or unintentional over-investment rather than on the genuine possibilities for intentional and yet compulsive behavior, insofar as the two can coexist. A child can be one type of unwitting dupe – one who does not realize the value of the money that they invest into the game – but what do we make of any number of other potential players who “buy in” to these games? The prevailing story about the pronounced financial success of F2P games is about these whales and the reliance on the expenditures of a small group of players who invest more than the rest of the players combined. In a bizarre mirror of wealth inequality statistics, a 2015 report based on the expenditures of 20 million players found that the top 10% of spenders accounted for 64% of money spent on F2P games, but demographic data also seems to indicate that these spending habits are not limited to children (although there does appear to be a connection to gender).²³⁹ There is more to this story than the issue of predatory marketing.

The nominal association with gambling behavior might provide significant explanatory power, and critics have remarked on the behavioral psychology of games – operant conditioning and the “Skinner box” qualities found in game mechanisms.²⁴⁰ However, these gambling elements only represent a portion of the ways that these games encourage IAPs through features of their games. The particular structures to these games, and the way that these structures

²³⁹ Owen Good, “Who Are the ‘Whales’ Driving Free-to-Play Gaming? You’d Be Surprised,” *Kotaku*, Aug 25, 2013, accessed Mar 9, 2016, <<http://kotaku.com/who-are-the-whales-driving-free-to-play-gaming-youd-1197333118>>
Alex Wawro, “Report: Whales gobble up even more of the F2P mobile game revenue pie,” *Gamasutra*, Apr 9, 2015, accessed Mar 9 2016, <http://www.gamasutra.com/view/news/240739/Report_Whales_gobble_up_even_more_of_the_F2P_mobile_game_revenue_pie.php>

²⁴⁰ Mike Rose, “Chasing the Whale: Examining the ethics of free-to-play games,” *Gamasutra*, Jul 9, 2013, accessed Mar 9 2016, <http://www.gamasutra.com/view/feature/195806/chasing_the_whale_examining_the_>
Nicholas Lovell, “Whales, True Fans, and the Ethics of Free-to-play games,” *Gamesbrief*, Sep 22, 2011, accessed Mar 9 2016, <<http://www.gamesbrief.com/2011/09/whales-true-fans-and-the-ethics-of-free-to-play-games/>>

position players relative to an international ludic community, allow for more complex ways of making experiences compelling for, and attempting to compel, players. A few examples from currently-popular F2P games will help illustrate these structures.

IV. The Structures of Free-to-Play Games

It is important point to emphasize from the outset that there is both diversity and overlap in the ways through which game companies attempt to promote further spending on the part of players. They may be specifically targeted at children using deceptive marketing or bright colors and friendly cartoon images, as with the regulatory concerns of the UK and EU, but they also make use of the characteristics of ludic communities and the ludic attention that appear in non-F2P games as well. I provide images of screenshots from a couple popular titles in early 2016, and there are plenty of games that share these basic structures. Still, there are plenty of iterations on these games that use different ways of achieving both compellingness and compulsion.

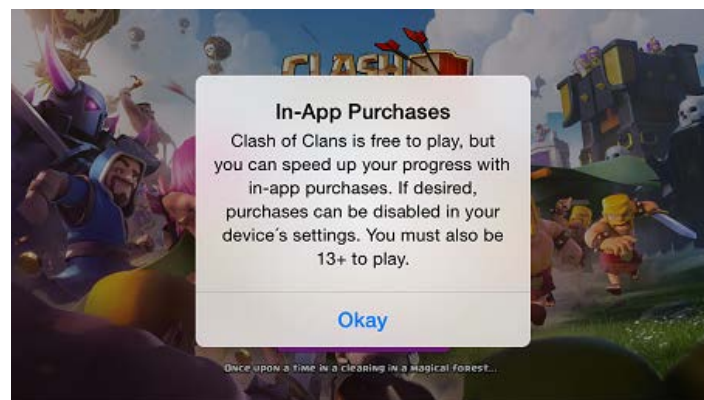


Image 1. Clash of Clans (Supercell 2012) alerts the player to IAPs on the first play session

The data about the sustained and substantial engagement of these whales in the ludic communities of these games suggests that there is more to the structure of these F2P games than making a quick buck off of unwitting children. As can be seen in the above alert that appears on the first time playing *Clash of Clans* – again, currently the highest grossing F2P game based on daily IAPs – the game reminds players of the advantages of speeding up progress while

including language suggesting ways to avoid unintentional purchases by children. A study by Electronic Entertainment Design and Research (EEDAR) found that 66% of their survey group who were in the top 5% of spenders identified as male and the average age across both men and women was 30.2 years old.²⁴¹ That study at least lends credence to the idea that the whale-like spending is not primarily driven by unwitting children. Instead, the phenomenon requires a more comprehensive account of how the compelling characteristics of these games enable the developers to persuade players to spend money on the game in significant and recurring ways.

It may be helpful to think of these IAPs as different obstacles to progress, or gates, which money can be used to bypass in the game. This framework recalls Suits' definition of games in *The Grasshopper* and the "voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles." These content gates in F2P games are unnecessary obstacles, but ones that often present players with two clear paths to overcoming them: time or money.²⁴² In order to monetize the game, the game developers build moments of interruption of the play experience into the structure of the game that draw the attention of the player to the possibility of spending money to enhance or facilitate that experience, as the player is reminded in Image 1 above. These gates in F2P games are peculiar game elements as their primary function is targeted at compulsion, not compellingness. Other aspects of these games need to be primarily compelling in order to attract and retain players, but gates look to compel players to spend on IAPs. In the following examples, I consider the variety of game elements that serve this function.

