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Getting Down in the MUDs: A Ludological Perspective on Arguers

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Abstract: Ludology studies games qua games, especially in terms of systems design, player experience and socio-cultural dynamics. By extending ludologist Bartle's analysis of relations among player types in successful Multi-User-Dungeon (MUDs) games, I argue that a healthy 'ecosystem for argument' requires diversity in 'player types.' The success of each player type requires the success of other player types. Understanding the interactions of 'arguers-qua-players' this way needs a framework at least as rich and versatile as Gilbert's "4 Modes of Argument."

1. Introduction

The modest ambit of this paper is to take up and extend the suggestion of Yong-Set (2016, 2019) who recommends using the principles of ludology – the academic and critical study of games qua games – to enhance our understanding of argumentation. If the comparison between games and argument is apt, we may be well-served to think of 'arguers-qua-players' and can then leverage ludology's insights into players to guide us in thinking about arguers. Ludologist Richard Bartle provides an analysis of how and why 'multi-user dungeon' games – MUDs, hereafter – are successful (Bartle, 1998). MUDs are the technological and spiritual successors to 'massively multiplayer online role-playing games' – or MMORPGs, such as The World of Warcraft^{TM}. In this paper, I argue that there is a relevant functional similarity for argumentation theorists to consider between Bartle's taxonomy of 'interest-based player types' and a taxonomy of 'goal-based arguer types.' Just as a healthy MUD ecosystem requires an interwoven diversity of activities that appeals to a diverse base of interdependent players, so too does a healthy ecosystem of argument require an interwoven diversity of argumentative activities that appeals to a diverse base of interwoven arguers. To understand argument, we must 'take arguers seriously' just as game-designers must take players seriously. Taking up a 'ludological perspective on arguers' requires a set of analytic tools with a breadth, depth and flexibility capable of dealing with the complexity of a diversity that obtains among non-ideal argument agents and their asymmetric – but interwoven – goal-satisfying activities. To understand, analyze and evaluate the 'arguers-qua-players,' a framework such as Michael Gilbert's coalescent and multi-modal argumentation is a promising place to begin.

2. Setting the stage

I take it as a given that much ink has and will be spilt on the variety of complicating issues that arise when one considers the intersection between the historical conceptual paradigms out of which

the modern argumentation movement has grown and the newly-recognized realities of race, gender, culture, religion, orientation, and myriad other factors. But this paper does not aim to contribute to that domain in which numerous other insightful contributors are raising their concerns and carrying their causes. Rather than travel down trails being blazed by others more equipped to do so, this paper aims to make in-roads into examining a rather different dimension of 'diversity.'

When understanding, analyzing and evaluating real, 'in the wild' argumentation, there is a growing recognition of the importance of taking in to account a myriad of factors beyond 'reasonableness' and 'effectiveness.' Cultural milieus, the dynamics of power relations, the intersectionality of social identities, institutional inertias, cognitive biases, implicit and encultured associations and more can all potentially be relevant. Taking that as a given, it is a short hop towards thinking that argumentation theorists might be well-served to diversify their attention to include both 'the arguments themselves' and 'the arguers' who argue. There is reason to suppose that at least some forms of analysis on some dimension of argumentation will require thinking about the relationship between arguments and arguers – even if there is indubitably a healthy debate on when those inclusions will or will not be helpfully relevant to particular projects. But if we take seriously the call to expand our focus from arguments to also include arguers, I argue that another facet of diversity and its relation to argumentation theory as a discipline will come into focus that argumentation theorists of some stripe will be well-served to explore. This diversity features in what I will call 'the ecosystem of argumentation.' The salience of this diversity will be made manifest when considering the merits of adopting a 'ludological perspective on argument' of the sort advocated by Yong-Set (2016, 2019).

The approach of Yong-Set generally attempts to leverage concepts from 'games' to discern new or better insights into argumentation. To be clear, making use of 'games' in an attempt to improve our understanding of 'argument' is not a novel notion. But what sets Yong-Set's proposed 'ludological perspective' apart from other theories of argument that invoke the concept of 'games' is the way in which this approach understands that very notion of 'game' that is central in the account. The wellspring of resources from which he draws and develops his account are mined from a relatively nascent academic discipline called 'ludology:'

> **Ludology**: the academic and critical study of games qua games, especially in terms of player experience, systems design and the socio-cultural dynamics of gaming (adapted by Yong-Set from Fullerton et al., 2008).

This 'theory of games' should not be confused with the more well-known and long-historied discipline of 'game theory.' A quick comparison between the two disciplines should make perspicuous the difference between the two fields, their subject matter, their ambits and their approaches.

