Speaker & Gavel

Volume 54
Issue 1 *Spring 2017*

Article 4

September 2017

Justifying Debate as "Cerebral Gymnastics" and as "Glorification of the Experience of Play": An Alternative to William Hawley Davis's Rejection of the "Debate as Gaming" Vision for Debate

Matthew P. Brigham
James Madison University, brighamp@jmu.edu

Justifying Debate as "Cerebral Gymnastics" and as "Glorification of the Experience of Play": An Alternative to William Hawley Davis's Rejection of the "Debate as Gaming" Vision for Debate

Matthew P. Brigham, Ph.D. -- James Madison University

Matthew P. Brigham, Ph.D. (University of Pittsburgh)

Dr. Brigham is an Assistant Professor in the School of Communication Studies at James Madison University. He teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in a number of areas, including advocacy and rhetoric, and interdisciplinary programs in political communication, environmental communication, and sports communication. He competed in and coached debate at Baylor University, and has coached at the University of Pittsburgh (where he earned his Ph.D.) and at his current university. His research focuses on the use of rhetoric, argument, and debate as lenses for understanding public and academic controversy.

Proper APA citation for this article is:

Brigham, M. P. (2017). Justifying Debate as "Cerebral Gymnastics" and as "Glorification of the Experience of Play": An Alternative to William Hawley Davis's Rejection of the "Debate as Gaming" Vision for Debate. *Speaker & Gavel*, *54*(1), 71-93.

Justifying Debate as "Cerebral Gymnastics" and as "Glorification of the Experience of Play": An Alternative to William Hawley Davis's Rejection of the "Debate as Gaming" Vision for Debate

Matt P. Brigham

William Hawley Davis's "Is Debate Primarily A Game?" (1916) represents an early, prominent effort to justify academic, intercollegiate debate and also, indirectly, societal debate. Davis sharply rebukes those who would conceptualize and/or practice academic debate as if it were a game, arguing instead for a version of debate that more closely approximates real democratic deliberation and thus cultivates the training necessary for meaningful public participation on serious issues. This essay explores other possible justifications for debate, including those that might re-claim play, game, and/or sport. Such alternatives suggest the importance of conceiving debate beyond tragic frames and Platonic Truth claims, in ways that might better envision the possibilities of debate and therefore provide strong public justifications for debate as academic activity and as democratic practice.

Keywords: Justifying Debate, Gaming and Play, Tragic and Comic Framing, Argumentation, Forensics

From the earliest beginnings, including but not limited to ancient Greece in the time of the Sophists, those connected with practices of academic/intellectual and/or societal debate have sought to conceptualize and justify the value of such activities. Changes in formal academic debate and in the role of debate in broader society have prompted the need, from time to time, to "give an account of oneself" (Butler, 2001; Butler, 2005), or in this case, of debate, both as intercollegiate contest and as societal, democratic activity.

William Hawley Davis's "Is Debate Primarily A Game" (1916) represents one of these prominent historical moments, though neither the first nor the last, where such a justification for the activity of intercollegiate academic debate, and indirectly of debate in American society, is offered. Davis's essay, placed among the earliest pages of what was then the new *Quarterly Journal of Public Speaking* and what is now the *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, offers an argument toward fellow debate educators and scholars, and indirectly to the broader academic and American communities, regarding the proper role of debate, and as a corollary, the types of practices that should be valued in such debate. Though Davis is talking about intercollegiate debating contests, his essay cannot be isolated in such neat categories, as he explicitly joins into

A previous version of this essay was presented at the 2016 National Communication Association convention in Philadelphia, PA.

a broader public conversation with the likes of Theodore Roosevelt regarding debate's value and role, a conversation that is never only about academic debating contests.

Since the publication of Davis's influential essay, many writings have offered competing justifications for debate, which carry implications for how debate should look and operate, and which are also connected with the popular conversations about debate at the time. Similarly, since Davis's (1916) essay, a number of scholars have explored notions of play and gaming with regard to debate and forensics from historical (Bartanen & Littlefield, 2014, pp. 211-239), sociological (Fine, 2000; Fine, 2001), ethical (Snider, 1992), and many other perspectives. Davis's essay primarily seeks to craft a compelling justification for the activity of academic debating, and his focus is not on conducting any kind of systemic ethnographic or rhetorical analysis of texts, such as specific contest debates. Such aspects are woven into his argument, but his essay is more of an articulation of the value of debate than an empirical examination of particular practices manifesting in contest debates during his time. Similarly, my essay focuses on Davis's vision and justification, as a way of imagining what alternative academic and public justifications for debate might be possible. In part, this essay does so by asking, based on information available, why Davis and others *think* debaters are drawn to the activity, and how that relates to how debaters *themselves report* their motivations for participating in debate. To the degree that the rationale guiding debaters is out of synch with the one crafted in public justifications, such as that provided by Davis, it may suggest the need to explore, re-frame, and re-invent the stories and justifications used to ground and legitimate academic debate. This inquiry may also suggest a need to re-imagine how debate is envisioned on the level of societal debate and how the example of academic debate could suggest another path for justifying a different kind of public, societal debate.

As Gehrke and Keith (2015) note in their history of the National Communication Association, understanding such history is important because "it can illuminate the past as well as the present. . . . at the end of an era, it becomes possible to understand assumptions and patterns invisible to those who made the history" (p. 1). Thus, listening to, working to understand, and critically analyzing and evaluating the words of Davis may help to better survey the range of possibilities, previously utilized and imagined alternatives, in terms of offering visions of the possibilities and justifications for academic debate, including what is entailed by considering whether to conceptualize debate as play, sport, or game.

This essay proceeds in the following steps. First, a number of preliminary definitions and distinctions are advanced, including in terms of definitions of and varieties within gaming, as well as a discussion of types of debate, in order to guide the overall arc of the essay. Second, the major arguments that Davis (1916) delivers are presented and described. Third, Davis's vision of and justification for debate is subjected to critique, considering what his *vision of* and *justification for* debate highlights and downplays, and what other visions and justifications could be developed as alternatives, including whether the language of gaming and the preference for a comic rather than tragic framing might provide a meaningful alternative. While in part such

visions of and justifications for debate are time-dependent, in other ways they possess a relatively timeless appeal. For instance, one could read Davis's essay alongside the arguments of his primary interlocutor, J. M. O'Neill, in 2016, one hundred years later, and observe substantial overlaps between visions of and justifications for debate offered in 1916 and 2016. Indeed, when Llano (2017) examined the debate between Davis and J. M. O'Neill over the role of debate, he reminded us that, "Although competitive debate in 1916 differed in many ways from today's debate, both grappled with many of the same issues," (p. 2) to which might be added, not just practices and issues like judging, as Llano indicates, but similar issues with justifying the activity itself. Finally, implications and contributions are offered.

On Gaming

In considering the varieties of visions of and justifications for debate, as examined through the words of Davis, the role of gaming is important. Thus, this essay explores the various ways that gaming has been understood in the past, and begins to imagine and reflect on the horizon of possibilities in which both gaming and debate could be considered moving forward. To provide some starting points, this section first considers definitions of gaming and the scholarship of gaming, and then differentiates genuine and disingenuous gaming, generally and regarding debate.

Gaming and Play as Areas of Academic Scholarship

Most scholarship today that discusses "games" and/or "play" does so in relation to highly particularized and technological practices, such as video games and computer games (Torner, Trammell, & Waldron, 2014). Such scholarship analyzes computer gaming and video games as, among other things, sites of technological, social, and/or cultural practice (Aarseth, 2001). Potentially lost in this contemporary narrowing of the field is a much older scholarly trajectory that seeks to understand games, play, and often sport as well, not in terms of any particular activity or accompanying technology, but in terms of the functions that they fulfill for the human condition (Mäyrä, 2006). Such scholarship has attended to gaming and play from numerous disciplinary approaches, including psychology, sociology, and anthropology, producing an important and rich body of academic insights (e.g., Sutton-Smith, 1980; Sutton-Smith & Roberts, 1981).