On perhaps the most basic level, and potentially the most familiar to the casual observer or player, we find that these games are usually time-gated. It is common in these games to only allow for players to play for a limited amount of time, which usually takes the form of allowing

²⁴¹ Owen Good, "Who Are the 'Whales' Driving Free-to-Play Gaming? You'd Be Surprised," *Kotaku*, Aug 25, 2013, accessed Mar 9, 2016, <http://kotaku.com/who-are-the-whales-driving-free-to-play-gaming-youd-1197333118>

²⁴² There may be circumstances in which the game provides money as the only option as well.

for a certain number of attempts at a challenge before having to wait for the number of attempts to replenish. On this model, the developer needs to make a game that is compelling enough that



Image 2. Home Screen of *Summoners War* (Com2Us 2014) with time-gated resources in upper right-hand corner

the player wants to keep playing, and so would be willing to pay in order to avoid waiting when they have used up their attempts. In Image 2 – which is the primary screen from *Summoners War: Sky Arena*, another game in the top-20 for daily revenue –²⁴³ there are two timers in the upper right-hand corner next to resources of energy (noted by a lightning bolt) and wings that indicate how long the player must wait for a unit of that resource to replenish. The cost of paying to bypass these time-gates (as well as the other structural game elements below) is often hidden behind another structural element: in-game currencies that deviate attention from the cost in local currencies, as can be seen in Image 3 below. There is a certain playful unreality to these in-game currencies, such as gems and crystals, even as they can be purchased with national currencies. The resources introduced by these structural elements demonstrate how ludic attention remains central to shaping the context within which players make decisions about

²⁴³ “Top Grossing iPhone Games,” Think Gaming, accessed Mar 2, 2016.

investing in playing these games, and an account of the dispositions of players is essential for understanding how they might be compelled to spend money.



Image 3. In-game currencies and costs in Clash of Clans

There are other elements of F2P games that use gates to limit access to content more directly – total denial instead of temporary denial. There may be experiences in the game that can only be had if you're willing to pay something. In these cases, the developers promote a “base game” that defines the core game experience that can be expanded on through purchasing new content. In the world of videogames in general, this way of monetizing additional content is often called DLC, or downloadable content, which gained prominence as videogames became increasingly networked with faster connections for file transfers. A related model in F2P games is power-gating, which relies on emphasizing competitive play experiences to compel players to spend more to perform better in the game. These gates function by exposing players to how the game works before demonstrating that they cannot possibly reach the highest levels of achievement in the game (at least not in time to keep up with the competition) without paying to improve their ability to succeed. This competitive power-gating relies directly on players that

have a particular orientation towards outcomes, which requires a certain tendency towards seriousness in one's ludic attention.

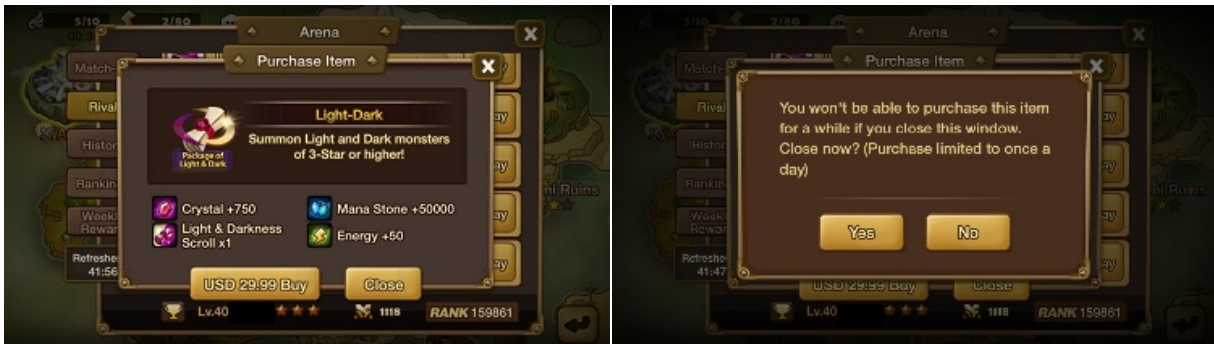


Image 4 Pop-up IAPs in Summoners War offer increased power, available for a limited time

In order to leverage this game element, power-gating relies on players readily perceiving what success looks like in the game, and how spending money will help them achieve it. Image 4 shows an offer that pops up during the play experience to remind the player of a way to enhance their power relative to other players combined with a time-gated sense of immediacy for the opportunity to purchase. In Image 5, there is an example of a leaderboard that drives the type



Image 5. Monthly leaderboard in Clash of Clans based on competitive performance

of compelling (in the sense of compellingness) competition that can also compel (in the sense of compulsion) spending on the part of committed players. In this example from *Clash of Clans*,

success can also be connected to membership in an organization of players, or “Clans,” that compete against others. Players have the potential to be recognized by members of the ludic community while also forming closer connections to members of that community, similar to the model of team sports. These associations have the potential to increase the relative seriousness with which a player might approach the game, which might make that player more willing to spend money on IAPs. Power-gating in particular relies on having a robust ludic community within which the actions of players might be rendered meaningful to the players themselves.

V. Ludic Communities and Persuasion

Although these power-gates encourage whale-like spending from players who want to be competitive, the players who spend little or nothing on the game are still fundamental to the ludic community that supports the F2P model. The whales need other players who can illustrate the power disparity that their spending on IAPs affords them while continuing to provide the context within which their action might be meaningful. Of course, as with all claims and experiences grounded within the amphibolous context established by the structures of games, different players from various positions of ludic attention can accept or contest the significance of this sense of gaining power in the game by investing money. Some players might credit what another player has done to succeed in the game and celebrate that success while others might invalidate achievements based on the additional financial means used. In the latter case, members of mobile F2P ludic communities often use the term “P2W” or “pay-to-win” to mock the uneven playing field created by the use of these power gates.²⁴⁴ Even given these internal disagreements in ludic communities about the merits of being successful at achieving the goals of the game by spending money, it remains the case that the structures used in the F2P game

²⁴⁴ Daniel Shumway, “Pay-to-Win is Not the Problem,” *Gamasutra*, Jan 23, 2014, accessed Mar 9, 2016, <http://www.gamasutra.com/blogs/DanielShumway/20140123/209073/PaytoWin_is_Not_the_Problem.php>

model rely on a broad group of players – both paying and non-paying – that enable the continued existence of the game as a potentially meaningful site of action and, therefore, as a potential site of persuasion.²⁴⁵ If anything, these disagreements within a ludic community serve to keep the game that they are playing vital. Contestation about the merit found in certain actions sustains the ludic attention that players bring to their activities.