Despite both being theories that involve and invoke 'games,' they are very different in their focus and purposes. Ludology is a 'theory of games' that attempts to understand how and why fun things are fun; it attempts to understand the complex set of factors and conditions that make a 'game' capable of purposefully generating experiences such as 'fun' for its players. By contrast, 'game theory' is roughly a theory of strategic decision-making, especially in terms of mathematical

and economic models; once inside a given situation, this theory's resources can help determine what the best choice is for satisfying one's goals. Ludology views games from without whereas game theory views games from within. The former helps in understanding how to design and improve systems whereas the latter helps in understanding how to move within a given system. I argue that a 'ludological perspective' on argument – rather than a game-theoretic perspective – is much more productive in understanding the 'arguers' that engage in so-called 'argument-games.'

Whether 'game' is a good metaphor for argument or whether arguments are literally game-like is an interesting question to pursue but is beyond the scope of our purposes here. The salient point to be made by proponents of the ludological perspective is that there is *some* kind of relevant functional similarity between the enterprises of 'gaming' and 'arguing.' Because of this relationship – whatever its precise contours – it is possible to use one's understanding of games to better understand argument. While similarly important, defending the comparison between games and argument against potential charges of disanalogy will also have to wait for another occasion. No helpful comparison of A to B is perfect – or else it would be an identity relation rather than a comparison – but this paper presumes that games are relevantly analogous to arguments.

The concept of 'game' – no different from 'argument' in this regard – is notoriously considered difficult to define. Nevertheless, just as argumentation theorists of many stripes have produced a myriad of more and less useful definitions that are more and less suited to different purposes, so too have the ludologists crafted several definitions of games. The one that this author finds the most helpful in the context of argumentation is as follows:

> **Game**: a system of interacting, first-order formal elements (including rules, objects and players) that gives rise to a second-order, emergent possibility-space that situates players in a structured conflict that resolves its uncertainty in unequal measures (adapted by Yong-Set from Fullerton et al, 2008).

It is not the purpose of this paper to unpack the myriad interesting or opaque concepts within this definition[1]; for our purposes here, the salient feature to focus on is how 'the player' is a 'formal element' of the game system. The sense of 'formal' meant here is 'shape-giving.' It is the same sense in which we speak of one's 'formative years.' Without delving deeper, it is interesting to note that this definition arises from a 'player-centric' approach to game design espoused by some ludologists. On this view, the 'player' is neither bracketed out nor an afterthought – the player is central to the approach. This should be kept in mind as we consider what a theory of argument might look like if the 'arguer' is taken seriously and placed in the centre of the analysis.

In fairness, it should be recognized that that some theories of argumentation ostensibly involve arguers in their analyses: the interlocutors' of speech act theory; the 'agents' of formal dialogue systems; the 'proponent' and the 'respondent' of refutation games; and Perelman's audience just to name a few. However, this author has observed a trend of moving away from reductionist and/or ideal theories in favour of richer and messier theories that endeavour to be more compatible with real-world conditions. To be clear, this is not to say that there is a move away

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[1] Consult Yong-Set (2016) "A ludological perspective on argument" for a fuller explanation and analysis of this ludological concept of 'game.'

from normative theories in favour of 'merely descriptive' theories; rather, it is to say that the viability of 'normative' ideals and expectations must now be constrained by what is descriptively possible to expect out of mundane human arguers rather than 'ideal rational agents.' I argue that one of the underlying planks of the 'player-centric approach to game-design' – and of the ludological perspective on argument – is a commitment to the idea that there are diminishing and limiting returns in postulating 'ideal rational agents.'

The shortcomings motivating such a rejection of the 'ideal rational agent' are analogous to those that have troubled the traditional studies of economics that conceptualize an 'abstract individual' – a so-called *homo economicus*. Painting with broad and rough strokes: *homo economicus* is the ideal agent or actor of rational choice theory. In other words, a 'person' is postulated as being self-interested, self-aware and capable of calculating the most efficient means by which to obtain the goals that most efficiently satisfy its self-interests. In some corners of the popular imagination and in many academic tracts for many decades, this combination of 'maximum efficiency' and 'maximally satisfied interests' is what constituted the very notion of 'rationality' itself. The philosophical counterpart of *homo rationalis* is – like the Platonic forms – something that one can posit but that may do no particularly interesting work in generating contemporary accounts that can productively understand or change the world of *homo sapiens*. With regards to conducting a critical inquiry into the subject of how things – in the broadest of senses – hang together, such abstracted, ideal entities are of some but minimal use.

It would of course be misrepresentative to say that 'real arguers' have never been highlighted or called for in theories of argument. For example, in Michael Gilbert's *Arguing with People* (2014), he emphasizes that "you also need to be aware of the personality of your argument partners, because those factors always come into play" (p. 51) and that "knowing about arguments and arguers leads to an awareness that can foster agreement and good argument" (p. 73). Daniel Cohen (2019) is upfront when he claims that argumentation theorists are too focused on arguments (p. 210) and not enough on arguers since "the character of the arguers matters because their lives extend beyond the boundaries of discrete arguments. And so does the life of argumentation" (p. 215). However, these calls seem to be exceptions rather than the norm; and that these calls are still being made suggests that no philosophically-robust theory of argument has satisfyingly met the challenge of 'taking arguers seriously.'