There is not, however, a consensus view about how to define or understand games and play. As Murray (2006) notes, there remains a "notorious difficulty of defining games" (p. 187) while play is an "even more contested category" (p. 187). Indeed, as Murray (2006) reports, the renowned philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein saw "games as exemplary of how messy linguistic categories are" (p. 192). Similarly, Juul (2001) works through a variety of attempts to define games and play, indicating the never-ending problems that such academic clarifications encounter. Nevertheless, Juul (2001) gives particular credit to the work of Sutton-Smith in the area of game and play studies, and Sutton-Smith and Roberts (1981) offer one persuasive account for gaming and play, in this more historically and culturally situated understanding of play, games, and sports:

> *Play* is a subset of voluntary behaviors in which the individual reverses the usual relationships of power (e.g., a child is in charge of a situation), by enacting prototypical behavior patterns in a vivid manner. *Games* are a subset of play, in which a rule-governed system of competitive behavior results in one side winning the competition. *Sports* are a subset of games, in which, in addition to the main participants, other individuals participate vicariously. (p. 426)

In the present essay, justifications for and imaginings of debate are explored, using this full range of meanings. Based on these definitions, a few particularly important characteristics seem to be clearly established. First, play is something that is voluntary, rather than coerced or mandated. Thus, anyone participating has made the choice to spend time on this activity rather than another. Second, play and games offer the opportunity to explore and even re-cast power relationships. For instance, role-playing as institutional agents, as policy debaters often do when acting as though they were representing the United States federal government, offers an opportunity for perspective-taking that exceeds the debater's own subject position and degree of personal and political power. Third, games suggest competition, with an end result that is generally either a win or a loss, and the idea of some type of rules or norms that shape a common experience for those playing. Fourth, as suggested in this essay, play might also be understood as a kind of spirit or motivation that leads people to want to take part in games and sports, even if they know they might not win. For instance, as Poulakos (1995) suggests, the Sophists identified rhetoric as being a form of playfulness: "one plays not only for a victory but also for the pleasure inherent in playing" (p. 65). Finally, those games that have formal audiences and/or "fans," who can vicariously feel as though they are participating from afar, may be termed sports. However, even games like debate, which have very small immediate audiences, can still have other actors (such as other department members and those in university administrations, politicians, and those in the media) following, monitoring, and even possibly surveilling what occurs within debate, ready to intervene should there be concerns. Thus, this work by Sutton-Smith and Roberts, supplemented with accounts by those such as Poulakos, offer a starting point, all while keeping in mind that, since there is no uniformly agreed upon definition for any of these terms, other meanings are also possible.

While the preceding definitions and characteristics provide a broader landscape with which to consider play, games, and sports, additional theorizing is necessary to understand the ways in which these categories, and gaming in particular, become subject to criticism and even scorn. Thus, what follows is an attempt to differentiate *genuine* from *disingenuous* gaming, without at this point narrowing such reflections to any particular game or activity itself.

Genuine and Disingenuous Gaming

The previously stipulated definitions of play, gaming, and sport do not seem to be particularly controversial, though the criticisms of game-based approaches to any number of social activities are plentiful and often delivered forcefully. Thus, what might account for the division between games, which appear good on their own terms, and a gaming model, which

seems fraught with suspicion and potential corruption? In part, such suspicion may relate to the extension of characteristics of games, play, and sports, by way of metaphor and analogy, to other spheres of human activity where they might not neatly and/or appropriately transfer. For instance, discussing politics or war using the language of gaming may strike audiences as an inappropriate over-extension. In part, however, what seems to make such extensions problematic is not necessarily anything tied to the defining characteristics of a "game" itself, but rather to the use and abuse of those who play games.

I account for this phenomenon, of those who undermine the game based on how they approach and play it, by offering a distinction between genuine and disingenuous gaming. Genuine gaming, as defined here, relates to those core characteristics of gaming previously described: *a competition with a clear outcome, a set of rules or norms that provide a basic structure by which to play the game, an activity done by choice that examines and plays with notions of power, and one that may or may not have a fan base, but likely has agents who participate vicariously, if nothing else to monitor and intervene if problems arise, either in day to day competition or in the larger vision/trajectory of the game itself.* And perhaps, most importantly for the purposes of this paper, those who seek to play games *genuinely are characterized by a spirit of play that necessarily includes a sense of anticipation and joy in partaking of the game, regardless of whether or not they amass trophies or win more frequently than they lose.*

What, then, differentiates whether someone plays a game in a disingenuous way? While there is no ultimate, hard and fast distinction, clues reside in implicit contrasts to what makes gaming good. First, whereas genuine gaming may initially attract, and even retain, participants due to competition and more specifically competitive success, defined in the narrowest sense as "winning" the game more frequently than "losing" it, it is only in disingenuous gaming that *all other purposes for gaming are subordinated to the overarching commitment to trophies and competitive success, particularly in such a way that one might regret years of dedication to a game if the final conclusion of one's playing career does not end in instrumental victory*. Because of the unhealthy dependence on victory, *victory often becomes victory at all costs, where cutting corners becomes if nothing else a necessary evil in pursuit of the ultimate goal*. Thus, whether the act be performance-enhancing drugs in athletic competitions, students of law and medical schools hiding readings from one another in the library, or even wiretapping the Watergate Hotel, the maniacal obsession with victory at all costs leads those observing such behavior to react with a feeling that something is very wrong, or at a minimum, bizarrely out of balance. Unfortunately, a certain metonymic relation may emerge, in which those who have abused games and gaming begin to stand in for all of those who participate in games, with the lesson being a strong caution against framing the most "serious" parts of the social world through a gaming metaphor. That is, the worst instances of disingenuous gaming, in arenas such as sports and politics, become so hyper-visible and criticized that people tend to forget that those guilty of such abuses are ultimately but a small subset of those involved in such games.

If one part of the focus of this essay concerns the nature and abuses of gaming and play, a closely related element relates to what is referred to when "debate" is being analyzed, critiqued, proposed, and justified, in the works of Davis and others.

On Justifying "Debate"

In 1916, the many types of and organizations housing debate were not at all like they are now. Thus, Davis would not have had to specify a particular kind of debate or an organization housing those competitions when making his critique. However, in the century since, an elaborate infrastructure has arisen, with many different kinds of debate and many debate organizations as well, suggesting a substantially changed scene for engaging in, envisioning and justifying, and/or exploring in scholarship aspects of debate.

In another way, though, there are important similarities, including that, whether in 1916 or 2016, the boundaries between public debate and academic competitive debate have always been more permeable than they might at first seem. For instance, in 1916, Davis and his colleagues were still attempting to respond to the forceful critiques made by President Theodore Roosevelt against the practice of "switch sides" debate as had become prominent, in part to make tournament competitions possible. Thus, when Davis (1916) opens his essay with the words, "Debating is under fire" (p. 171), he means not only within the academy, but also throughout society, while his own model for intercollegiate debate, "counterfeit presentment" (Davis, 1916; Llano, 2017), aims to make debate operate as "an approximation of actual conditions, of 'real life,'" (Davis, 1916, p. 173), thus again blurring the tidy distinctions between type of competitive intercollegiate debate and the model for societal debate.