However, there are also often structures based on non-competitive means through which players might display status within the ludic community, which are often referred to as “cosmetic” elements. It is on this aspect of how players spend money on F2P games that most readily blurs the boundary between compellingness and compulsion. Unlike the power-gated elements, these cosmetic elements do not improve your ability to succeed in the explicit ends of the game. Instead, these elements focus on varieties of appearance that allow for the player to stand out before the ludic community in ways that are not tied to their success in the game, but that still signal investment in the game of another sort. A popular example of this type of element is the economy of hats in Valve’s *Team Fortress 2*. Although not a mobile game, but still free-to-play, members of that ludic community invest heavily in the importance of virtual hats as indications of commitment to the game, which has generated a robust in-game economy based around those items.²⁴⁶ These elements can be thought of as relying on vanity or conspicuous consumption, which might factor into a significant amount of whale-like spending patterns.

²⁴⁵In his 1996 article, “Hearts, Clubs, Diamonds, Spades: Players Who Suit MUDs,” game designer Richard Bartle discusses four types of players found within early multi-player online games, organized according to what they find compelling about the game. His taxonomy divides players into “killers,” “achievers,” “socialisers,” and “explorers.” Of these, all but the explorers rely on other types of players for their enjoyment (and the explorers rely on other explorers). Although these specific categories might not translate directly to F2P games, the framework of relying on other players to maintain the compelling aspects of play activities remains salient to how we ought to think about these ludic communities.

²⁴⁶Christopher Moore, “Hats of affect: a study of affect, achievements and hats in *Team Fortress 2*,” *Game Studies*, 11 (2011). It is worth noting that the profits from sales are shared between the company and players who contribute content to the game, which makes the example somewhat different from most of the mobile F2P games.

Even if that is the case, this cosmetic spending also maintains the ludic attention that drives the play experiences found within the game. Engaging with cosmetic game elements is compelling to some players, and the same can be said about all of these IAPs. Some players may find it compelling to try to maximize the impact of a limited spending budget given the variety of gates that limit their experience. IAPs are unique game elements, owing to the ways that they seek to violate the “magic circle” by trying to compel spending; nevertheless, they remain game elements. Insofar as a player treats them as part of the “unnecessary obstacles” from Suits’ definition of games, then they appear as compelling; yet they seamlessly become powerful tools for persuading players to fulfill the financial aims that exist outside the game itself. As such, they are part of the structure that facilitates the ludic attention of players at the same time as they rely on that ludic attention to achieve their functions.

VI. The Contested Sense of Appropriate Attention to F2P Games

As a player spends money on IAPs, the contested sense of meaningfulness and significance of that action in the context of a game becomes pronounced relative to how the ludic community receives it. Ludic attention and ludic community operate in tandem, and both impact the persuasive effects of game structures. As whale-like players invest their time and national currency in a F2P game, they encounter critiques from members of the ludic community about the degree of seriousness expressed through ludic attention. The above-mentioned critique of “pay-to-win” can be a critique both of games, whose structures rely too heavily on paying money to succeed, and the players who take advantage of those structures. The critique relies on a sense that there is an appropriate level of investment in a game that is violated by particular games and their whale-like players. One may be reminded again of Achilles’ censure of Idomeneus and Ajax on the grounds that their action was unbecoming of the context as an example of

disagreement about the disposition exhibited by how one acts relative to the structure of the game. The ludic community continues to weigh significantly on the persuasive potential of games as sites of action through the way in which concerns about appropriate attention are experienced and articulated, whether in the case of the funeral games or mobile F2P games.

The experience of contested dispositions need not only be critical of over-investment. As one builds up investment in a ludic community – as would be the case for any community – one is more likely to commit oneself to the activity of that community (and with an increased sense of meaningfulness). As with the example of “clans” in *Clash of Clans* above, players build connections to other players that can develop a sense of more appropriate seriousness for engagement in the activity. In these cases, the ludic attention of these players might be challenged as not being serious enough. One might be able to think of familiar analogs in other game contexts: a professional athlete whose teammates claim that she is not serious enough about practicing, or a boy who does not put enough effort into his debate team. A relative seriousness of ludic attention can lead to this other type of challenge to appropriate attention, especially in competitive contexts. The competitive aspect of power-gates in F2P games, paired with the potential for the significant investment of time and money, makes them potentially potent sites for a contested sense of the appropriate seriousness with which one attends to the activity.

There is an existing dichotomy used in discourse about videogames that captures this sense of varied investment well: casual and hardcore gamers.²⁴⁷ The former is used to describe players for whom games most closely match their association with fun and leisure, while the latter denotes a certain intensity of playing habits. Someone who identifies, or is identified as, a “hardcore” gamer is willing to sacrifice other potential uses of time and attention in order to

²⁴⁷ Jesper Juul, *A Casual Revolution*. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009), 8-9.

spend more time playing games or participating in ludic communities (by posting on online message boards, producing fan content related to the game, etc.). Such a level of sacrifice also maps onto the financial investment in games, as we might find in the example of whales and the F2P model. Mobile games, which make up a large portion of games adopting the F2P model, tend to be considered as games with predominantly casual players because they tend to be relatively easy to understand with simple possibilities for game interactions. The affordances of the mobile technology tend to be limited in ways that preclude complex engagement, while simultaneously lending these games the ability to fit relatively conveniently into idle time. Of course, as I have repeatedly asserted, the relationship between activity and disposition is not prescriptive, and the incidence of the whale helps to illustrate the multiple possibilities for engagement in ludic communities. The extent to which these whales are persuaded to invest in the games is also the condition of the contested sense of appropriate attention for the ludic community.