Real players – like real arguers and real consumers – have limited capacities, come preloaded with experience and preferences, can have internally-inconsistent value hierarchies, and do not always bother going for maximization and instead are often satisfied with 'good enough.' More importantly, different players can enjoy the 'same game' for different reasons. Most importantly, real arguers have differently limited capacities and different dispositions from one another. In what follows, I do not claim to have vetted empirical evidence supporting factual social scientific claims. Nor do I harbour any pretension of here providing a complete, philosophically-robust account that can deal with real arguers that meets the entire challenge of 'taking arguers seriously' – but the resources and insights from ludology provide a promising place to start.

3. Multi-user dungeons and the players who suit them

In 1996, the ludologist Richard Bartle published the essay *Hearts, Clubs, Diamonds, Spades: Players who suit MUDs*. Bartle is an academic, game player and game designer whose

observations during the late '90s were born out in practice during the following decades in the judgment of this author. A 'multi-user dungeon' – or MUD for short – is from the early days of the internet and of commercially-available personal computers. A MUD was one of the first instances of a game that allowed individuals in geographically removed locations to participate in a real-time activity where one could directly interact with multiple users within a common system.

The 'dungeon' part of the MUD references the common dramatic or narrative setting for these games. The sense of 'dungeon' intended here is meant to evoke concepts found in high fantasy and myth in which dragons guarded hoarded treasures within caves, or in which minotaurs protected loot within labyrinthine constructs, or in which captured villagers or royal family members were held hostage by demons and evil wizards. Inside the game, multiple users would typically play the role of fantasy-style adventurers – such as warriors, rogues and mages – who would virtually attempt to collect items, explore the dungeon, and overcome the myriad challenges that would otherwise dissuade those with faint of heart from reaching the treasures within.

MUDs are the direct technological and spiritual predecessors to the modern MMORPGs – the massively multiplayer online role-playing games – that enjoyed wild and unprecedented popularity in the mid-to-late 2000s. In most ways, a MUD is now a proper subset of what is offered by contemporary MMORPG game services. Blizzard's *World of Warcraft*^{TM} is perhaps the example most likely to have name recognition to the unitiated; it is almost to MMORPGs what Kleenex^{TM} is to facial tissue and Jello^{TM} is to gelatin desserts.

MMORPGs differ from MUDs most significantly in the scope of what is made possible by the advancement of technology – the first M stands for 'massively,' after all. Official numbers have never been released, but *WoW* is rumoured to have had a peak of over 12 million paid-subscription users in a global player base that communally experienced a shared world. The world of *the World of Warcraft* is a persistent continuity that transcends any individual user's play session – it does not disappear or reset and cannot be 'undone' by any one player. It continues to exist even when a player is logged off. The world continues to change even when a player is logged off since other players continue to populate the world and act within it. Like with the real world, an MMORPG world continues to go even if any user stops – it goes even if every player stops.

Both technologically and spiritually, the MMORPG carries on both the legacy of MUDs and the salient features that make Bartle's analysis relevant to understanding the facet of diversity in argumentation I wish to highlight in this paper. An MMORPG is not a single game in the same sense that 'basketball' is a single game. Nor is it a collection of activities in the way a decathlon is series of different sports. An MMORPG is a service that provides a crafted, structured environment in which players can find interactive and expressive engagement – in whatever form they find interesting and appealing. Bartle (1996) argues that successful MUDs – and by extension successful MMORPGs – have been capable of such massive popularity and such long-term, committed engagement by its players *because* they are games that can offer different activities that appeal to different types of players for different reasons.

3.1 Player types and player interests

In Figure 1 adapted and reproduced below, Bartle (1996) has laid out a rough 'taxonomy' of player types who enjoy playing MUDs. The taxonomical divisions are based on two axes of interests: 1)