In 1954, the boundaries again blurred, as the national policy debate topic was about whether the U.S. should recognize Communist China, and many universities including the service academies refused to or were not permitted to take part. This became another moment in which intercollegiate debate and societal debate became mutually implicated and where the borders of each became less precise and absolute (English et al., 2007). And most recently, in the 2016 presidential election, the lines attempting to neatly characterize competitive and public/societal debate were crisscrossed. For instance, the debate over whether Ted Cruz had been a "good debater" in college became an enduring *topos* in the election analysis, but despite attempts by those in the debate community to specify the type of debate he did, often to try to disown him, the media and the public were not at all concerned with such distinctions. Moreover, those in various parts of the debate community were called in to advise how one might debate against Donald Trump, under the assumption that what "works" in competitive academic debate has some crossover appeal in the realm of public, societal debate. Thus, contributions to the public conversation began to appear, such as Aaron Kall's edited volume *Debating the Donald* (2016), whose selections were written completely by those with expertise in intercollegiate debate, offering advice to those in the public sphere as to how to engage in societal debate against Trump.

Thus, on the one hand, a study focused on individual debate contests at intercollegiate tournament sites during any time in the last several decades suggests grounded practices that look and sound very different, depending on the sponsoring forensics organization and the type of debate being adjudicated. However, the vision, purposes, and justifications for debate, specifically in the intercollegiate setting but indirectly in terms of societal debate, suggest that for these purposes any such boundaries, of organization or event classification, are substantially de-emphasized in favor of larger discussions whose apparent borders and boundaries are highly permeable and contingent.[1]

Having framed notions of gaming, types of debate, and the purpose driving the kind of justification for debate offered by Davis (1916), the next section offers a detailed description of his overall argument, followed by a critique of his position.

Debate's Purpose as "Dealing with Serious Affairs": Davis's Critique of "Debate as Gaming"

The historical moment surrounding William Hawley Davis's 1916 essay was one of upheaval and change. His is one of the earliest essays in the newly formed academic discipline of speech communication, inaugurated with the teachers of public speaking parting ways in 1914 from their former home discipline to form their own organization—what we would now identify as the National Communication Association. Furthermore, this article was published in the new discipline's original flagship journal, the *Quarterly Journal of Public Speaking*, in just its second year of existence. Just as the academic space for public speaking teachers was very new, including its outlets for publishing scholarship, so too were conceptions of intercollegiate debating. The transition to more and more competitive approaches to debate were growing in Davis's time, and the rise of the tournament model was not far behind, as it "gained popularity among colleges in the 1920s" (Bartanen & Littlefield, 2014, p. 49).

Therefore, amidst an array of academic and organizational change, Davis's essay stands as one of the most well developed and comprehensive of the early accounts to wrestle with this challenge of providing a vision of and justification for debate, particularly as an intercollegiate, academic activity, but more broadly for societal debate his well. His essay provides such a

[1] The types of debate analyzed in this essay are, then, three-fold: historical debate (circa 1916), before such divisions of debate had become prominent; societal debate (which might be termed "public debate," were it not the case that public debate is its own specific genre of debate practice in contemporary times); and intercollegiate/academic debate (though at the level of overarching vision, purpose, and justification, rather than as conceived based on particular forensics organization or rules/structures of specific types of debate). Nevertheless, as a basic disclosure, the author's own experiences, as debate competitor, coach, judge, and scholar are grounded in policy debate in the NDT/CEDA tradition, and accordingly, a significant amount of the literature cited in the essay draws from that tradition. To avoid the assumption that any debate tradition, NDT/CEDA or otherwise, represents an unmarked, universal form, future scholarship could examine the ways in which discussions of debate's vision, purpose, and justification might differ, even if only subtly, across numerous debate organizations and types.

justification by attending, though at times only implicitly, to three different levels of audience: those in debate, those who were the early public speaking teachers in the new discipline, and those in the public sphere, either who were raising ever greater challenges to the legitimacy of intercollegiate debate practices and approaches and/or those trying to figure out the broader role of debate in society. Among the former, Davis specifically references the loudly pronounced condemnations offered by Theodore Roosevelt about debate, particularly in its use of "switch sides" debating practices in which debaters would be asked to alternately argue for and against the same propositions throughout their time in competition. Therefore, while there are many iterations of this debate about debate, including whether it should be understood and practiced as a game, Davis's essay occupies a unique intersection and constellation of competitive, organizational, academic, and political concerns, and his essay is one that has, since its original publication, continued to be cited and referenced in these ongoing debates (Atchison & Panetta, 2009; Cox & Adams, 1993; Llano, 2017; O'Neill, 1916; Panetta et al., 2010).

Davis and Debate's Fork in the Road: Toward What End Should Debate Be Oriented?

Davis (1916) argues forcefully for a shift in debating practices toward the civic, the practical, and the commendable, offering a sharp rebuke of those who would approach activities of intercollegiate debate as a game:

> One thing is certain: that, frankly accepted as a game, debating becomes a monstrous affair. A game is engaged in for fun; practices clearly improper in dealing with serious affairs, actual conditions, become permissible and even important in the realm of the sport; they are 'part of the game.' . . . Where shall the strategy of the debater begin or end if debating is primarily a game? . . . specious structures of argument can hardly be ruled out; the more cunningly specious they are, the more commendable, as the fruit of brilliancy and industry, they become. As participants in a game, debaters may devise artfully misleading arguments or wordings. (p. 175)

Thus, for Davis, the framing of debate alongside other games ensures that it suffers the same troubles, yet with higher stakes, as it opens the floodgates to any tactic, however deceptive, in the pursuit of immediate, instrumental victory.

Davis, throughout his essay, does at times mention specific practices in debate, but these are ultimately not his focus. Instead, vision of and justification for debate seem to be the guiding spirit behind his article: "Debating seems to me most in need of readjustment with regard to its aims, its ideals" (Davis, 1916, p. 172). In fact, Davis (1916) argues clearly that addressing the questions of vision and justification will itself translate into changes in practice: "Changing the ideal will change also the thing itself. But upon that aspect I shall not now enlarge" (p. 172). In that light, he foregrounds two visions of debate that he finds to be ultimately in tension and likely incompatible: debating as a game on the one hand, and debate "as training for the wise disposition of important factors" throughout democratic culture, in which debate is meant to serve as "an approximation of actual conditions, of 'real life'" (Davis, 1916, p. 173), on the other hand. After elaborating the constituent elements and tendencies of each approach, and

acknowledging that these two camps are more about tendencies than pure exemplification of either spirit (and thus are also not mutually exclusive), Davis (1916) suggests that the stakes of this decision could not be higher, for debate and, by implication, for democratic society as well:

> And the leading colleges, and an organization such as this Conference, cannot too promptly begin to revise and improve debating ideals and practices, if this important means of securing effective training in speaking is to be rescued from merely a place in the encyclopedia of ancient and curious games and pastimes, and made what it is capable of being—an enduring and an honorable means of preparing citizens to participate in the work of living and governing, of deciding intelligently and confidently the serious questions which from time to time arise. (p. 179)

Having identified the central elements of Davis's argument, I turn next to a critique of his essay, examining both the potential upsides to a "gaming"-type approach to debate, while also suggesting limits to approaching debate as "an enduring and an honorable means" to investigate "serious questions."

Debate as Something Exhilarating, Joyful, and Fun, and Not Merely Serious and Somber: A Rejoinder to Davis

This section argues that William Hawley Davis's image of debate as serious business causes him to be dismissive of games and sports and ultimately misunderstands both the role and potentiality of debate, game, and sport.[2] Indeed, the focus on gaming neither helps to illuminate debate's situation better nor aids in better conceptualizing games or, relatedly, sports. Ultimately, the somber and serious tone that structures the critique of Davis and those who make similar gestures serves to bracket the humanity of debate's potential participants. As Howe (1982) suggests, "human beings stand alone in the animal kingdom in their ability to laugh" (p. 2). He suggests that "perhaps one of the cardinal sins of American educational debate has been its tendency to take itself too seriously," with "the dry, uninteresting nature of the speeches" needing to "take some of the blame" for the fact that "the appeal of debate has waned in consequence" (Howe, 1982, pp. 1-2).