VII. Whales, Persuasion, and Community

Whales are but one way of thinking about how we might distinguish a group of players within a ludic community, but it is a particularly interesting category because of the way that it straddles the interests that are meant to be separated by the magic circle. In mobile F2P games, the question of the persuasiveness of ludic attention is simplified in many ways if taken from the perspective of the profit motive of the game companies. The play activity of customers is secondary and instrumental to the interest of the business, as is the ludic attention that the game structures inspire. For players, however, the game remains primarily the structure of a play activity. The potential purposes or meanings given to that play experience will be as

multifarious as the people who engage in them, but they are shaped by the structures given to those experiences.

Whales seem to mark the boundary of the distinction between compellingness and compulsion without giving us a clear means of disentangling them. The issue that they highlight is whether or not it is possible to find an activity so compelling as to invest oneself to the degree that occurs for whales in these types of games, or whether that type of spending could only happen through compulsion (or some related means, like deception). Furthermore, both alternatives require an answer to the question of how others ought to react to those players and their engagement in the activity. In the regulatory efforts against these games, there is a targeted negative valence with regard to how these companies draw on the persuasive force of games. However, there is reason to hesitate before categorically condemning these practices. Insofar as these games thrive on the exploitation of vulnerable populations – and there are arguments that most whales fall into that category, although there are arguments to the contrary as well –²⁴⁸ one can describe their persuasion as predatory manipulation. In other contexts, however, one might readily praise the significant investment on the part of some individuals that allows for the perpetuation of an activity that a large group of people finds enjoyable or meaningful. In fact, one likely would chastise those “free riders” who rely on the investment of others without contributing their resources to support the activity. More players, the argument could be made, should be contributing money in order to keep the game going.

Conversely, there are familiar political analogs – such as campaign donations from wealthy interests – in which the substantial investment of a few individuals would be more

²⁴⁸ Rose, “Chasing the Whale”

Lovell, “Whales, Trues Fans, and the Ethics of Free-to-play games”

Brendan Sinclair, “Free-to-play whales more rational than assumed,” *gamesindustry.biz*, Apr 1, 2014, accessed Mar 2, 2016, <<http://www.gamesindustry.biz/articles/2014-04-01-free-to-play-whales-more-rational-than-assumed>>

alarming than how someone chooses to spend money on a game. Whales could easily be cast as plutocrats or special interests in other contexts, but the game provides a different experience of these arguments about attention and investment. The comparison of different contexts in which human beings act is, of course, more complicated than any easy analogy allows, but the juxtaposition of games and politics renews an awareness of the differences enabled by ludic attention. The case of the whale suggests ways in which one's experience of such an amphibolous disposition – and then one's ability to contest other accounts of meaningfulness tied to such an activity through one's action – is central to our experience of membership in any type of community. Whales respond to the structures provided by F2P game developers in ways that are more readily contested in the context of a ludic community because of how their actions cut across the disposition that others expect to be brought to a game, especially a game that one could play for free.

Games provide structures within which we intersubjectively maintain a tenuous balance of disposition through the attention to uncertainty and ends that I have been calling ludic attention. The ways in which human beings separate out such experiences establish important differences for how others understand and assess the different activities. The formulation of the “magic circle” continues to be a helpful designation for that which is peculiar about games as structures, even as (or, perhaps, because) that boundary remains contestable itself. In this case, the structure of these F2P games helps to elucidate the particular type of persuasion that is compellingness in relation to the familiar political act of compulsion. The affinities and tensions between these two modes of persuasion remain relevant when we think about how game elements can also be employed in the structure of other activities – the practices introduced above as gamification. I will consider the debates surrounding these practices before exploring

how the understanding of the persuasive effect of games that is articulated in Plato's *Laws* suggests a way of understanding what gamification can and cannot do.

VIII. Games Escaping into Everyday Life

At the beginning of a recent edited volume on gamification, *The Gameful World*, Steffen Walz and Sebastian Deterding note the peculiar way in which the perspective towards the type of structures that games provide has changed in the past decade. The dominant narrative at the start of the new millennium was about video games facilitating a detachment from the world.

Remarking on the growing interest in gamification as a way of promoting engagement in a variety of contexts, they claim that “today the direction is reversed: not people escaping into the virtual world of games, but games escaping into everyday life.”²⁴⁹ The idea of “games escaping into everyday life” introduces a curious position from which one might understand what it is that games do. Implementing game elements into structures for action in everyday life further strains any attempt at defining what games are – recalling the Wittgensteinian critique about definition – while simultaneously emphasizing the trouble with determining what one distinguishes as “everyday life.” Another way of putting this problem might be: how many game elements does it take before the structure to which they are applied is simply identified as a game? Part of the problem with this slippery categorization can be addressed by considering the extent to which elements are capable of facilitating ludic attention.

At this intersection of games and other human activity, the issue of separation, specification, and the constitutive paradox of the magic circle emerges again in another form, and the problems with the ephemerality of the experience of separation remain central to debates about gamification. Also in Wittgensteinian fashion, “gamification” itself is a contested term for a family of related practices that involve something like Deterding et al.'s “game elements” and

²⁴⁹ Walz and Deterding, 2.

their application to various contexts. A popular, but contested, example of an element that often identified with gamification is the use of points by credit card companies to encourage spending. The simplicity of the example can be viewed as either its genius or the conditions of its inanity. The rising popularity of these practices has proponents, skeptics, and critics, but these different perspectives tend to revolve around the issues of persuasion that emerge in the attempt to use game elements as part of structures for other activities.

The most common game elements used in gamification are the use of points and badges to reward particular actions, as in the credit card example, and leaderboards to drive competitive achievement. These basic elements use simple extrinsic rewards in the attempt to motivate particular behavior. As a comprehensive collection of debates around gamification, *The Gameful World* brings together various perspectives that reflect on the surge in the application of these familiar game structures in non-game contexts. Alongside expressions of enthusiasm about the motivational effects of game elements, there are concerns ranging across familiar political topics in the 21st century – e.g., exploitative business practices, privacy in the digital age, and insidious means of social control. At the core of these disagreements about gamification is the same tension between compellingness and compulsion that emerges in the context of F2P games and the trouble with disentangling those two persuasive effects. Proponents tout the possibilities for game elements to shape compelling experiences that will have immediate positive consequences that extend beyond the activity itself, while critics linger on the concerns about what designers of structures for interactions can convince people to do under the guise of a “gameful” experience. Even the large volume assembled by Walz and Deterding can only give an initial foray into the applications and attendant concerns, so the following engagement with the literature is only meant to briefly establish the field of the debate within which the insights about ludic attention

can inform how we think about the applicability of games and gamification in the lives of political beings.

