

Playfulness Versus Epistemic Traps

C. Thi Nguyen

(This is a pre-print. Please cite the final version, which will appear in *Social Virtue Epistemology*, eds. Alfano, Klein & de Ridder, Routledge 2022).

What is the value of intellectual playfulness? Traditional characterizations of the ideal thinker often leave out playfulness; the ideal inquirer is supposed to be sober, careful, and conscientiousness. But elsewhere we find another ideal: the laughing sage, the playful thinker. These are models of intellectual playfulness. Intellectual playfulness, I suggest, is the disposition to try out alternate belief systems for fun – to try on radically different perspectives for the sheer pleasure of it. But what would the cognitive value be of such playfulness? I suggest that intellectual playfulness function as, at the very least, a kind of intellectual insurance policy against epistemic traps. An epistemic trap is a belief system that re-directs good-faith inquiry to bad results. An epistemic trap manipulates background beliefs to fend off contrary evidence. For example, a conspiracy theory might include a set of beliefs about how the mainstream media has been taken over by some vicious cabal. Normal epistemic attempts will be captured by a well-wrought epistemic trap, because normal attempts at inquiry are guided by these background beliefs -- which set what counts as a plausible path to explore, and what is implausible or beyond the pale. And a clever epistemic trap will manipulate those background beliefs for ill effect. Intellectual playfulness, on the other hand, isn't motivated by an epistemic interest in the truth, but in the sheer pleasure of intellectual exploration. Since intellectual playfulness isn't oriented towards the truth, it won't be constrained by an agent's background beliefs – it won't, for example, prefer to investigate apparently more plausible pathways. Intellectual playfulness offers an opportunity to escape from epistemic traps. But intellectual playfulness has its own limitations. It will only drive us to explore belief systems when that exploration is fun. What we need is an array of differently-motivated exploratory tendencies – empathy, curiosity, playfulness – each of which will each cover for the others' limitations.

Dogmatism often seems to come packaged with a mood of grim and unpleasant humorlessness. And when dogmatists do indulge in humor, it's often of a decidedly heavy-hearted sort: smug mockery and harsh satire. At least in the popular imagination, dogmatism does not seem to sit easily with a spirit of genuine lightheartedness or play.

And we can find various playful qualities — lighthearted humor, a sense of fun — associated with a more intellectually fluid mode of being. Laughter and play may not be required for all forms of intellectual achievement, but they strongly associated with some particular forms of intellectual virtue. The joking genius, the laughing sage — these are all familiar archetypes. Of course, these might just be stereotypes or cultural mythologies. But might these popular association reveal some kind of genuine and deep connection between playfulness

and intellectual virtue?

In this paper, I'll take a reconstructive approach. Let's look to see if there might be some plausible cognitive function for playfulness, some way in which it might help us in our struggles to cope with and understand the world. But if one surveys the literature on intellectual virtue, the ideal which emerges is a figure who is, if not actively dour, then at least not very much fun. Here's a typical example, from a contemporary discussion of intellectual virtue: "the most excellent cognizer" turns out to be "sober, careful, conscientious, thorough, and the like" (Riggs 2010, 184). There are certainly people in whom intellectual virtue emerges in such a sober manner. But that description seems to leave out other approaches to being a thoughtful and sensate person. Some sages are full of humor, and some of the best insights start as jokes.

Here, I'll take the first step towards an account of one particular virtue in this space: the epistemic virtue of *intellectual playfulness*. Intellectual playfulness, loosely, is the disposition to try out new ideas, perspectives and systems of thought for the sheer joy of it. Intellectual playfulness, I will argue, is the right disposition to get us out of a certain kind of dogmatism. This isn't its only role in our lives. Playfulness is surely valuable in and of itself — a source of joy and laughter. But intellectual playfulness also has some clear epistemic functionality for us.

Intellectual playfulness, I will suggest, is a disposition to explore ideas for the value of the exploration itself. The ramblings of intellectual playfulness are not guided, in their particular movements, by a hope of finding a truer and better theory. The intellectually playful person tries out ideas because the process is fun or pleasingly wild, or because the ideas are beautiful. In this way, it is a distinctive process from the intellectual exploration of the truth-seeker. The truth-seeker's explorations are guided by the current belief system; they will typically check out the most plausible alternatives. The intellectually playful person doesn't care about plausibility. They care about more aesthetic qualities of ideas. They care about cool ideas, or elegant ones, or thrilling joy-rides of discovery. They care about exploring where exploration is joyful.

I will suggest that the intellectually playful exploration sometimes can better serve the goal of finding the truth, than will exploration that is strictly aimed at finding the truth. The best approach to finding out the truth will turn out to include some joyful rambles away from it. To bring out the value of intellectual playfulness, I will show how it functions against one of its natural enemies: epistemic traps. Epistemic traps are belief systems that undermine our epistemic efforts, leaving us stuck inside them. Intellectual playfulness is the right disposition to get us out of such a trap, if we happen to fall in one. And since it is hard to tell if one is in such a trap, it's good to maintain some intellectual playfulness at all times. It is an intellectual insurance policy.

Epistemic Traps

To understand the value of intellectual playfulness, then, we'll need to get a clearer view of how epistemic traps work. So: some belief systems linger because they are epistemically

successful. They contain a starting seed of good beliefs and help us to find more good beliefs.¹ But other belief systems linger, not because they guide us towards the truth, but because they are sticky. I am particularly interested in those belief systems that linger because they work to prevent their believers from seeing or acknowledging good contrary evidence. Such belief systems seem rigged up to block defection. Let's call these belief systems *epistemic traps*. (By *belief system* I don't just mean a set of beliefs about propositions, but also the values that guide the acquisition and evaluation of particular beliefs.)

Some trap belief systems operate by preventing their adopters from reflecting on their belief system at all. They prevent, in their adopters, processes like evidence-gathering, reflection, and deliberation.² We can call these *anti-reflective traps*. One example: a belief system that emphasizes unswerving and unthinking obedience to a leader — a deference trap.³ Another example: a belief system that made its followers so under-motivated in general that they lost the verve to reflect at all — an apathy trap.⁴ Other examples include belief systems that encourage one to drug themselves into oblivion, or starve oneself, or exercise so vigorously so as to obliterate all thought.

Even more insidious than anti-reflective traps, however, are those belief systems which encourage, but *re-direct*, various intellectual processes — leading good-faith, epistemically oriented efforts astray. Such a belief system performs a kind of intellectual judo, flipping earnest intellectual efforts and sending down the wrong paths. They are traps for active inquiry.

Let's call something an *inquiry trap* if it has the following characteristics:

1. It is a belief system (including some set of beliefs and relevant norms, values, and standards for evaluating, adopting, and discarding beliefs).
2. It is arranged such that good-faith, epistemically-oriented attempts at inquiry are re-directed to yield epistemically poor results.
3. Those poor results tend to reinforce the belief system.