By way of Davis's (1916) presentation of the seriousness of debate as that which separates it from activities that are more frivolous and trivial, even "notoriously ephemeral" (p. 174) diversions like game and sport, it might be possible to understand why people do not, in general, flock to see debates in action: an inattention to debates as reaching out to the entire human.[3] Whether in 1916 or 2016, one might lament the laziness of the electorate or the short

[2] Though the focus in this essay is more about the possibilities of gaming and play, others have sought to expand our considerations of and even rehabilitate sport (and war) as metaphors to think about argumentation (Aikan, 2011).

[3] Though this analysis seems to point to specific changes in debate at different points in American history, I would instead suggest here that the question of seriousness and fun, broached by Davis in 1916, is examined much later by Howe in 1982, and thus contains an important continuity. Of course, in the intervening years, other changes have happened, such as the rate of delivery (in terms of words per

attention span of young people as reasons for lack of interest and attention to debate, whether academic/intercollegiate or societal, but perhaps instead it might be more fruitful to think about what might be involved in justifying debate as something fun and enjoyable rather than endlessly serious. Should insights from gaming and sport aid in that reconceptualization and re-framing of the activity's justification, those linked with academic trajectories of debate should not regard themselves as superior to or "above" such approaches.

Gaming: Motives and Motivations

As described earlier in this essay, genuine and disingenuous gaming can and should be distinguished. Any game contains participants who "con" it out of an overwhelming desire to win at all costs. But gaming can uniquely spur creative imagination. Indeed, Sutton-Smith (1980) has noted that, whereas in the past, the factory model of society minimized the value of play, "Today where the need for original and innovative thinkers cannot be satisfied at any level of government and economics, we are relatively more open to this ludic domain [play] seeking out new possibilities and new alternatives" (p. 10). Indeed, in this shift that Sutton-Smith (1980) describes, there has begun to be an examination of play's "value in its own right" and to the "glorification of the experience of play" (p. 9). Davis, however, understands games in a different and less positive way.

Davis (1916) makes a series of objections to the gaming model of debate. Unfortunately, more often than not these objections are less supported with evidence than merely assumed by Davis to be held already by the audience. For instance, he asks, "is there anyone . . . who can deny" (Davis, 1916, p. 171) the objections he poses regarding debate, and yet he has already

---

minute), but by stepping back to examine controversies over vision, purpose, and justification of/for debate, it is possible to see more continuity than sharp break across time. In Davis's time, debate was an immensely popular event with a large following: "debating is probably, next to athletics, the most widely practiced educational exercise in the country" (Davis, 1916, p. 171). Since then, audiences for most forms of intercollegiate debate have vanished, as specialization has often crowded out popular appeal. Despite such an apparent shift, there is a broader continuity. Witness, for instance, the excitement that public debates draw even now, in 2016. For instance, visits by debaters on international tours from places such as Great Britain, Japan, and Rwanda tend to draw large audiences on college campuses across the country (in fact, this is part of the context of Howe's [1982] essay, as well as Jones's [1994] essay). And the interest is not limited to international debate tours. On September 8, 2010, a public on-campus debate at the author's home university, James Madison University (JMU), between two JMU undergraduate debaters and Bruce Friedrich, former Vice President of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) on the topic of "Is Eating Meat Ethical?" "was attended by over 1000 members of the JMU, Harrisonburg and Shenandoah Valley communities" ("Past Events", n.d.). Perhaps the fun and exciting nature of these events, and the interlocutors that comprise them, suggest that audiences could be interested in other forms of debate as well. In any case, as previously indicated, the focus of this essay is not to lay out a comprehensive set of particular practices (format, kind of topic, invited audience, etc.), but rather to interrogate visions of and justifications for debate, how those do or do not link with participants' motivations to debate, and how these models/justifications inform broader societal notions of debate.

answered the question, "no sane man" (p. 171). Nevertheless, despite this strategy of argument, the critiques with which he most frequently leverages his criticisms seem not to bear on anything essential to debate itself, which could easily do without these defects and excesses. Many of these references are to practices unique to the time of Davis's essay that are no longer (and perhaps never were) common to debate, such as certain labels for one's debate opponents including "'colleague,' 'preceding speaker,' 'our opponents'" (Davis, 1916, p. 171), using "artfully misleading arguments or wordings" (p. 175) and "postpon[ing] refutation" (p. 175). Even when such practices have continued, at least in some varied form, into the present, it begs the question of whether such practices are in any way part of the essence of rather than merely incidental to a gaming approach to debate, and thus whether the ability to provide a vision of the purpose for debate that can serve as a public justification for the activity rests on such actions being identified as essential to debate when performed as a game. Ultimately, then, the correspondence, or lack thereof, between Davis's justification for and vision of debate and what is actually occurring in debate is not necessarily as important as tracing the terms under which he advocates for the activity.

Particularly because much of the backstory of communication, debate, and argument has foundations in the historical practice and theory of rhetoric, debate scholars should be particularly concerned with this distinction between genuine and disingenuous gaming. As Keith (2007) reminds, regarding those who would dismiss and delegitimize rhetoric, "like any technology, rhetoric can be well employed or abused . . . there are many versions of rhetoric; the question should be which will advance our common causes and which will not" (p. 3). Similarly, and in the context of debate, Rieke (1968) has argued for the need to reflect, with more nuance, on the legitimate and warped varieties of competition. He argues that the element of competition in academic debate is necessary for the "sustained intellectual intensity and depth of research" involved, and in leading students to want to participate in forensics in the first place, noting, then, that "Competition, therefore, will probably remain—and *should*" (Rieke, 1968, p. 68). Moreover, he argues that even addressing the more problematic elements of competition offer an important pedagogical opportunity: "learning to overcome the excesses and undesirable concomitants of competition is a good preparation for later life where the same struggle prevails with greater intensity" (Rieke, 1968, p. 68). Here, too, Rieke (1968) suggests that the problems of disingenuous gaming are no different for forensics than for other forms of gaming:

> As with the football coach who teaches his players to kick and punch in a pile-up, nothing is so disheartening as a teacher of forensics who coaches students to exploit the evils of competition rather than resist them. In such a case, the teacher should be eliminated—not competition itself." (p. 68)

Thus, the fact that there have always been those in games and sports who do vicious, underhanded things to each other is no more of an indictment than misuses of democracy to the concept of democracy, nor than human rights discourses manipulated to in fact deny people basic rights are a fatal indictment about the potential of human rights and its discourses, nor perhaps

most broadly than those who misuse rhetoric, argumentation, or debate thereby level any true condemnation on such arts.

Additionally, an exclusive or even primary focus on winning need not be intrinsic to a gaming approach, nor potentially even to one rooted in sporting. Jones (1994) set out to explore, in the context of debate, how notions of competition and gaming might be complicated. On the one hand, Jones (1994) points to a set of concerns that, while not the same as those articulated by Davis, are generally included in critiques of the gaming model: "If winning is the sole motivating force behind debate, then the justification of the pedagogical benefits of debate become suspect to budget-conscious administrators" (p. 66). Once he identified this as a perennial concern voiced in the literature, Jones raised a question that would seem to short-circuit the efficacy of this hyper-competitive, winning-focused approach to debate: if students are only motivated based on winning in competition, "why do students who are not continually winning maintain involvement in the activity?" (Jones, 1994, p. 66). In response, Jones (1994) reasons that there must be something more than accumulating trophies: "Since not all debaters can win, some sort of additional motivation to debate must exist" (p. 66).