Proponents, to speak generally of a wide variety of perspectives about potential applications, tend to focus on these persuasive issues as practical challenges in pursuit of the assumed goal of enhanced engagement. They understand compellingness – whatever term they use to describe it – as a powerful experience to be harnessed, while any amount of compulsion is justified in the pursuit of the right ends. For example, notable proponent Jane McGonigal, in her book *Reality is Broken*, describes her research as “proposing how we could leverage the power of games to reinvent everything from government, health care, and education to traditional media, marketing, and entrepreneurship – even world peace.”²⁵⁰ This scattershot of justifiable ends is treated as an inspirational possibility by proponents, while critics are alarmed by the unreflective proliferation of applications that attempt to draw on the compellingness of games and game elements.

There are two principal disagreements in the literature that can be put in terms of ludic attention. The first is whether or not game elements can actually establish the conditions required for them to be persuasive; the second is, if they can do so, whether or not we should consider that to be an opportunity or a concern. Proponents seek something like the disposition of ludic attention in order to inspire engagement, while critics question both the possibility of achieving that goal and the appropriateness of doing so in non-game contexts. The link between persuasion and attention emerges again with respect to the particular disposition that games facilitate. In exploring the contours of ludic attention, I began with an Aristotelian account of how seriousness and playfulness frame a continuum of dispositional positions that individuals can bring to any particular context. On this model, it makes little sense to suggest that certain

²⁵⁰ Jane McGonigal, *Reality is Broken*. (New York: Penguin Press, 2011), 8.

dispositional positions are *impossible* to achieve with game elements. Critics are certainly correct that there is more to the experience found within the structure of a well-designed game than points, badges, and leaderboards, but that should also leave open the possibility of well-designed gamification that facilitates ludic attention as well. These critiques are important clarifications about what is at stake in thinking about how ludic attention matters to political beings with respect to these issues of persuasion.

IX. Critics on the Limitations of Game Elements

Walz and Deterding apply Victor Turner's language of *liminoid* and *liminal* to distinguish between critics and proponents of gamification.²⁵¹ In this framework, critics of gamification consider games as sites of the possibility for *liminoid* questioning of the existing social order, and thus gamification is understood to be an improper application of structure in the interest of the existing social order. The conditions for the concerns of the critics are precisely the foundations of the promise of the proponents; the *liminal* use of game elements is an idealized means for achieving given ends. The validity of the goals pursued through gamification is taken for granted. There is more variation in perspectives than captured by this distinction, but it reflects a central disagreement about what games – or contexts that are structured in ways similar to games – should and should not accomplish.

There is also a disagreement about what is constitutive of games structures, as critics tend to reject the idea that the game elements most commonly used in gamification have more than a superficial resemblance to game structures. Margaret Robertson asserts that gamification makes this error by “taking the thing that is least essential to games and representing it as the core of the

²⁵¹ Walz and Deterding, 9. In this same section, the editors also associate this distinction with the tendency for critics to be game scholars and designers, while proponents are understood as novices from industry. They say: “Gamification has brought communities into the discourse around games and play whose rhetorics are alien and often anathema to the rhetorics of game designers and scholars.”

experience” and its current implementation would be better termed “pointsification.”²⁵² As with F2P games, the attempts to persuade are only effective by virtue of the other compelling aspects of the activity, as established by the rest of the game structures. Leaderboards, like the ones used in *Clash of Clans*, might be used to attempt to motivate achievement in the workplace, but critics would argue that the leaderboard only serves to enhance the already compelling activity that is the core play experience of a well-designed game; a dull job becomes a dull job with a leaderboard.

In a similar focus to Robertson, Ian Bogost’s argument about “Why Gamification is Bullshit” treats gamification as a hollow marketing ploy. Using Frankfurt 2005’s conceptual category of bullshit, Bogost notes how it “is used to conceal, to impress, or to coerce. Unlike liars, bullshitters have no use for the truth. All that matters to them is hiding their ignorance or bringing about their benefit.”²⁵³ Bogost argues that what proponents call gamification is simply a new cloak on the back of familiar business consulting practices – an attempt to capitalize on the excitement surrounding games to the sole benefit of the consultant: “Gamification is not really a style of game design or a manner of putting games to use. Rather, it’s a style of *consulting* that happens to take up games as its solution.”²⁵⁴ As such, proponents of gamification are not interested or invested in whether or not gamification has any effects as long as the trend is self-serving in the short-term. These *liminoid* critics are dismissive of the possibility of structuring experiences using game elements that resemble the experiences found within game wholes.

²⁵² Margaret Robertson, “Can’t Play, Won’t Play,” *Hide & Seek Blog*, October 6, 2010, <<http://hideandseek.net/2010/10/06/cant-play-wont-play/>>.

²⁵³ Ian Bogost, “Why Gamification is Bullshit,” in *The Gameful World*, 65.

²⁵⁴ Bogost, 68.

These critical voices tend to be dismissive of the possibility that game elements can achieve the same conditions as game wholes. On this point, Deterding reminds us that it is even rare that games achieve the level of engagement to which proponents of gamification aspire. It takes a well-designed game and the right circumstances for a game to be taken up as a meaningful site of action for a ludic community. Part of this argument is that the experiences found within games rely on the articulation of a complete experience, which is to say that the tenuous separation of the magic circle remains integral. Nevertheless, insofar as ludic attention emerges out of the structures of games, it seems reasonable to consider the possibility that game elements are possible of achieving the same dispositional effects by facilitating specification and separation. Both critics and proponents are focused on the persuasive effects that people experience with respect to structure and context, and ludic attention gives us a lens through which to consider those effects.