Anti-reflective traps discourage the process of wriggling to find the truth for yourself.

¹ I am being intentionally vague here between about what counts as a good beliefs. I am trying here to make no particular commitments about epistemic internalism vs externalism, reliabilism, pragmatism, or to take sides on any of the major epistemic debates of the contemporary scene. In particular, when I say that good-faith epistemic efforts are those that proceed from epistemic grounds. In particular, I mean for my account here to include, as good-faith beliefs, those beliefs not supported by evidence, but whose adoption supports epistemic goals. My hope here is that I can give an account of epistemic traps compatible with any of the standard positions of contemporary epistemology.

² Elsewhere, I've discussed the possibility that some belief systems offer us a hedonistic instrumentalization, by giving us pleasure in return for adopting certain belief systems (Nguyen and Williams 2020; Nguyen, forthcoming).

³ Joshua DiPaolo offers a useful study of the epistemic manipulations of fanaticism — which often involve undermining followers' self-trust as well as their trust in outsiders, and placing that trust entirely in the hands of a small leadership (DiPaolo, 2020).

⁴ The idea of, and name for, "apathy traps" suggested by Geoff Pynn.

Inquiry traps re-direct that wriggling, pulling you more tightly into the trap.⁵

One example of an inquiry trap is the belief system associated with an *echo chamber*.⁶ Echo chambers are social structures which bring insiders to distrust all outsiders. I have discussed echo chambers at length elsewhere. To summarize: an echo chamber is a community which creates a significant trust disparity between members and non-members. That disparity is created by undermining the credibility of non-members and amplifying the credibility of members. Echo chambers also come with a core belief system, which one must accept the belief system to count as member. Crucially, that belief system includes beliefs that maintain and increase that trust disparity.

I draw my analysis from Kathleen Hall Jamieson and Frank Cappella's landmark empirical study of the right-wing echo chamber around Rush Limbaugh and Fox News. Limbaugh's followers adopted the belief-system promulgated by Limbaugh. That belief system includes the view that everybody who didn't share those views was caught in the grips of a corrupt media, which had been taken over by malicious liberal elites (Jamieson and Cappella, 2010). Though Jamieson and Cappella's analysis is of a right-wing political echo chamber, we can find examples of echo chambers among liberals and among centrists, and across all manner of non-political domains. I believe I've seen echo chambers around particular forms of exercise, breastfeeding theories, systems of nutrition, and science denialism.

It's crucial that we distinguish echo chambers from a nearby phenomenon: that of epistemic bubbles. An epistemic bubble is a social structure which *omits* outsider voices, while an echo chamber is a social structure which *discredits* outsider voices. Epistemic bubbles leave their insiders ignorant of relevant evidence; echo chambers leave their members actively distrustful of outside sources. Current usage often conflates these two ideas — usually ignoring the possibility of trust manipulation, and focusing on epistemic-bubble-style filtration effects. But epistemic bubbles aren't the most significant threat right now. Epistemic bubbles shatter easily; we simply need to expose insiders to the evidence that they've missed. Echo chambers are much more robust. Members of echo chambers come equipped with the intellectual machinery needed to dismiss contrary evidence coming in from the outside. Outside sources are, after all, untrustworthy, malicious, and corrupt).⁷

Notice that epistemic bubbles aren't inquiry traps; but echo chambers are paradigmatic inquiry traps. Epistemic bubbles do entrap their members, but they work through bad connectivity in their external information delivery network. An echo chamber, on the other hand, changes how inquiry will go by discrediting outside sources. A member's attempts to understand the truth will immediately run afoul of the echo chamber's trust settings, which will guide them to dismiss many reliable informants and trust many unreliable informants. But notice that the echo chamber member isn't unreflective or unthinking. They are often

⁵ Geoff Pynn suggested the terms “apathy trap” and “inquiry trap”, and greatly assisted in the development of this taxonomy.

⁶ The ensuing paragraphs offer a brief summary of my analysis of echo chambers in (Nguyen, 2018).

⁷ See also (Nguyen, 2020b) for a discussion of a more minimal kind of non-engineered epistemic trap - one in which erroneous beliefs lead to the selection of unreliable experts, which reinforces those erroneous beliefs.

furiously analyzing incoming information — seeing where it comes from, and deploying their background theories about who’s trustworthy and who’s malicious. Echo chambers can furnish their members with vigorous and satisfying intellectual lives, since the belief system makes it easy for them to create powerful, seemingly-apt and seemingly-unifying explanations for all manner of phenomena.⁸

Echo chambers also typically contain *disagreement-reinforcement mechanisms*. For example, the leader of an echo chamber might claim that everybody on the outside was part of some vast conspiracy to undermine our country — and that those conspirators will try to corrupt the true believers by undermining the leader, with fake contrary evidence, or stories about the leader’s corruption and unreliability.⁹ Often, these mechanisms involve conspiracy theories which implicate journalists, universities, scientists, or other external sources of information.¹⁰ Thus, echo chamber members are prepared for assaults from the outside, with pre-established machinery designed to dismiss contrary evidence from the outside. Endre Begby calls this process *evidential pre-emption* (Begby, 2020). Crucially, Begby points out, evidential pre-emption not only disarms incoming evidence, but can create a positive feedback loop inside the echo chamber. The leader has made a prediction: that outsiders will try to undermine the leader’s authority. When outsiders do try to undermine that leader, then, from the perspective of the insiders, the leader’s predictions have come true — which is a reason to increase their trust in their leader. Disagreement-reinforcement mechanisms are a truly elegant piece of malicious design. With such a mechanism, an echo chamber’s defenses also serve to simultaneously increase the echo chamber’s grip.

It is tempting to attribute to our political opponents pure unthinkingness or brute idiocy. But I think that inquiry traps are far more common than brute unthinkingness. Pure unthinkingness is easier to detect and to recognize as problematic. Inquiry traps are more insidious precisely because they permit — and often foster — vigorous intellectual effort. They help create, in their members’ self-inspection, the appearance of intellectual virtue.

Some epistemic traps hybridize the strategies of anti-reflective traps and inquiry traps. Consider what we might call an *insensitivity trap*. An insensitivity trap is a belief system that selectively cuts off attention to certain areas of life by attributing valuelessness to those areas. This typically occurs by narrowly specifying what counts as valuable. Consider, for example, the archetypical figure of the businessperson who believes that the only thing of any importance is money. Since they care only about money, they are unlikely to notice many of the things that might have pressured them to revise their belief system. They are likely to spend all their time thinking about strategies to make more money, and unlikely to spend any time on, say, literature or various humanistic pursuits. They fail to attend to the very

⁸ For more on the satisfactions of simple explanations offered by echo chambers, see (Nguyen, forthcoming b)

⁹ This example adapted from Jamieson and Cappella’s analysis of Rush Limbaugh’s rhetorical strategies.