What, then, helps to account better for such motivation? In what follows, Jones explores a set of motivational forces that, while tied to gaming and competition, are process-oriented rather than product-oriented—namely, such products being ballots with wins and losses. Jones (1994), through the use of surveys and follow-up interviews with debaters, identified a compelling reason for debaters to make the sacrifices of scarce resources, such as time, money, and opportunities to socialize, that are virtual requirements to participate in debate: "apparently few other activities provide the debater the opportunity to engage in the 'cerebral gymnastics' which debate requires. By participating in the cerebral-gymnastic process, debaters receive the rewards necessary to encourage them to continue in the activity" (p. 70).[4] Jones (1994) provides a more complete definition of this idea of "cerebral gymnastics," noting that debate requires significant "intellectual dexterity, flexibility, and diversity" in order to "stretch, adapt, and change with each situation" (p. 74). In so doing, Jones (1994) ultimately ends up blocking the associational logics that have equated gaming with competition with an overwhelming if not exclusive focus on winning:

> While winning is very much a part of debate, this study indicates that winning is a secondary manifestation of other primary motivational factors. Debate offers individuals a chance to engage in an activity which they perceive as involving critical thinking skills which cannot be found through other avenues. . . . cerebral gymnastics may provide a

[4] Though there has been a recent study (Mabrey & Richards, 2017) seeking to examine, among other things, attitudes by those in the debate community about why they participate in debate, and though this study developed and envisioned itself in part as an update to Jones' work, the categories they used to explore motivation ("social aspects," "competition," "education," "resume building," and "forms of activism" [p. 44]) did not offer as an option something similar to what Jones found in the 1994 surveys (namely, "cerebral gymnastics").

> common denominator among those who chose to debate. . . . Debaters debate for a wide variety of reasons. This study suggested that there is a marked difference between reasons for debating and motivation behind those reasons. . . . Cerebral gymnastics appears to be the motivating force, or reward, behind debaters' willingness to participate in an activity which provides very few tangible rewards. By engaging in cerebral gymnastics, debaters receive reinforcement that they are intelligent . . . [and they] find a great deal of satisfaction in that experience. (pp. 73-74)

Thus, pointing to the worst tendencies of those in games and sports to undermine their various activities, even if at first it seems like their efforts are able to "succeed," is not sufficient to undermine the value of games and sports as metaphor. Similarly, just because "gaming" talk has shown up among debate participants in explaining their motivation for involvement in the activity across time, in 1916 as in 2016, that does not mean that "anything for the win" is the unexpressed warrant for that claim. Instead, something like "cerebral gymnastics," which is a valuing of process rather than a win-loss record or a trophy count, already interrupts the neat, clear-cut distinctions with which Davis and many others have sought to undermine the gaming approach to debate.

Envisioning Debate's Rationale Outside of the Tragic Frame

Gaming may represent what Kenneth Burke and others have termed a comic corrective to the overly dramatic framing of the need for debate in academia and in a democratic society. Davis's reference to debate as being not just "about jest" or "playthings," but about "vitally important business," suggests the tragic frame. Through something like a comic "argument as play," gaming may re-humanize visions of and justifications for debate. Indeed, what Hariman (2007) argued, in defending Jon Stewart, might be capably extended to the need for a comic corrective for debate in society because, although differences in political culture clearly exist between 1916 and 2016, the sense of the precariousness of responsibility over public affairs then and now also suggests a fundamental similarity. Hariman (2007) claims that in contemporary political culture "we need a laugh" that reminds us of our "common fallibility," "the most authentically democratic attitude" (p. 275). The alternative, Hariman (2007) notes, is more problematic, since "democratic politics should never be a search for a Redeemer" as such a quest "can only lead to the wrong candidates in the short run, and authoritarian rule before long" (p. 276). Thus, he concludes, "Frankly, we all need to lighten up a bit, and here's why: only by admitting to absurdity and moving through laughter can one become really serious today" (Hariman, 2007, p. 276).

Davis's essay, in embodying a rhetorical approach that might be termed similar to a diatribe or a polemic, points directly to what the comic corrective was needed for in the first place, according to Burke and as explored by Hariman, as Davis's argument seems bound within the tragic frame. For instance, Davis (1916) suggests a tone of evil/manipulation rather than fallibility and mistakenness on the part of those he implies are his opponents: "If in establishing courses in debating and encouraging debate contests our colleges have simply been indulging the

sporting instinct, I have been grossly deceived" (p. 174). Moreover, he explains the problems of debate as a game with deeply tragic expressions: "debate becomes a monstrous affair. . . . clearly improper in dealing with serious affairs" (Davis, 1916, p. 175). In contrast, he prefers another vision for debate, because "I am impressed by the *reality* involved in a debating contest, by the inescapable fact that the debate deals with truth rather than jest, with things and not with playthings. . . . [a] method of dealing with pressing and important affairs" (Davis, 1916, p. 177). Holding to the gaming model is, for Davis (1916), even "suicidal" (p. 178), and the way that he rests his case represents a clear-cut preference for the tragic and, following Hariman, for a redeemer, though in this case the savior would be an activity rather than an individual. Such redemption, Davis (1916) argues, is only possible if debate, as something "important," "enduring," "honorable," and meant to decide "serious questions," can be "rescued" from occupying "merely a place in the encyclopedia of ancient and curious games and pastimes" (p. 179).

As indicated previously, overly serious debate, which guts the activity of affect and the human connection, including through humor, might actually be what is likely to relegate the activity to "the encyclopedia of ancient and curious games and pastimes" (Davis, 1916, p. 179). Notably, Burke made clear that the comic is not identical to the comedic, but perhaps conceptualizing and justifying debate might require some of both. I argue that is necessary to characterize politics, and for the purposes of this essay, debate practices and approaches to debate, as being about fallibility, mistakes, and errors, rather than evil sins, fools who are mistaken rather than villains who are challenging the ability for our society and for debate, as part of that society, to achieve its potential (Smith & Voth, 2002). It is also important, though, to be able to laugh, whether as described by Howe or by Hariman, rather than assuming that foolish and exaggerated practices in debate are worthy of scorn and derision, as Davis's essay as a whole performs more often than not. Indeed, as Burke (1937/1984) famously suggests, "The progress of human enlightenment can go no further than in picturing people not as *vicious*, but as *mistaken*" (p. 41). Such mistakenness is not a partisan challenge toward those with whom one disagrees, but an awareness that "people are *necessarily* mistaken, that *all* people are exposed to situations in which they must act as fools, that *every* insight contains its own special kind of blindness," allowing one to "complete the comic circle, returning again to the lesson of humility that underlies great tragedy" (Burke, 1937/1984, p. 41). Indeed, as just one illustration from a modern context: judging by the times when this essay's author has introduced video clips of "speed reading" to undergraduate students, such moments generally tend to produce laughter, a feeling like such activity is foolish and a foible among these otherwise intelligent people, rather than derision, scorn, and anger that such practices are going to undermine democratic deliberation that is so *seriously* needed and cannot be delayed.