In Jaakko Stenros' article – through which I introduced the distinctions between structure, context, and disposition – he notes that “this ideal of approaching all kinds of situations *as* games underlines the similarity of game systems and other systems – a perspective omitting the element of playfulness.”²⁵⁵ Stenros provides a skeptical account of gamification in which he emphasizes that the structures of games function in tandem with the dispositions (or mindsets, in his terms) of those who act within the contexts established by games. The ludic attention that can follow from those contexts forms the foundation upon which compellingness and compulsion might occur. Stenros' argument is that an account of playfulness is paramount to the experience that gamification wants to co-opt, but that it is also violated by the very attempt to orient it. He summarizes: “The playful paratelic mindset is defined by doing things for the sake of doing them, not for an external goal. The process of cultural recognition of something as play or game can

²⁵⁵ Stenros, 204.

ensure the continuity of structure even once playfulness has been removed, but it is a step toward the serious.”²⁵⁶ His account of a movement towards seriousness resonates with a sense of ludic attention in flux as one becomes oriented towards ends that exist outside of the perceived magic circle of the activity. The activity may become less compelling, and thus less likely to compel, by virtue of this change in attention, but the financial success of F2P games reminds us that the transgression of the magic circle does not always have that effect.

X. Ludic Attention and the Persuasiveness of Separation and Specification

As mentioned above, critiques tend to focus on the ineffectiveness or the dangers of gamification; either game elements cannot do what they claim, or their successes ought to concern us due to their potential for manipulation. Both critiques originate from an understanding of the separation of games and their contexts. In the former, game elements cannot achieve the same ludic conditions as game wholes, while the latter expands upon the types of fears associated with F2P games about manipulation and exploitation. If game elements are to affect anything, they cannot do so absent some measure of separation. For critics like Robertson, who point to the fact that points, badges, and leaderboards do not comprise the essence of games, the ludic attention to which gamification aspires is dependent on more than these simple structures. These elements are, at best, crude attempts at achieving the specification of separate ends, and the simplistic attempt to use these structures may, in fact, undermine the attempt to inspire ludic attention. As Stenros suggests, a poor fit between structure and other contextual factors may draw serious attention to the structure itself, rather than permitting something like Csikszentmihalyi’s flow. Ludic attention is a necessary condition for compellingness, and ludic attention is difficult to achieve and maintain through structure.

²⁵⁶ Stenros, 216.

Beyond these doubts about possibility, however, are the concerns with the potential effects. If game elements are to achieve the separation and specification that facilitate the experience of ludic attention for individuals, then what are the resultant possibilities for manipulation? The importance of a ludic community that maintains the intersubjective context in which play activities can be considered meaningful is more threatening when that community becomes co-opted in the interest of profit margins. Of course, ludic communities face these implications in structures that we tend to recognize as game wholes as well. Professional sports associations, manufacturers of games and gaming equipment, and other such interested parties are important parts of ludic communities that benefit financially from the compelling characteristics of games. The idea that separation and specification could ever be disinterested and innocuous has been challenged at least since Caillois challenged Huizinga on the problem posed by gambling to the idea of the separation of the magic circle. Nevertheless, there is a lingering unease about the lack of agency implied by the use of separation and specification in the service of ends that remain obscured to those who pursue them.

It is because of the centrality of separation and specification to achieving this condition that ludic attention has the potential to be so alarming in its persuasiveness. The experience associated with compellingness can readily become an opportunity to compel. The sense that one is engaged in a context that is “dedicated to an act apart,” to recall Huizinga’s language, can render one amenable (or vulnerable, depending on one’s perspective) to certain actions. Under the effects of apparent separation and specification, game elements can obscure or redirect attention through the specification of particular ends that results in performing actions that are not of one’s own design.

This malaise returns the discussion all the way back to Aristotle and the imperative of intentional action. Regardless of whether we are in the world of McGonigal's aspirations of facilitating world peace or bolstering the earnings report for a national bank, there is a concern about the reflective intentionality of action that is challenged by ludic attention. Where is the virtue, Aristotle reminds us, in virtuous action that is done while one intends something else? Virtuous action requires that the actor choose to act for the sake of the action, and gamification explicitly aims at short-circuiting the element of *prohairesis*. The Aristotelian counterpoint for proponents of gamification is the model of habituation to virtuous action – that an action becomes choiceworthy through repeated exercise. Gamification, on this argument, lays the groundwork for *prohairetic* virtuous action. This, however, does not seem to be the argument of major proponents like Jane McGonigal. *Reality is Broken* explicitly posits that we need the gameful experiences to inspire participation in desirable (from the perspective of the designer) activities.²⁵⁷ From this perspective, gamification provides training wheels that never come off of the bicycle. They are a necessary aid to generate compelling activity; they do not do the work of exposing human beings to the underlying compelling qualities of the virtuous action, so as to convince them of the pleasure associated with the activity.

The issue with the current logic of gamification is that it focuses on how game elements orient people towards *ends*, rather than reflecting on how game elements can reflect on the *activity* itself. This issue addresses the concerns of Walz and Deterding's *liminoid* critics. Game wholes are intersubjectively set apart as sites of attenuated intentionality, which allows for ludic attention. Transitory ends help establish the context within which the activity is possible; it is the structure – of which transitory ends are a part – that facilitates the activity, not the activity

²⁵⁷ McGonigal, 13.

that facilitates the pursuit of ends. If there is to be an effect of gamification, something that transgresses the magic circle, then it needs to focus on the activity, not the ends.

As such, insofar as game elements are capable of inspiring ludic attention, then the merits of gamification can be found in the capacity to approach different activities with ludic attention. Gamification cannot be prescriptive of ends without simply being an attempt to compel by exploiting an aspect of human psychology. The problem with teleology in the account of Aristotelian virtue was that it proscribed the importance of a measure of playfulness with which we approach acting in the world. Gamification, however, can use transitory ends, as games do, to establish a context in which particular actions can be attended to with ludic attention. If there is a lingering effect of that attention, then it is as a capacity to approach an activity with a countervailing measure of playfulness as part of a context that would otherwise be defined by pervasive seriousness.