¹⁰ Note, however, that merely because something is a conspiracy theory doesn’t mean that it is false, or that its believer is in an inquiry trap. There are, after all, real conspiracies in the world, and rational people should believe in some conspiracy theories <cite Cody, dentith>. But conspiracy theories can function as part of a well-tuned strategically formulated inquiry trap.

pursuits which might put them into contact with other expressions of value.¹¹ Similarly, imagine a philosopher who thinks that the only worthwhile philosophy is well-articulated and rigorously developed, and which addresses a carefully delineated set of topics. Such a philosopher will ignore anything that lack that that style of articulation, or which addresses a different set of topics. They will fail to adequately attend to ideas and expressions that might have served to broaden their sense of what was worthwhile.

Notice that the insensitivity trap shares with the anti-reflective trap a certain stifling of key reflective processes. Our insensitive businessperson doesn't ask, say, philosophical questions about the value of a life spent with money, because their belief system has rendered such questions valueless. Our insensitive philosopher doesn't ask questions about, say, systematic oppression, since those questions cannot be well-articulated inside their designated set of worthy topics — so the topic appears uninteresting. But the insensitivity trap also shares with the inquiry trap a quality of re-direction. Our businessperson could be spending plenty of time assessing their belief system and fine-tuning their beliefs, as they optimize their ability to make money. But those efforts are all spent in a narrowed and focused direction, as set by their belief system. The businessperson is not utterly unreflective; rather, their efforts of reflection have been channeled along sharply delineated paths. They might be extremely reflective about, say, rooting out those cognitive biases which make them a worse at investing, but entirely unreflective about why their life has nothing in it but financial pursuits.

To simplify: an anti-reflective trap gets you not to see the man behind the curtain by persuading you not to look at all. An inquiry trap lets you see the man behind the curtain, but tells you he's actually something else. And an insensitivity trap tells you not to care about or pay serious attention to the man behind the curtain, because he's far less important than the stock market.¹²

The nature of playfulness

Intellectual playfulness, I suggest, is an epistemic virtue. Part of what makes it a virtue is its ability to help us escape from epistemic traps. But what, exactly, is intellectual playfulness? Let's start by taking a step back and thinking about playfulness in general. The term seems to denote a loose cluster of related qualities, which do not seem to admit of any clear and simple definition.¹³ But there are certain features that recur through the many discussions of play and playfulness which will serve as a useful starting point.

Let's say that *play* is a certain type of activity, and *playfulness* is the disposition to engage

¹¹ This account of the insensitivity trap is only a brief sketch, and the description of this businessperson something of a cartoon; I plan to develop this account in future work.

¹² I owe this analogy to Melissa Hughs.

¹³ For an argument to this effect, see Randolph Feezell's argument the concept of "play" is essentially pluralistic, and none of the main categories can be reduced to another (Feezell, 2010). For an anthropologist's discussion to a similar effect, see Brian Sutton-Smith's famous account of the ambiguity of play (Sutton-Smith, 2001).

in play activities.¹⁴ To understand playfulness, then, we'll need to understand play. In the many discussions of play, we see two recurring qualities. First, play is done for its own sake. We play because playing is fun, pleasurable, or satisfying, and not because we want some kind of product. Second, play involves some sort of shifting of perspectives, or stepping outside of one's normal rules and roles — and stepping into other ones. Let's look at these qualities separately, before we fit them together.

First, play is *autotelic*. It is an activity engaged in for its own sake, rather than the sake of its products. We play because we want to be playing, and not because playing grants us some valuable product. Bernard Suits puts it quite nicely. In Suits' account, play is the diversion of normally instrumental resources into autotelic activity (Suits, 1977).¹⁵ When we play with our food, we are taking a substance normally used for nutrition, and using it in some amusing process of stirring and sculpting. When we play-wrestle, we take our physical capacities — and our fighting abilities — and use them to make a ruckus in the dirt for the raw joy of it. What matters here is the motivation for play, and not what benefits play may grant us. I may derive further benefits from play, but when I play, I am motivated by the play itself. Playful dancing may have the side-benefit of improving my fitness — but if I dance primarily for the sake of fitness, then it wouldn't be play.¹⁶

Crucially, Suits notes that “play” and “playing a game” are conceptually distinct. Games, for Suits, are particular structures of artificial goals and voluntary obstacles. There are instances of play which are not playing a game — like playing with your food or playing with your beard. These activities involve no rules or goals. And there are instances of playing a game which are not play — like a miserable professional boxer, just doing it for the money. And there are many cases in which we are playing a game in both senses — like when we play a boardgame, exercising our intellectual capacities for the sheer fun of it, inside a structure of rules and goals.¹⁷ *Play* — which is not the same as game-play — is autotelic, in the sense that it is done for the value of being engaged in the activity of play itself, rather than for some outcome of that activity. We are playing a game as play when we are doing it for autotelic reasons. But we are playing a game as work when we are just doing it to extract some benefit, like status or money.

Second, play seems opposed, in some way, to order and strict rule-boundedness. Miguel Sicart puts it this way: true play is essentially free and appropriative. It disrupts the normal states of affairs (Sicart, 2014, 3). Friedrich Schiller's account starts from a similar nubbin: play, says Schiller, is a state of openness towards the rules that normally govern you, and a

¹⁴ There is some debate about which of these concepts is primary and which secondary. For example, Bernard Suits thinks that ‘play’ is primary, Maria Lugones thinks that ‘playfulness’ is primary (Suits, 1977)(Lugones, 1987). My analysis attempts to remain agnostic on that debate.

¹⁵ For a useful exploration and refinement of the details of Suits' position, see Emily Ryall (Ryall, 2013).

¹⁶ This kind of strictly motivational account is an improvement of an earlier, more demanding sort, like Johan Huizinga's, which specified that play both proceed from no interest in benefit, and actually grant us no benefit (Huizinga, 1980, 1-20). But so many paradigmatic instances of play obviously offer benefits in physical fitness and mental health, among other things.