Moreover, while Hariman's (2007) defense of Stewart is often grounded in the idea that his cynicism, so to speak, is deployed in relation to the flawed democratic culture it parodies and challenges, Davis's approach, as described by Llano (2017), uneasily negotiates a fundamental tension, regarding the value of a copy when what is being copied is deeply problematic. In

Llano's (2017) view, the virtue of Davis's "counterfeit presentment" is to be found in its "idea of verisimilitude": "Debate pedagogy was to be judged by how closely a contest debate resembled a real deliberation," because for debate to "serve as a mode of training for citizenship in a democracy, it had to represent a real deliberation as closely as possible" (p. 7). In this way, the counterfeit transitions to the real. However, Llano (2017) also points to Davis's model as being more explicitly normative, in seeing debate as a way to "teach good practices in crafting arguments for civil society" such that there should be "no distinction" between "'good debate' in educational settings" and "good argumentation in the civic arena" (p. 6). Though Llano (2017) dismisses O'Neill's objections, saying that the counterfeit did not need to "be a copy of bad practices in the public sphere" but could instead "help improve the 'real thing'" (p. 9), there seems to be a real risk that, should a democratic culture be flawed, debate as counterfeit may be too focused on reproduction of what is already present rather than offering viable counterfactuals of what could become a better civic space.

Advancing Truth or Self-Risk/Vulnerability?

While Davis advocates shifting debate from game to truth, most scholars studying arenas such as debate, argument, rhetoric, and communication, now reject Platonic Truth, even though many individuals who inhabit formal debate spaces as well as society as a whole continue to believe in and aspire toward this impossible achievement. Instead, it might be more useful to re-conceptualize debate around the values and goals of self-risk and mutual vulnerability, transforming Davis's "debater's argument" into a praiseworthy model that is capable of cultivating democratic habits. In imagining alternative possibilities for justifying debate, including in times like the present moment, when polarization seems to be everywhere, and social media and other technologies of communication and deliberation allow people to avoid and in fact refuse to speak across differences, cultivating democratic habits such as encouraging "self-risk" might be more urgent and fruitful than trying to force a particular notion of Truth on a highly pluralistic, diverse culture.

Davis's essay seems constantly attached to a larger intellectual mission grounded in a Platonist conception of Truth, making it difficult to reconcile with those who have identified Davis's advocacy as being in line with the project of the Sophists (Llano, 2017). For instance, he says that his approach "will tend to render futile brilliancy and industry, however great, when employed in advocating falsehood" (Davis, 1916, p. 173), which seems to read directly from Plato in his advocacy for dialectic as opposed to rhetoric. He also calls his approach one that involves a "'search for truth' aspect" (Davis, 1916, p. 173), and elsewhere suggests debate's role to be in "converting to truth" as opposed to simply recognizing "superiority in debating" (p. 175). Indeed, Davis (1916) disparages the gaming approach, conceding that perhaps it would be "superb fun," but then asking, "But will it not be despicable? Would any of us be proud of having a share in producing it?" (p. 176). Such a moment recalls, in Plato's *Phaedrus*, Socrates berating young Phaedrus for enjoying the creation and hearing of speeches on love without any reference to whether the arguments they make tend toward the True or Good or Beautiful.

The examples of Davis's reliance on a truth-centered model for debate could extend indefinitely. The point is that this model is one that many in the newly formed academic discipline (at that time, of public speaking and speech) would have already rejected, and one that most would be even more wary of now. A Platonic foundation for academic debate reduces debate to eliminating error and falsehood in the pursuit of discovering and uncovering Truth, in a way not dissimilar to Vatz's (1973) observation that the objectivism in Bitzer relegates rhetoric as a discipline to the bottom of the academic ladder. Such an approach begs the question as to why public speaking, rhetoric, debate, and argumentation are even necessary, and why they cannot already be accounted for by philosophers.

Debate could offer an underpinning that did not rest on notions of objective Truth claims. For instance, the work of two debate luminaries, Wayne Brockriede (1972) and Douglas Ehninger (1970), proposed that argumentation and debate should be about self-risk and vulnerability toward one's co-arguer. Dowling (1983), building on Brockriede's three-fold metaphor structure of arguer as rapist, seducer, or lover, suggests that the former two approaches are far too common in debate. By incorporating Brockriede's insights, Dowling (1983) "provides forensics educators with valuable guidance in improving the development of competitive debaters" (p. 237). Perhaps these dangerous tendencies as revealed in the approaches of rapist and seducer, rather than gaming itself, might better characterize the situation for which debate should feel compelled to change, just as inappropriate humor, rather than humor itself, might better focus our conversation about improving debate and its possibilities. Howe (1982) notes, in his call for humor and "wit" in debate, that such tactics should be enjoyable for all involved and "not be embarrassing or personally derogatory to anyone in the room" (p. 2). Therefore, the combination of self-risk and wit/humor help to create a situation whereby weaknesses of debate in its current form might be explored, thus beginning to set an avenue for reform that does not confine itself to the lowest hanging fruit, in this case an obsession with critiquing and condemning the gaming approach to debate.

Does Gaming Justify Debate As It Is Or Can It Be Used to Challenge and Transform It?

Davis (1916) claims that debate's leaders should regard debate as "an improvable, not a finished, product" (p. 172). In Burke's *Attitudes Toward History* (1937/1984), he opens by reflecting on his title: "Though the tendency is to pronounce the title of this book with the accent on *history*, so far as meaning goes the accent should be on *attitudes*" ("Introduction," para. 1). As an analogue, when talking about debate as a game, it is often assumed that the meaning of the word *game* is fixed, and that what is being addressed is whether *debate* as it exists now or could exist is or is not like a game. And this is misleading, in part because games as well as sports are not nearly as static and fixed as may be suggested in this equation. Even competitive, intense games have evolved, and in an interrelated sense, the vision of and justification for them has as well. Basketball has changed the shot clock's length, football has outlawed hits to the head, while in baseball, where tradition is sacred and thus such a radical change was never thought possible, instant replay now exists. But what does this mean for the way that debate is envisioned

and justified, regardless of particular historical occasion, governing association, type of debate, or more particularly still, specific practices within any given type or tradition of debate?

Universities always and unavoidably implicate debate, while benefiting in many ways from having debate programs (Hingstman et al., 2010, pp. 127-128). Debate programs, with rare exception, cannot and do not exist without an institutional home, one that can provide funding and legitimacy (Hingstman et al., 2010, p. 135). Debate, then, is closely interrelated with the university structure, to the point that both sides might find opportunities for mutual benefit, but might also instead find this relationship to be a nuisance or, at a minimum, an inconvenience at times (Mitchell et al., 2010). As its institutional host, universities at times make requests of what debate should become on their campuses (Hingstman et al., 2010, p. 137). And, the ways in which universities approach debate may too be "improvable and not finished," potentially to the gain of debate programs and their respective universities (Louden, 2010). But to work, I would argue that both spheres must be seen as dynamic, unfinished, and capable of modification. When debate programs request higher budgets and more coaches, without any given and take, the implicit assumption being conveyed appears to be that debate is fixed and unchangeable, and thus that debate as an activity should just stick with the "status quo" (Keith, 2010, pp. 22-23). Universities might question why debate itself cannot change: less travel, reducing the coaching and card-cutting "arms race," and/or adopting a "comprehensive" program including public debate, debate outreach, and debate in the curriculum (Newman, 1970). Thus, I argue that those in both academia and debate should see their own and each other's practices as dynamic and revisable. And since those in debate have less direct access to structures of university administration writ large, I believe that a first step might be to work a vision of debate as being about self-risk and vulnerability into the way that relations with universities occur. How, then, in crafting justifications for debate, might the vision of debate be crafted in a way that is not purely internally-focused, toward fellow members of the debate community, and not already fully constituted/defined in terms of its goals and practices? That is, can meaningful calls for critique and improvement be made toward debate if debate is grounded in justifications rooted in play, game, sport, and fun and joy?