A capacity for ludic attention, developed relative to particular activities, can be a benefit of game elements as part of gamification, just as it is with game wholes. The possibility of inspiring ludic attention with game elements is an empirical question, and, as Deterding reminds us, it is a challenge for games and gamification alike; but the issue of what activities can, or ought to, be approached with a degree of the para-intentionality of playfulness is a political one. The agitation of Megillus is a reminder of how contentious it can be to challenge perceptions as to what ought to be approached with seriousness.

XI. The Political Problem of Appropriate Attention

The question that follows from the debate about gamification is about the types of activities that can be appropriately attended to with more playful dispositions – a question that precedes the issue of whether or not game elements can effectively be used to achieve that

disposition. As with the contestation over what was appropriate for different sites of action in the *Iliad*, the question of appropriate attention is a political one for gamification as well.

Gamification attempts to inspire particular dispositions towards particular activities, and that may be as contentious as Idomeneus and Ajax gambling was in the chariot race. If gamification inspires ludic attention towards personal finance via credit card points, then that initiates a debate about whether or not that is an appropriate disposition for that site. The credit card example readily lends itself to criticism through the blatant pursuit of the interest of the credit card companies. However, the same question becomes more interesting relative to other contexts, like those that comprise the well-intentioned variety of application in McGonigal's work.

When McGonigal aspires to reinvent "government, health care, and education" through gameful structures, the question follows as to whether or not political communities believe that those areas ought to be approached with anything less than what the Athenian Stranger calls "complete, blessed seriousness."²⁵⁸ Megillus is not the only one who recoils and objects to the reorientation of attention; he represents a common human response to such a challenge. As a result of that response, the issue of attention becomes one of political contestation about appropriate dispositions towards acting in public. There may simply be some things towards which human beings are unwilling to accept anything but serious attention. Still, the Stranger's argument about education and the imperative of embracing movement in the pursuit of truth is a powerful ally on the side of the application of gamification towards an appropriate disposition of ludic attention in a range of pursuits. Human beings may benefit, as Megillus does, from being challenged on what is worthy of a certain seriousness.

Insofar as the facilitation of ludic attention establishes the conditions for the development of a capacity for engaging with questions of what activities merit what types of attention, then

²⁵⁸ *Laws*, 803c

these attempts at gamification assist in preparing citizens to reflect and debate about the merits of the application of these structures in different contexts. The temporality that forms the foundation of the possibility of ludic attention – the stubbornness of that foundational paradox of the magic circle, which renders activity both experientially separate and imminently vulnerable – permits for individuals to step outside the disposition of attention that they brought to a particular activity in context, consider it, and assess whether or not that degree of intentionality was appropriate to the situation. The political problem of appropriate attention is one that ludic attention helps prepare citizens to confront, and the thoughtful design of structures in which citizens experience ludic attention is an important consideration for students of politics.

Postlude: The Virtue of Attentiveness

“As we have often said, then what is honorable and pleasant is what is so to the excellent person [spoudaios]. To each type of person the activity that accords with his own proper state [hexis] is most choiceworthy; hence the activity in accord with virtue is most choiceworthy to the excellent person [spoudaios]. Happiness, then, is not found in amusement [paidia]; for it would be absurd if the end were amusement [paidia], and our lifelong efforts and sufferings were aimed at amusing ourselves.”

– Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*²⁵⁹

I. Catching Pokemon at the Corner of State and Liberty

As I walk to and from the campus of the University of Michigan while completing this dissertation, I have to keep an eye out for people randomly stopping on the sidewalk to flick intently at the screen of a mobile phone. The summer of 2016 saw the release of the new “augmented reality game,” or ARG, *Pokemon Go* as a mobile F2P game. ARGs build game structures on top of the world around the player.²⁶⁰ In this case, *Pokemon Go* uses players’ mobile phone camera and global positioning system (GPS) functions to populate the world around players with monsters, known as “pokemon,” which can be “caught” using the mobile phone. The popularity of the *Pokemon* franchise and the novelty of the concept led to a massive early adoption of the game. Early numbers skyrocketed the game to the top of daily revenue for mobile games, and the game was downloaded more than 15 million times in less two weeks.²⁶¹ It remains unclear how extensive the game’s impact will be on how both game studies scholars

²⁵⁹ *Ethics*, 1176b25

²⁶⁰ ARG can also stand for “alternate reality game,” which is a related type of game in which a game fiction is built on top of the surrounding environment.

²⁶¹ “Top Grossing iPhone Games,” Think Gaming, accessed July 17, 2016.

James Surowiecki, “Is Pokemon Go’s Success Sustainable?” *The New Yorker*.

<<http://www.newyorker.com/business/currency/is-pokemon-gos-success-sustainable>> Accessed July 17, 2016.

and the broader population think about the effect that games have on their players. Initial accounts, however, take both sides of a debate that revolves around some of the key concepts elaborated in this dissertation.

ARGs are a part of Jane McGonigal's account of the benefits of gamification; these games provide frameworks for encouraging beneficial activity, and that is precisely the narrative that proponents of the effects of *Pokemon Go* are adopting. The game structure requires that players move around their local environment in order to find and capture pokemon. Players gain levels by catching more pokemon, and can train their pokemon to compete with other players at coordinated locations in the world. The mobility encouraged by these game structures is being heralded by some as a boon for social interaction for reclusive gamers and a call to exercise for those who would otherwise stay home.²⁶² These benefits resonate with the ideals of gamification for McGonigal and other proponents.

At the same time, there is a counter-narrative about the way in which the game distracts players from the world around them. There are fears about physical safety as a result of the way in which the attention that players lend to the game makes them unaware of their actual surroundings.²⁶³ Other concerns have emerged about the extent to which the game demands personal information from players as a part of the networked requirements for the game to function, and the attendant privacy concerns are masked by the compellingness of the game.²⁶⁴ Both the excitement and the concern reflect how appropriate attention becomes a politically

²⁶² Kyle Hill, "Pokemon Go Isn't Destroying Society, It's Making It Better" *Nerdist*. <<http://nerdist.com/pokemon-go-isnt-destroying-society-its-making-it-better/>> Accessed July 17, 2016.