¹⁷ (Suits, 1977). For Suits' account of games as constructs of artificial goals and constraints, see (Suits, 2014).

willingness to transcend them.¹⁸ But play's relationship to order, rules, and norms is not merely oppositional. Play is not the same as chaos, destruction, or the refusal to follow any sort of norm whatsoever. Play often seems to involve, not just stepping away from the normal rules that guide one's life, but slipping into new ones. In the classic discussion of play, *Homo Ludens*, Johan Huizinga suggests that what it is to play is to enter a "magic circle" where we take on different roles and accept different rules. When we play a game, friends slip into the roles of enemies; mundane objects take on a special significance.¹⁹

Or, as Maria Lugones puts it:

The playfulness that gives meaning to our activity includes uncertainty, but in this case the uncertainty is an *openness to surprise*. This is a particular metaphysical attitude that does not expect the world to be neatly packaged, ruly. Rules may fail to explain what we are doing. We are not self-important, we are not fixed in particular constructions of ourselves, which is part of saying that we are *open to self-construction*. We may not have rules, and when we do have rules, *there are no rules that are to us sacred*. We are not worried about competence. We are not wedded to a particular way of doing things. While playful we have not abandoned ourselves to, nor are we stuck in, any particular "world." *We are there creatively*. (Lugones, 1987, 16)

To pull a simple thread in common from all these accounts: playfulness involves a certain fluidity with respect to norms and beliefs.

It is useful here to compare playfulness with irony. To be ironic, in its most extreme form, is to refuse to value anything, or to be committed to anything — to, as Jorge Portilla puts it, enter into a complete suspension of seriousness.²⁰ This refusal makes it impossible to become invested in any sort of community — since communal action requires that we commit to doing things together and valuing things together. As Soren Kierkegaard says, the pure ironist wants to be entirely free from obligations, restrictions, and commitments; this dedication to pure negative freedom makes them unable to participate substantially in much of human life (Frazier, 2004, 419-421).

But play is different. Play involves lightness with rules, in both directions — the ability to lightly step away from, but also the ability to lightly adopt. Think about the difference between playfulness, seriousness, and irony, when it comes to playing games. To be serious about a game is to play it under the idea that its goals are really and genuinely important —

¹⁸ This is a vast oversimplification of a very complex theory. For a detailed discussion of Schiller's theory of the play drive, how it unites the rational and the sensual, and how it provides an account of aesthetic value, see Samantha Matherne and Nick Riggle's reading of Schiller's *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* (Matherne and Riggle, 2020).

¹⁹ This suggestion leads to a rather vast literature on what's called "the magic circle" - the alternate space of play. There have been some significant criticisms of the concept (Malaby, 2007; Taylor, 2007). But I think modern reconstructions of the view are much more plausible (Stenros, 2012; Waern 2012). I have offered my own reconstruction and defense of the magic circle concept (Nguyen, 2020a, 177-180).

²⁰ My understanding of Portilla is shaped by discussions by Carlos Alberto Sanchez and Francisco Gallegos (Sanchez, 2012; Gallegos, 2013).

as, say, an Olympic athlete does. The opposite of such seriousness is the wholly ironic game-player. They refuse to adopt any of its norms in any committed. But that sort of irony is often antithetical to the shared commitment of game-play. Such an attitude, Huizinga says, makes one a *spoilsport*, who mocks the game and wrecks the shared illusion of gameplay (Huizinga, 1980, 11). To be playful about games is neither to be utterly serious, or utterly ironic, but to move easily into and out of commitments to rule-sets.

Consider, for example, the shared mood of tabletop roleplaying games. The players have to commit, temporarily, to the rules of the game and a kind of (absurd) sincerity of purpose. The players have to really go all-in in pretending to be in character — of really being, say, fantasy elves and dwarves on a quest to save a village. As is often remarked by dedicated role-players, this shared mood is often wrecked by the pure ironist — who mocks the activity, who follows the rules mechanically but without real commitment, who breaks the illusion by calling attention to the arbitrariness of its rules (Nguyen, 2019). As Francisco Gallegos makes a parallel point in his discussion of Portillian irony. So much of human life, says Gallegos, depends on a shared mood. But such moods are delicate and require considerable communal support. They depend, one might say, creating resonance through active participation. An ironist, by openly refusing that shared commitment, destroys the communal development of shared moods (Gallegos, 2013, 13-14).

So playfulness involves, not only the ability to slip away from one framework of norms and beliefs, but also the ability to slip into a new framework — at least for a while. To be playful with a game is to bring oneself to care, for a time, about the specified goals of the game, and to adopt, for a time, a temporary but absolute obedience to a set of rules. It involves entering into, in some phenomenally substantial way, the imagined world of the game. And it involves letting those goals and rules slip away when the game is done. To be playful with a game is to wear the game's cares and norms lightly (Nguyen, 2019; 2020a, 27-73, 216-224). The ironist may mock, but they don't have quite the same spirit of lightheartedness. They wear their refusal to participate too heavily, to play.

If we were interested in constructing an account of playfulness in general, things would turn much more complicated around this point. But I think we have enough bits and pieces gathered to make a stab at saying something about the narrower quality of intellectual playfulness. Intellectual playfulness seems to include the ability and interest in trying out new ideas, perspectives, and belief systems. Let's call this the disposition for *perspective shifting*. The playful person can step out a framework of beliefs, values, and cognitive framing mechanisms, and step into another. Those new perspectives may be only temporary visiting points, or they may grow into something that the person inhabits more deeply. The playful person is neither dogmatist nor ironist, but, as Lugones puts it, an easy traveller between, and an explorer of, different normative worlds.

Let's put our two parts together, now. I propose that *intellectual playfulness* is the disposition to investigate ideas, beliefs, and values in a manner that is:

1. *Autotelic* — done for the sake of being involved in the investigation itself

2. Involves intellectual *perspective shifting* — trying on and (at least temporarily) inhabiting alternate belief systems, which includes trying out alternate beliefs, values, and norms for belief-acquisition.

In shorthand: intellectual playfulness is the disposition to try out new perspectives for fun. For brevity's sake, I'll refer to intellectual playfulness as "playfulness" for the remainder of this paper — but where it should be understood that I am not attempting to speak about the whole vast edifice of playfulness in all its ineffable glory, but only about this specific cognitive varietal.

The value of perspective shifting

Why would this form of playfulness be an intellectual virtue? A disposition to engage in perspective-shifting seems obviously valuable for epistemic pursuits. But why might it be especially virtuous to do it for fun? Before we answer the complex question about fun, let's get clear on the cognitive value of perspective-shifting.

Compare the disposition to shift perspectives with a nearby neighbor: the attitude of open-mindedness. Open-mindedness is a disposition to be open, to a certain extent, to challenges to one's own beliefs, taking them seriously rather than dismissing them. Wayne Riggs' account offers us a useful way to flesh out of this notion. There's a difficulty, says Riggs, for any philosophical accounting of open-mindedness: open-mindedness seems incompatible with full-throated belief. Why should we seriously consider challenges to a particular belief, if we were already confident in that belief? Riggs solution is to take open-mindedness to be, not an attitude towards particular beliefs, but rather an attitude one holds towards oneself as a believer, in general. Open-mindedness involves a general awareness of one's fallibility as a believer, and the general acknowledgement that for any belief, one might be wrong (Riggs, 2010, 180).