In Burke's *Counter-Statement* (1931/1968), he explained the reason for its title as follows: "We have chosen to call it *Counter-Statement* solely because—as regards its basic concerns and tenets—each principle it advocates is matched by an opposite principle flourishing and triumphant today. Heresies and orthodoxies will always be changing places, but whatever the minority view happens to be at any given time, one must consider it as 'counter'" (p. 7). Though the names of the players change, and the battle lines are drawn differently, there is much to recommend a reading of continuity from Davis's day to the present. While Davis (1916) envisioned his own argument as going against the consensus of the time, regarding the proper attitude toward debate, in many ways the majority opinion by scholars currently writing about debate appears to be that the game and/or sports metaphor for debate is problematic. For instance, a recent essay by Kaylor (2015) concludes that, "as a result of the game metaphor's potential pedagogical problems, it should not be used as a primary way of depicting competitive

debate" (p. 43). Conversely, within the debate community, there may be more acceptance of this gaming metaphor, in terms of day to day practice if not in overarching justifications for the activity. In that role, it may serve as a tool of legitimation for what is already occurring in debate, rather than as a challenge to it. Thus, this essay takes up the challenge offered by Davis (1916) in the form of a double counter-statement: challenging the predominance of the critique and rejection of the "debate as game" metaphor in scholarship while simultaneously resisting debate's adoption of the game metaphor as a justification for maintaining and continuing its current practices, individually or as a whole. One exemplar that makes this double move can be found in Jones (1994), who both makes a scholarly argument for a type of gaming, while also challenging debate as it is conceptualized and justified. Rather than merely legitimizing current debate practices, Jones (1994), after challenging competition as being merely about "winning," suggests the potential to incorporate cerebral gymnastics into a debate program, without focusing solely on the tournament mode:

> A final conclusion regarding this study involves the possible need to rethink present program orientation. Programs required to justify budgets in terms of dollars spent and students serviced may want to explore providing non-competitive cerebral gymnastics opportunities as a means of attracting more students. Not long ago, I watched as two members of the traveling British debate team "beat up" on a good American open debate team, although the British team members never had competed in an intercollegiate debate competition. They were products of English debating "societies" which meet periodically, usually over a meal, to discuss and debate current events. On-campus activities offering cerebral gymnastics opportunities, without the required travel and competitive environment, might provide greater numbers of program participants for year-end reports. (pp. 73-74)

Note that this justification does not require a serious, even tragic orientation to the grave importance of debate in society, but instead embodies more of the unending, playful spirit characterizing the Sophists (Poulakos, 1995).

As this example from Jones (1994) illustrates, this essay is not meant to simply endorse debate in its current form. Indeed, there is much in debate that is in need of systematic reflection and change, though the list of such concerns is beyond the scope of this essay, just as Davis avoided making his 1916 essay into a comprehensive catalogue of the ills of debate at that time. The point of my critique is that gaming does not seem like it is or has ever actually been the primary cause or even a highly significant contributing factor in debate's argued weaknesses. Framing debate as needing ever more serious and sober analysis, particularly by divorcing it from gaming, sport, and fun, seems as likely, perhaps more likely, to turn people away from debate rather than toward it. And a model that emphasizes playfulness and affect, including joy, better suggests a public sphere role and relevance and attractiveness for debate. Conversely, writing out of public discussion those who would be the equivalent of spectators in the stands of mass sporting events is ultimately justification for technocratic rule by the few, if one decides

that people will not or cannot engage "intelligently and confidently the serious questions which from time to time arise" (Davis, 1916, p. 179). The question, then, facing those invested in debate, as competitor, judge, coach, and/or debate scholar, is whether they want people to come back to watch and participate in academic and/or societal debate, and if so, which mechanism is most likely to produce that change? Perhaps such inquiry might begin by observing that the problems of debate might spring from the ways in which it has potentially become banal, untheorized, and decontextualized, and that what is identified as "gaming" is more a reflection of that highly insulated model.

Returning to this essay's start, perhaps what matters, and what is needed, is for debate to, in the words of Butler (2001, 2005), give an account of itself as a way of justifying debate in and to society. A gaming or sports accounting of debate, if executed well, could be persuasive, such as with the focus on cerebral gymnastics as a guiding justification for the activity. And perhaps, in exonerating the spaces of game, play, and sport, it might be possible and even desirable to stop ceding the space for such activities in a democratic culture such that they get taken over by primetime television, including news networks, passing off some of the truly slimy as if it adequately embodied any of academic debate's conceptions of debate and argument and rhetoric. There are many ways to account for debate's goals and purposes in the 21st Century, and the possibility need not be ruled out, in advance, that game and sport could operate persuasively in debate's favor without cheapening it or causing it to go forever off course. As Sutton-Smith (1980) has argued, there may be much more possibility and richness to gaming and play than has been previously admitted:

> [R]ecreative behaviour is a cultural domain more likely to be open to change. . . . a people's play is a commentary on their kind of society and their management of that society. It tells us . . . about our own contradictions and compromises. At the same time it gives us imagined solutions. . . . Gathering people together into larger communities for festivals and games may generate the kind of community feeling, which is later institutionalized in a more enduring way. At the very least it is a commentary on our desire. When different groups celebrate together . . . they bring to their lives the kinds of vividness which we have earlier called play or flow. These have in them the seeds of a life which is more interesting and more connected in an age when many of the older forms of connection no longer seem so available or so meaningful. (p. 10)

Thus, gaming and play, understood as sites of cultural longing and human community, of who a people has been and who they could and would like and aspire to be, creates an open space in which questions can be asked and explored that could radically re-make and re-mobilize democratic and civic space. Rather than dismissing such a large sphere of human activity and becoming out of hand, those invested in debate, as a formal academic, intercollegiate set of practices, or in debate, as a way of societal exchange in the public sphere, would do well to make use of the spaces of play and gaming in order to argue for an academic activity and a democratic

society more in line with their visions of the joyous and the just than what is available in the current moment and what was available for Davis in 1916 as well.

Debating the "Serious Affairs" of the Day: Must We Be So Serious?

Were one to grant, following Davis, that the vital affairs of the day demand that debate serve as a positive force in engaging in democratic discussion and decision-making regarding current events of momentous importance, does this indicate that the proper attitude must be somber, angry, and/or serious as regards the importance and role of debate, rhetoric, and advocacy? I would argue, based on insights from other arenas of social activism, that we should not pin our hopes on this strategy, that is, on treating the serious seriously. Indeed, social justice activist and writer Michael Albert (2002/2015a) opens his advice to would-be advocates by invoking a comparison to games, and more specifically, sports, by arguing, "We might not like it, but we, too, have to try to win just like professional athletes do. That's the currency of success in social struggle" (p. 324). Despite the many serious issues that he argues must be addressed by those advocating for social and economic justice, or perhaps because of it, Albert (2002/2015b) specifically calls attention to the vital function of joy and levity if the revolutionaries he seeks to empower are to succeed in their instrumental goals:

> Trying to revolutionize society because it is fun is no joke. That is to say, if social change isn't fun, the probability that people will keep trying to do it through hard time and over the long haul is vastly reduced. So, it's actually important that people are engaged in activism because it's preferable to doing other things, which means again that we need a movement that does not involve perpetually going through a gauntlet of debilitating criticism that makes us feel rotten. Not that we can't be critical when appropriate, but we can't allow life in the movement to be so depressing that it's worse than working in a factory. Life in the movement can't be more boring, more negating, than life out in the real world. If we have a movement like that, what is the probability that it's going to win? (pp. 328-329)

The purpose of this essay is not to provide a blueprint for what debates filled with fun would look like. That is most likely dependent on the particular context and moment in which any given debate occurs. Instead, my overriding argument, in analyzing Davis alongside other possible, potential and imagined, visions of and justifications for debate, is that those enunciating such visions and defenses should consider couching the activity in a framework of joy and "cerebral gymnastics" rather than exclusively as something meant for the very serious tasks of attending to the grave state of democratic deliberation with serious approaches to engaging one another. Not only does a playful, joyous, and gaming-inflected model of debate affect who seeks to participate, and thus who constitutes the community, but it also suggests a vision for debate in democratic society that offers an alternative to being and becoming ever more serious and even tragic about those serious issues facing society.