²⁶³ Gabriel Rosenberg, "Pokemon Go Is Catching Us All – In Unexpected Ways." *NPR*. <<http://www.npr.org/sections/alltechconsidered/2016/07/11/485551781/pokemon-go-is-catching-us-all-in-unexpected-ways>> Accessed July 17, 2016.

²⁶⁴ Mazin Sidahmed, "Senator Al Franken demands Pokemon Go release privacy information." *The Guardian*. <<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2016/jul/12/al-franken-pokemon-go-privacy-concerns>> Accessed July 17, 2016

salient issue. *Pokemon Go* is not explicitly political in any way, but the way in which its structures act on the attention of its players becomes a political issue about how citizens ought to attend to different ways of acting in the world. Players of this game are experiencing the world in a way that is impossible absent these technological means, and it is a particularly ludic experience. The game has initiated, if only briefly, debates around the issue of appropriate attention.

As in the previous chapter, I would hesitate to adopt the position that the person catching pokemon at the corner of State and Liberty as I walk to campus is learning to find the city of Ann Arbor or the activity of walking more compelling. The temporary attention afforded by the game seems unlikely to render its activity autotelic in the minds of its players. Nevertheless, the surprising adoption of this augmented reality game does have interesting implications for the ways in which attention can be drawn, reoriented, and temporarily invested in virtual preoccupations that are found out in the world. It will be interesting to continue to observe how people think about playing with their surroundings, and whether *Pokemon Go* turns out to be another step towards Zimmerman's "Ludic Century."

II. Citizenship, Ludic Attention, and Gaming Literacy

The concept of ludic attention captures a particular disposition that is not readily associated with political life. We live in a world in which the virtue of the Aristotelian *spoudaios* carries the day as the dominant mode of how one ought to attend to activities, especially those understood as political. We live in a world in which we identify with Megillus' objection to the Athenian Stranger. But, we also live in a world in which we celebrate moments like Meriones' triumph in the funeral games. Games deliver an experience that is fundamentally

important to human experience, and they help to develop a capacity for ludic attention that matters to political beings.

Some scholars, especially those interested in the relationship between games and education, talk about gaming literacy.²⁶⁵ Players learn how to play games; they learn the possibilities and limits to acting within the game structures. The ways of obtaining literacy mirror the continuum of possible dispositions that comprise our ludic attention. Sometimes this is done deliberately and diligently with the intention of improving a skill, an approach of a relatively serious disposition, but it may also be the product of a more playful experience. Playing games develops tendencies and habits, with insights and innovations that occur while someone simply engages in a pleasurable, compelling activity. The proponents of gamification want to harness that potential towards specific ends, but I have argued that the effect is better thought of as a capacity of the individual. Furthermore, it is a political capacity by virtue of the way in which issues of appropriate attention become contested in communities. Gaming literacy goes hand-in-hand with a capacity for ludic attention that helps political beings navigate the various claims on their attention and the assertion of the merits of those claims. We diminish the development of that capacity if we want games to “do” something specific in the world, but that does not mean that the effects of games on players remain confined to Huizinga’s magic circle.

The “Ludic Century,” and its analogs identified in the literature, gestures at the importance of this sort of gaming literacy for human beings who will continue to confront the systemization of the digital age. Insofar as one is concerned about the persuasive character of these systems, it is also worth appreciating the ways in which human beings act within the

²⁶⁵ Eric Zimmerman, “Gaming Literacy,” in *The Video Game Theory Reader 2*, ed. Bernard Perron and Mark J.P. Wolf (New York: Routledge, 2008).
Constance Steinkuehler, “Massively Multiplayer Online Gaming as a Constellation of Literacy Practices,” *E-Learning and Digital Media* 4,3 (2007): 297-318.

contexts established by those systems. The capacity for ludic attention is central to the ways that human beings have, and will continue to, engage with the structures in which we participate as part of our lives in common. Aristotle, for all of the merits of his thought, is incorrect when he separates playfulness from a virtuous disposition; or, at least, the specificity of the meaning that he attaches to *spoudaios* and *paidia* distorts how one reads his argument about an appropriate disposition of attention. Instead, it is the Athenian Stranger who introduces a more apt account of how human beings actually negotiate the experience of, and reflect upon, the appropriate attention for a given context. It is this sense of the political importance of ludic attention that helps us think about how attention is part of a virtue of citizenship.

III. The Virtue of Attentiveness

The exploration of Aristotle and Plato in the first and third chapters provides two accounts of virtue related to attention. The Aristotelian model focuses on a mean condition of intentionality that reflects an appropriate attentiveness to particular activities. The Platonic model emphasizes the relationship between ludic attention and a predisposition to find pleasure in ruling and being ruled, the virtue of citizenship. The former points to the importance of developing an individual capacity through action, one that corresponds to a disposition of attention, while the latter renders that disposition as relevant to a political virtue through the pleasure associated with ruling and being ruled in turn. Ludic attention is a disposition that permits for such an experience in context. Contestation over appropriate attention links the relevance of the individual virtue of character to the political community, and political beings are more adept at engaging in that contestation by virtue of the compelling experience of ludic attention found within the contexts established by games.

The *Iliad* demonstrates how issues of attention travel across contexts, and the contemporary examples of games and gamification point to the concerns about persuasion that emerge out of the separation and specification that make games into distinct sites of action. With innumerable structures and contexts within which human beings act, the issue of how one ought to act relative to particular contexts remains as relevant as it was to the Achaeans outside of Troy. The depictions of, challenges to, and arguments about the significance of something like a virtue of attentiveness permeate these texts. This dissertation applies their insights in order to sketch a framework through which we might better appreciate our contemporary moment and the types of attention it requires, but it also represent only the initial steps towards doing so. If indeed we are at the beginning of a “Ludic Century,” then we ought to have a language for conceptualizing the necessary capacities of the citizens of that century, even if some of the lessons for that century are themselves millennia-old.

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