Riggs points out that being open-minded doesn't require us to take seriously every single challenge to our beliefs. (That would open the door to an overwhelming cognitive load, for one thing.) Rather, open-mindedness involves using our positive knowledge of our likely fallibilities to decide which challenges to take seriously. Suppose there were a bunch of musical artists that I think are just crap. (You don't really have to suppose it — it's true.) I might not take seriously each and every challenge to my musical judgments. The fact that Smashmouth has legions of loving fans doesn't, by itself, give me any reason to re-listen to those horrible Smashmouth singles. But suppose that my friend points out that the overall pattern of my musical judgments reveals a systematic bias: I seem to reliably prefer white artists over black artists. This claim hooks up with my background knowledge about the state of the world— about my having grown up in a systematically prejudiced society. My positive understanding of my potential for fallibility gives me reason to take a particular set of challenges seriously — like, say, my dismissal of rap.²¹

²¹ This actually happened to me as a college freshman. Taking my friend's challenge seriously lead to the

Open-mindedness, then, turns out to be quite different from perspective-shifting. Open-mindedness makes a weaker demand. An open-minded person ought to take some challenges seriously, when their background belief system gives them good reason to. But their standing belief system is a very active participant in the process. First, their belief system shapes which challenges one takes seriously. Second, when one does take a challenge seriously, that challenge will be investigated using one's standing belief system. Open-mindedness is a willingness to entertain challenges *when those challenges are properly supported by other parts of one's current belief-system, where the ensuing investigation will be conducted using one's current belief system*. Open-mindedness is a good guard against the possibility that my belief-system has not been made adequately coherent. I might have formed my judgments of musical artists based on my immediate response of pleasure, and never connected that up with my background beliefs about bias — until somebody else challenged me to.

But open-mindedness, understood this way, is particularly weak against epistemic traps, especially inquiry traps. In an inquiry trap, beliefs come in a self-supporting network, which contains resources to repel challenges. When you are open-minded, you are willing to consider challenges. But the process of inquiry, for the open-minded person, draws upon their background beliefs — and, in an inquiry trap, those background beliefs function to re-assert the original belief system, and offer explanations and considerations to block challengers. Mere open-mindedness lead us to inquiries conducted while using our standing belief-system. And in an inquiry trap, that belief system has been rigged to re-affirm itself. If the function of open-mindedness is to iron out incoherencies in one's belief system, then it won't help against a trap belief system which has already been engineered for appealing internal consistency.

Perspective-shifting, on the other hand, involves actively trying on a new perspective. It involves going through — or at least, entertaining — lines of inquiry from alternative systems of belief. The perspective shifter will not only re-consider a single belief or narrow set of beliefs, but also be willing to consider it from the perspective of a temporarily-adopted alternate belief-system. The value of perspective-shifting is in its temporary suspension of one's standard belief system. Perspective-shifting is an insurance policy against inquiry traps because it can neutralize, for a time, those engineered, pre-prepared defenses. Perspective-shifting gives alternate belief system some air, so that the shifter can explore an alternative system of explanation as a functioning and networked whole — rather than rejecting the parts piecemeal, from the perspective of their standing belief-system.²²

Let me offer an analogy, in the key of Otto Neurath. Imagine that a belief system is a boat. Open-mindedness involves the willingness to pull out any particular plank and inspect it, to

greatest internal aesthetic revolution of my life — and the most valuable one. I offer a detailed discussion of trust and prejudice in aesthetic appreciation in (Nguyen, 2020c).

²² Some may wish to call perspective-shifting a kind of open-mindedness. The precise terms here don't seem particularly important to me. What seems important, rather, is the difference between the two attitudes, and the difference between the willingness to consider challenges and perspective shifting. We could just as easily call the attitude described by Riggs "weak open-mindedness", and call perspective-shifting "strong open-mindedness".

see if it's really the best plank for the job. But that assessment occurs while standing on all the other planks of that boat. Each particular plank-evaluation will still occur against the background of the rest of the planks. So even if you assess each and every plank individually, the boat will retain its shape. Perspective shifting involves jumping ship and trying out a whole new boat.

The cognitive value of fun

But perspective-shifting is not, by itself, playfulness. Playfulness involves engaging in perspective-shifting activity for autotelic reasons: for the sheer fun and joy of it, for the beauty of the ideas. Playfulness can even involve delight in the perspective-shifting itself — in the joys of trying to occupy a particularly strange and alien-position. We can relish a new mental position for its mind-bending weirdness — for the delightful feeling of having to stretch our minds into some odd shape.

So here is the key question: why might perspective-shifting be epistemically better when it is done autotelically, rather than when it is used as an instrument for the pursuit of epistemic ends?

The question might seem quite strange at first. How could the fun-loving idea-player ever get closer to the truth than somebody who was directly pursuing the truth? But the idea is not entirely outlandish. What we are approaching here is the possibility that truth might be somewhat related to what are called “self-effacing ends”. A self-effacing end is an end that cannot be acquired through direct pursuit. A classic example is *the pleasures of love*. There are certain pleasures associated with loving another person — with being unselfishly devoted to promoting another’s interests. But an entirely selfish person couldn’t get the pleasures of love. If a pure egoist were trying to be in love, for the sake of their own selfish enjoyment of the associated pleasures, then they wouldn’t actually be in love. The pleasures of love are self-effacing (Parfit, 1984, 23-24; Pettigrove, 2011, 192-193; Nguyen, 2020a, 53-58). Similarly, the playful person might have an advantage in getting certain epistemic goods, if it turned out that those epistemic goods were self-effacing, at least in part.

Why might that be? I think there are two distinct, but interrelated possibilities. First, an interest in getting it right constrains the search space, focusing searches on areas which promise good epistemic yields. Suppose that you are perspective-shifting, not for autotelic reasons, but in the pursuit of truth. You are searching the possibility space for ideas you might have missed. Your perspective shifts will likely be guided by your sense of which shifts will be epistemically fruitful. Since you are interested in the truth, you’ll try on those alternate systems of belief which might turn out to be true. Your shifts will be constrained by your sense of plausibility. And that assessment will proceed from your standing system of beliefs. Even if you are trying out alternative systems of belief, the choice of those systems will still be influenced by your standing system of beliefs.

But a well-designed epistemic trap should be able to manipulate these plausibility as-

assessments. A well-designed inquiry trap can undermine the plausibility of key alternate perspectives by, for example, associating them with the most wildly untrustworthy and unsavory people. I take it that you or I would probably never even attempt to occupy the moral perspective of, say, a Nazi, as part of a search procedure for real moral truth. An echo chamber could strategically manipulate that effect, by associating alternative moral and political visions with that kind of sheer outright evil, as part of their strategy of credential manipulation. Jamieson and Cappella note that one of Rush Limbaugh's basic strategies for building his echo chamber is creating an insider language, full emotionally charged labels for opponents and their positions. This language serves both to create an "insular language community", and to reinforce associating outsider belief systems with pure evil. For example, Limbaugh coined the term "feminazi", which strongly associates the position of feminism with fascism, putting it beyond the moral pale (Jamieson and Cappella, 2010, 177-190). Our analysis here makes Limbaugh's maneuver clear: he is trying to make feminism seem so wildly implausible, as to be unworthy any exploratory efforts.