References

Aarseth, E. (2001). Computer game studies, year one. *Game Studies*, 1(1). Retrieved from http://gamestudies.org/0101/editorial.html

Aikin, S. (2011). A defense of war and sports metaphors in argument. *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 44 (3), 250-272.

Albert, M. (2015a). Stop whining, start winning. In E. Ammons & M. Roy (Eds.), *Sharing the earth: An international environmental justice reader* (pp. 324-328). Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press. (Original work published 2002)

Albert, M. (2015b). Sustaining radicalism. In E. Ammons & M. Roy (Eds.), *Sharing the earth: An international environmental justice reader* (pp. 328-329). Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press. (Original work published 2002)

Atchison, J. & Panetta, E. (2009). Intercollegiate debate and speech communication: Historical developments and issues for the future. In A. A. Lunsford (Ed.), *The SAGE handbook of rhetorical studies* (pp. 317-333).

Bartanen, M. D., & Littlefield, R. S. (2014). *Forensics in America: A history*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Brockriede, W. (1972). Arguers as lovers. *Philosophy & Rhetoric*, 5(1), 1-11.

Burke, K. (1968). *Counter-statement*. Berkeley: University of California Press. (Original work published 1931)

Burke, K. (1984). *Attitudes toward history* (3rd ed., with a new afterword). Berkeley: University of California Press. (Originally published 1937)

Butler, J. (2001). Giving an account of oneself. *Diacritics*, 31(4), 22-40.

Butler, J. (2005). *Giving an account of oneself*. New York: Fordham University Press.

Davis, W. H. (1916). Is debating primarily a game? *Quarterly Journal of Public Speaking*, 2 (2), 171-179.

Dowling, R. E. (1983). "Arguers as lovers": Implications for forensics education. *Communication Education*, 32 (2), 237-241. DOI: 10.1080/03634528309378534

Ehninger, D. (1970). Argument as method: Its nature, its limitations and its uses. *Speech Monographs*, 37, 101-110.

English, E., Llano, S., Mitchell, G. R., Morrison, C. E., Rief, J., & Woods, C. (2007). Debate as a weapon of mass destruction. *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*, 4(2), 221-225. DOI: 10.1080/14791420701296646

Fine, G. A. (2000). Games and truths: Learning to construct social problems in high school debate. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 41(1), 103-123.

Fine, G. A. (2001). *Gifted tongues: High school debate and adolescent culture*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Hariman, R. (2007). In defense of Jon Stewart. *Critical Studies in Media Communication,* 24 (3), 273-277.

Hingstman, D., Hahn, T., Cram Helwich, D., Harris, S., Lain, B., Thompson, J., Lowry, S. (2010). Development and advancement in the coaching profession: A report on professional debate coaching positions and benchmarks for the profession. In A. D. Louden (Ed.), *Navigating opportunity: policy debate in the 21st century* (pp. 127-46). New York, NY: International Debate Education Association.

Howe, J. H. (1982). Debate should be a laughing matter. *CEDA Yearbook*, 3, 1-3.

Jones, K. T. (1994). Cerebral gymnastics 101: Why do debaters debate? *CEDA Yearbook*, 15, 65-75.

Kall, A. (Ed.). (2016). *Debating the Donald*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform.

Kaylor, B. (2015). It's all fun and games until someone loses the idea: Implications of the 'game' metaphor for competitive debate. *The Forensic of Pi Kappa Delta*, 100, 33-44.

Keith, W. (2010). Keynote address: A new golden age—intercollegiate debate in the twenty-first century. In A. D. Louden (Ed.), *Navigating opportunity: policy debate in the 21st century* (pp. 11-26). New York, NY: International Debate Education Association.

Keith, W. M. (2007). *Democracy as discussion: Civic education and the American Forum Movement*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.

Llano, S. M. (2017). The counterfeit presentment: An early 20th century model of intercollegiate debate as civic education. *Argumentation and Advocacy*, 53(2), 90-102. doi: 10.1080/00028533.2017.1304983

Louden, A. D. (Ed.). (2010). *Navigating opportunity: policy debate in the 21st century*. New York, NY: International Debate Education Association.

Mabrey, P. E., & Richards, K. (2017). Evidence based decision making and assessment for the Cross Examination Debate Association. *Contemporary Argumentation & Debate*, 36, 1-45.

Mäyrä, F. (2006). A moment in the life of a generation (why game studies now?). *Games and Culture,* 1(1), 103-106. doi: 10.1177/1555412005281912

Mitchell, G. R., Woods, C. S., Brigham, M., English, E., Morrison, C. E., Rief, J. (2010). The debate authors working group model for collaborative knowledge production in forensics scholarship. *Argumentation and Advocacy*, 47, 1-24.

Newman, R. P. (1970). The tournament in a balanced debate program. In J. H. McBath (Ed.), *Essays in forensics* (pp. 101-104). Hannibal, MO: Standard Printing Company.

O'Neill, J. M. (1916). Game or counterfeit presentment. *Quarterly Journal of Public Speaking*, 2(2), 193-197.

Panetta, E., Mosley-Jensen, W., Fitzmeier, D., Hall, S., Kuswa, K., Lee, E., Steinberg, D., Sternhagen, F., & Turner, J. (2010). Controversies in debate pedagogy: Working paper. In A. D. Louden (Ed.), *Navigating opportunity: Policy debate in the 21st Century*. New York, NY: International Debate Education Association.

Past events: Fall semester 2010. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://www.jmu.edu/debate/madison-debate-society/past-events/fall-2010.shtml

Poulakos, J. (1995). *Sophistical rhetoric in classical Greece*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press.

Rieke, R. D. (1968). A philosophy of forensics. In D. F. Faules & R. D. Rieke (Eds.), *Directing forensics: Debate and contest speaking* (pp. 33-78). Scranton, PA: International Textbook Company.

Smith, C., & Voth, B. (2002). The role of humor in political argument: How 'strategery' and 'lockboxes' changed a political campaign. *Argumentation and Advocacy*, 39, 110-129.

Snider, A. C. (1992). Ethics in academic debate: A gaming perspective. In D. A. Thomas & J. P. Hart, *Advanced debate: Readings in theory, practice & teaching* (4th ed.). Lincolnwood, IL: National Textbook Company.

Sutton-Smith, B. (1980). Play as flow and innovation: the new meanings. In J. Shallcrass, B. Larkin, & B. Stothart (Eds.), *Recreation reconsidered into the Eighties* (pp. 9-12). Auckland, NZ: Auckland Regional Authority and New Zealand Council for Recreation and Sport.

Sutton-Smith, B., & Roberts, J. M. (1981). Play, games, and sports. In H. C. Triandis (Ed.), *Handbook of cross-cultural psychology: 4. Developmental psychology* (pp. 425-471). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Torner, E., Trammell, A., & Waldron, E. L. (2014). Reinventing analog game studies. *Analog Game Studies*, 1(1). Retrieved from http://analoggamestudies.org/2014/08/reinventing-analog-game-studies/

Vatz, R. E. (1973). The myth of the rhetorical situation. *Philosophy & Rhetoric*, 6 (3), 154-161.