But somebody who was perspective-shifting for autotelic reasons — for the fun of it, for the beauty of the ideas, for the joy of the sheer perspective-shifting itself — would be freed from those plausibility constraints. They don't need to engage their standing background beliefs to figure out which alternative perspectives to occupy, since their reason for occupying alternative perspectives has nothing to do with those perspectives' likely truth. Playfulness is unconcerned with truth, and so unconcerned with plausibility — and so freed from such dismissals emanating from background beliefs. Playfulness, as a motive, brings people to explore belief systems which their current background beliefs treat as beyond the pale.

This, of course, has its dangers. But it also has a clear functionality: it provides an insurance policy against epistemic traps. This is not as implausible as it might seem. What this looks like, in actual life, is people trying out and exploring systems of belief because they are funny, beautiful, elegant, or charmingly bizarre. In my own life as a teacher, I've noticed that these sorts of motivations often get students to let down their guard for a moment. When I present certain philosophical theories as candidates for the truth, when those theories are sufficiently distant from my students' own belief system, my students are likely to reject them immediately, without significant consideration. But when I present philosophical theories as worth thinking about because they are gorgeously elegant or deliciously fun, then students will actually try them out for a while — and often find that these belief systems can carry more water than it had first seemed.

Another way to put the same point: rational beings need to go on some random walks. It is easy, says Adrian Currie, to get trapped in local maxima during the inquiry process. Attempts to optimize for truth will help climb a local maxima, but are likely to miss higher peaks that are radically different. So the right thing to do is to sometimes go on *random walks* — to explore idea unconstrained by the need to optimize for truth every step along the way. And, he says, we have a name for the tendency to go on a reasonable number of random walks: we call it "creativity" (Currie, 2019). As Sara Aronowitz says, the optimally rational being — or community of beings — mostly pursues the best-looking most plausible paths

for exploration, but occasionally goes on random walks (Aronowitz, forthcoming).

Of course, one might simply protest: if going on occasional random walks — and occasionally occupying implausible perspectives — is part of the best path for rationality, then shouldn't the rational person simply make themselves go on random walks? Surely a rational person should think that this would be the right strategy. But what would this actually look like, as a plausible activity that could be adequately motivated in a human? It seems difficult to imagine that a person interested only in the truth would be adequately motivated to explore, carefully and thoroughly, a completely implausible position. If we wanted to construct a rational being with cognitive limitations, who occasionally went on random walks with some degree of care, then we should build a being that *enjoyed* sometimes going on random walks, with no thought that they would take them somewhere good. As David Schmidtz says, an agent that loves eating and sex for their own sake will do better at survival and procreation, than an agent who values survival and procreation, and pursues eating and sex only as instruments to those final ends (Schmidtz, 2001, 251-255). Intellectual playfulness can directly motivate epistemic agents to explore the space of possibilities, sometimes leaving behind considerations of plausibility. (Autotelicity isn't the only possible motivation, however. We can easily imagine others. For example, we might set up an institution which strongly incentivized the publication of ideas merely because they were novel, and not because they were likely to be true. This would also incentivize people to explore the possibility-space, away from plausibility constraints.)

One might worry that playfulness is just as likely to get a person ensnared in a new epistemic trap as it is to get them out of one. After all, might one not explore an epistemic trap and so become seduced by it, in the exploration? This is certainly a possibility. But one thing we might say is that playfulness serves as an useful insurance policy when it occurs in epistemic agents that are otherwise mostly rational. That is, a rational epistemic agent should be able to, if adequately presented with two systems of belief, determine which is better. Epistemic traps work to keep rational people in epistemically inferior systems of belief by preventing them from getting an adequate view of the alternatives. So, for such a rational epistemic agent, playful exploration of the space will get them out of epistemic traps. But for an irrational epistemic agent, easily seduced by, say, clear-seeming explanations, playfulness may get them into trouble. Which is just to say that playfulness won't get us to intellectual virtue by itself. It is useful as a motive to explore widely, but that exploration will only bear fruit when appropriately conjoined with other intellectual virtues.

Importantly, playfulness suffers from its own particular form of constraints. The hedonistically-motivated form of playfulness I've described is not entirely free-ranging. It will tend to seek out and linger on those belief systems that give us some kind of pleasure — the beautiful ones, the fun ones, the entertainingly wild ones. That is why, I suspect, a really robust epistemic character will involve multiple dispositions to shift-perspectives for different reasons. Consider, for example, empathy. Empathy, some have suggested, is the disposition to take on the emotional perspective of another person.²³ But notice that empathy, too, has its

²³ Peter Goldie offers a useful summary of some accounts of empathy as perspective shifting (Goldie,

weaknesses and vulnerabilities. We might only be empathetic to people that we spend significant time with, or those we think are worthwhile people. And epistemic traps can manipulate those qualities too. A well-constructed echo chamber, for example, can bring you to limit the amount of time you spend around outsiders, and also treat those outsiders as monsters beyond the moral pale.

It will be most useful, then, to maintain a variety of different perspective-shifting dispositions, each of which perspective-shifts for different reasons, and each of which has its own vulnerabilities. Truth-oriented perspective shifting is limited by one's sense of plausibility; playfulness is limited by one's pleasure; empathy is limited by one's social sphere. We need a diverse portfolio of perspective-shifting dispositions, each of which will do some work to shore up the limitations of the others.

To sum up: Playfulness brings us to explore other perspectives. It provides the motivational force to leave well-ordered belief systems and explore new ones. And that is particularly useful against epistemic traps. In many cases, the belief system of an epistemic trap would be, to the eyes of a genuinely rational agent, obviously worse than other belief systems. The trap works on such agents by occluding those alternative belief systems, so an adequate comparison can never be made. The trap can't usually completely block out those alternative belief systems from view. They can work, instead, by keeping entrapped agents from spending time exploring those alternative belief systems — which they can often do by presenting such exploration as worthless or silly. Playfulness is a disposition that provides the motivation to explore alternative belief systems, coupled with the technique of suppressing one's background beliefs. It seems precisely tuned to block the workings of this sort of epistemic trap.

Pleasurable attention

Autotelicity has a second important function, besides freeing us from plausibility constraints. My discussion here will depend on an empirical claim about our psychology, though one with significant empirical support.²⁴ Suppose, for the moment, that pleasure attracts our attention. We attend to that which we enjoy and care about. When we love the process of doing something, we pay more attention to the details of that process, than if the process were a mere instrument.

This relationship was made clearest to me when I was learning to rock climb. As a novice, I was driven by the desire to get to the top, flinging myself at the wall in earnest efforts. A friend — and a far better climber — told me: “Just savor your movement, OK? Just love the

2011). Goldie also offers a criticism: he thinks full-blooded empathetic perspectival-shifting is impossible, because you will never really be able to see something fully from another's emotional perspective — some version of you will always come along for the ride. He permits weaker forms of perspective-shifting — where you imagine what you would think while adopting some aspects of another's perspective. That weaker form is all we need for these trap-escaping qualities. You don't need to take on every aspect of another's personality to explore an alternate belief-system.

²⁴ For an overview of this empirical support, and a plausible application to understanding how pleasure motivates and facilitates aesthetic appreciation, see (Matthen, 2017).

motion.” At first, I thought this was strictly a comment about the value of the activity — and, indeed, it did make rock climbing a far richer and more lovely experience. But, interestingly, the more I let myself focus on the pleasures of movements, the better a climber I became. This is, I take it, because the attitude of taking pleasure in my movement drives me to attend more lovingly to every aspect of my movement, to take in the details. And for hard rock climbing, the climber needs careful control of the subtle details of their movement. The activity of savoring my movement for its own sake, then, also supports the development of my sensitivity towards my own body and its movements. For similar reasons, those cooks who love the process of cooking tend to turn out much better food, in the end, than those cooks who are interested primarily in the end-product. Pleasure is not the only way to drive attention somewhere; we can also force our attention there, through sheer effort of will. But a being constituted to take pleasure in the process of doing something will need to spend far less emotional and cognitive resources to get themselves to attend to the details of that process, than a being who finds such attentions unpleasant, but exerts them through force of will.

What’s more, if we take pleasure in attending to a process for its own sake, we will likely see the details of the process more clearly. Why might this be? There’s a useful lead in aesthetic theory, in a discussion about the special nature of aesthetic attention and perception. Consider the aesthetic attitude. According to one traditional line of thinking, the aesthetic attitude is quite distinct one from the everyday practical attitude. In ordinary life, we have clear practical goals, and we look to the objects in our lives to meet those practical goals. Our attention is filtered: we pay attention to those features of the object relevant to our practical interests, but not the irrelevant features. If we need a hammer just to hammer in some nails, we would pay attention to its weight, balance, heft, and hardness — but not to the color of the wood, the smell of the iron, the pattern of patina on the rust. Our attention, when it is practical, is narrowed and specific. But when we attend aesthetically, we do so for the value of the experience of attending itself. And so our attention roves over all parts of the object in an unfiltered way.²⁵

Though the argument is couched in terms of the “aesthetic”, the argument relies on one particular feature of the aesthetic attitude: that it is marked by the attitude of disinterestedness. In the aesthetic attitude, we attending to an object for its own sake, rather than for the sake of using that object as an instrument to some other end. The argument actually works, then, for any autotelic form of attention. Playful attention is just as disinterested as aesthetic attention, and so just as unfiltered.

If we have an object that we consider under one single use-category, and we only look to it with an eye towards that use, then we can easily fail to notice other aspects, that might

²⁵ The aesthetic attitude thesis is usually attributed to Jerome Stolnitz (Stolnitz,1960). Though it became unpopular through some supposedly decisive counterarguments from George Dickie (Dickie 1964), the argument has seen plausible contemporary defenders (Kemp 1999). Most notably, Bence Nanay has offered an empirically-informed account of aesthetic perception, based in contemporary research into the cognitive psychology of perception, which supports a revised version of Stolnitz’s aesthetic attitude thesis (Nanay, 2016, 1-34).

make it useful in other ways. So long as I look at this whisk for cooking, I will only pay attention to its practically relevant features — the grip on the handle, whether it has the right shape for beating eggs, etc. It's only when I take an unfiltered, aesthetic attention will I also notice the pleasingly eccentric noise it makes when struck, and the delightful way it shivers in unpredictable self-clattering loops. And those kind of observations might let me see new uses for it — like, for instance, that the whisk also turns out to be an absolutely magnetic toy for babies to pound things with. The creative use of objects, then, involves a touch of self-effacement. The person who is aesthetically interested in the object may have an advantages in seeing the object in all its totality — a process which may reveal new and unexpected uses for the object. This means, paradoxically, that the aesthetic attitude is quite useful — and useful precisely because it is unconcerned the usefulness of its object.

The same, I think, is true for ideas and belief systems. When we assess a belief system for its usefulness to us, our vision narrows. Let me start with an extreme — but familiar — case. Suppose we have made up our minds about some issue. Our interest in arguments towards those issues will typically be practical — we may be interested in using them to convince other people, or to fend off attacks and criticisms. We will attend to those features that are useful for that end. We are unlikely, then, to explore in detail the way an argument works that carries us to some other target. (And if we do, we will likely be paying closest attention to where we might find flaws.) But if we try it on in a spirit of play, then that practical filter is lifted. We can explore how the argument works — the way a belief system coheres — in an unfiltered way. And the more pleasure we take in it, the more we will attend to the details — discovering new possibilities that we might not have seen before.

We can find a subtler version of that effect in less extreme cases. When I attend to ideas in the mode of truth-seeking, I notice the features of those ideas which strike me as useful in the pursuit of truth. The selection of those features will, again, be driven by my sense of the plausible. But in playful exploration, we don't confront ideas by immediately assessing them for their usefulness — so we can linger on the details of stranger belief-system.

Such open and unfiltered attention is an antidote for epistemic traps which function by directing attention away from relevant alternatives. Such attention seems particularly potent against inquiry traps and insensitivity traps. In an inquiry trap, a belief system manipulates plausibility considerations so as to prevent the believer from lingering in what are genuinely good, alternative belief systems. In an insensitivity trap, a narrowed sense of what is really valuable sharply focuses the attention, and shrouds other domains beneath a veil of unimportance. A belief system needs to be given some time and energy, before its powers become apparent. In each case, some valuable alternative is choked of air.

Playfulness motivates people to spend some time in alternative belief systems, unconstrained by the limitations of their background belief system. Playfulness gives the entrapped person some reason to explore unimportant-seeming domains, to reason from within those alternate perspectives. Playfulness motivates people to try out ideas, not because they are plausible or important, but because they are fun and beautiful. And those qualities are, if not entirely random, at least importantly skew of how our usual epistemic

goals, values, and beliefs guide us — and so free of the traps that might have been built into our standing set of goals and beliefs. The claim here is, not that we should always be animated only by a sense of fun in our intellectual life. It is that playfulness is an excellent attitude to occasionally take up — that will drive us out of our usual intellectual paths, and encourage us to occasionally leap into faraway perspective.

Of course, if we wanted to engineer an effective epistemic trap, then we will want to discourage playfulness. We will want to cultivate a kind of bloody serious-mindedness, a disdain for intellectual play for play's sake. And this is what I think we often find, in real-world epistemic traps: the spirit of playfulness is discouraged — labelled as evil or wasteful. Playfulness is particularly easy to exclude in insensitivity traps. We simply need to articulate the values of an insensitivity trap in a way which leaves playfulness by the wayside. (For example: valuing strictly money, or valuing strictly rigor.) Which gives those of us, who are opposed to epistemic traps, a reason to try to cultivate and spread the virtue of playfulness as an antidote.²⁶

Bibliography

Begby, E. (2020). Evidential Pre-emption. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/phpr.12654>

Coady, D. (2012). *What to Believe Now: Applying Epistemology to Contemporary Issues*. Wiley-Blackwell. <https://www.wiley.com/en-us/What+to+Believe+Now%3A+Applying+Epistemology+to+Contemporary+Issues-p-9781405199940>

Currie, A. (2019). Existential risk, creativity & well-adapted science. *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science Part A*, 76, 39–48. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.shpsa.2018.09.008>

Dentith, M. R. X. (2019). Conspiracy Theories on the Basis of the Evidence. *Synthese*, 196(6), 2243–2261. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11229-017-1532-7>

Dickie, G. (1964). The Myth of the Aesthetic Attitude. *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 1(1), 56–65.

DiPaolo, J. (2020). *The Fragile Epistemology of Fanaticism* (pp. 217–235). <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429325328-11>

Feezell, R. (2010). A Pluralist Conception of Play. *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*, 37(2), 147–165. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00948705.2010.9714773>

Frazier, B. (2004). Kierkegaard on the Problems of Pure Irony. *Journal of Religious Ethics*, 32(3), 417–447. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9795.2004.00173.x>

Gallegos, F. (2013). Seriousness, Irony, and Cultural Politics: A Defense of Jorge Portilla. *American Philosophical Association Newsletter on Hispanic/Latino Issues in Philosophy*, 13(1), 11–18.

²⁶ I'd like to thank Elizabeth Camp, Anthony Cross, Adrian Currie, Nick Hughes, and Melissa Hughes for their wise counsel for this paper.

- Goldie, P. (2011). Anti-Empathy. In A. Coplan & P. Goldie (Eds.), *Empathy: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives* (p. 302). Oxford University Press.
- Huizinga, J. (1980). *Homo ludens: A study of the play-element in culture*. Routledge & K. Paul.
- Jamieson, K. H., & Cappella, J. (2010). *Echo Chamber: Rush Limbaugh and the Conservative Media Establishment*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kemp, G. (1999). The Aesthetic Attitude. *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 39(4), 392–399. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjaesthetics/39.4.392>
- Lugones, M. (1987). Playfulness, “World”-Travelling, and Loving Perception. *Hypatia*, 2(2), 3–19. JSTOR.
- Malaby, T. M. (2016). Beyond Play: A New Approach to Games. *Games and Culture*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412007299434>
- Matherne, S., & Riggle, N. (2020). Schiller on Freedom and Aesthetic Value: Part I. *British Journal of Aesthetics*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/aesthj/ayaa006>
- Matthen, M. (2017). The Pleasure of Art. *Australasian Philosophical Review*, 1(1), 6–28. <https://doi.org/10.1080/24740500.2017.1287034>
- Nanay, B. (2016). *Aesthetics as Philosophy of Perception*. Oxford University Press UK.
- Nguyen, C. T. (2018). Echo Chambers and Epistemic Bubbles. *Episteme*, 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1017/epi.2018.32>
- Nguyen, C. T. (2019). The Forms and Fluidity of Game-Play. In T. Hurka (Ed.), *Games, Sports, and Play: Philosophical Essays*. Oxford University Press. <https://oxford.university-pressscholarship.com/view/10.1093/oso/9780198798354.001.0001/oso-9780198798354-chapter-4>
- Nguyen, C. T. (2020a). *Games: Agency as Art*. Oxford University Press.
- Nguyen, C. T. (2020b). Cognitive Islands and Runaway Echo Chambers. *Synthese*, 197 (7), 2803-2821.
- Nguyen C. T. (2020c). Trust and Sincerity in Art. *Ergo*.
- Nguyen, C. T. (forthcoming). How Twitter Gamifies Communication. In *Applied Epistemology*, ed. Jennifer Lackey. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Nguyen, C. T. (forthcoming b.) The Seductions of Clarity. *Philosophy*.
- Nguyen, C. T., & Williams, B. (2020). Moral Outrage Porn. *Journal of Ethics and Social Philosophy*.
- Parfit, D. (1984). *Reasons and Persons*. Oxford University Press.
- Pettigrove, G. (2011). Is Virtue Ethics Self-Effacing? *The Journal of Ethics*, 15(3), 191–207. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10892-010-9089-4>
- Riggs, W. (2010). Open-Mindedness. *Metaphilosophy*, 41(1–2), 172–188. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9973.2009.01625.x>
- Ryall, E. (2013). 3 Playing with Words. In E. Ryall (Ed.), *The Philosophy of Play* (p. 44). Routledge.
- Sánchez, C. A. (2012). *The Suspension of Seriousness: On the Phenomenology of Jorge Portilla, with a Translation of Fenomenología Del Relajo*. State University of New York Press.

- Schmidtz, D. (n.d.). Choosing Ends. In E. Millgram (Ed.), *Varieties of Practical Reasoning* (pp. 237–257). MIT Press.
- Sicart, M. (2014). *Play Matters*. MIT Press. <https://mitpress.mit.edu/books/play-matters>
- Stenros, J. (2012). *In Defence of a Magic Circle: The Social and Mental Boundaries of Play*. <http://www.digra.org/wp-content/uploads/digital-library/12168.43543.pdf>
- Suits, B. (1977). Words On Play. *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*, 4(1), 117–131. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00948705.1977.10654132>
- Suits, B., & Hurka, T. (2014). *The Grasshopper - Third Edition: Games, Life and Utopia* (3 edition). Broadview Press.
- Sutton-Smith, B. (2001). *The Ambiguity of Play*. Harvard University Press. <https://www.hup.harvard.edu/catalog.php?isbn=9780674005815>
- Taylor, T. L. (2007). Pushing the Borders: Player Participation and Game Culture. In J. Karaganis (Ed.), *Structures of Participation in Digital Culture* (pp. 112–132). Social Science Research Council. <http://content.talisaspire.com/auckland/bundles/5a7a6e56540a267f7849b434>
- Waern, A. (2012). Framing Games. *DiGRA Nordic '12: Proceedings of 2012 International DiGRA Nordic Conference*, 10. <http://www.digra.org/wp-content/uploads/digital-library/12168.20295.pdf>