the <Player-World> spectrum; and 2) the <Acting-Interacting> spectrum. The first axis pertains to a player's degree of preference in engaging with other players rather than with the 'game world' itself. The 'game world' includes its combat systems and its mechanics and not just its fictional lore, history, cultures and geography. The second axis pertains to a player's degree of preference for one-sided, discrete processes rather than open-ended, reciprocal processes. It is not the difference between an interest in 'activity verses passivity' nor is it the difference between caring about the product of activities instead of the process itself.
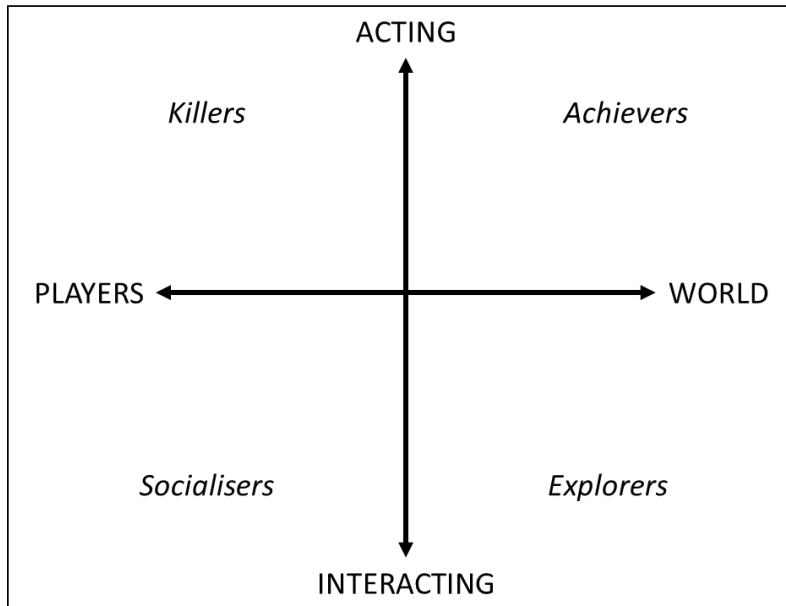
Figure 1: Bartle's taxonomy of interest-based player types found in MUDs, adapted from Bartle (1996)

Taking these two axes of interest as factors yields a four-quadrant grid in which each box represents a different 'player type.' Those Bartle names: 1) Achievers; 2) Explorers; 3) Socialisers; 4) Killers. Of course, there are manners of degree and hybridization based on strength of interest.

Briefly characterized and summarized, players who are *Achievers* are action and world oriented; they primarily enjoy performing the challenging feats made possible in virtue of what the game's systems and features craft and allow. *Explorers* are interaction and world oriented; they primarily enjoy poking and prodding the game world to learn how it works, what there is and what can be done. *Socialisers* are interaction and player oriented; these players primarily enjoy engaging with other users in communicative endeavours, whether this is chatting about in-world events, real life news or even the literal role-playing of fictional characters. *Killers* are action and player oriented. The name for this group derives from a facet of many games referred to as 'PvP' or 'player verses player' combat. As has been argued elsewhere (Yong-Set, 2019), opposition can take many different forms – sometimes including the solicited or unsolicited interference of other players. 'Killers' are primarily interested in demonstrating their own proficiency through

6

structured and consensual duels, or in inhibiting the fortunes of other players through direct and unwanted interference.

Of course, it should be well noted that there is nothing magical about the number four – whenever you have *any* two axes of characteristics laid out in this way, one will always get four quadrants as a matter of course (Bartle, 2012). And there is no claim that a two-factor taxonomy is comprehensive or even maximally helpful. However, as a conceptual point, its broad strokes are sufficient. MUDs – and massively more so with MMORPGs – are fascinating in this regard: the 'game' is actually 'one system' that is composed of a collection of many smaller systems. And these systems work together to give shape to many different permutations of experience that can each differently appeal to many different types of players.

Recall the importance of dealing with 'real players' and not ideal rational agents when considering game design from a ludological perspective. Arguably, only one of the four quadrants in Bartle's player taxonomy even begins to approach the ideal agent of rational choice theory interested in the maximization of self-interests – and that might be the 'achiever.' Perhaps a case could be stretched to argue that 'killers' are most like the ideal rational agent. Even so, there are enough caveats in either case that I would argue that it is overall a poor fit. The simple reason for this is that most actual players who play games do so for reasons that are primarily *other than the thrill of making optimal strategic choices.* To quote Mark Rosewater, the lead designer of the original collectible card battle game, *Magic: The Gathering*^{TM}: "They say in game design you should know your audience . . . don't change your players to match your game. Change your game to match your players. Don't get yourself into a fight you're probably not going to win" (GDCVault, 2016). If it were true that optimal choosing is commonly the most appealing facet of games, then games of pure strategic choice like chess would be much more popular than other games such as football, Magic: The Gathering, Fortnite^{TM} or Pokémon^{TM}. There is no singular profile for 'player' – ideal, general or otherwise. And even if some players do approach fitting the description of 'homo economicus,' I argue 'anecdataly' that they are certainly not the majority.

3.2 Player populations and ecosystems

This diversity in player types is not the only interesting or salient feature to extract from Bartle's analysis that I will soon attempt to extend into argumentation. More interestingly, Bartle contends that MUDs/MMORPGs do not simply offer parallel, appealing activities to a segregated player base – the 'population' of its world. A healthy game ecosystem requires a population with a particular balance of player types who must interact with other types. Each type requires the success of other player types to both enjoy and continue in their own preferred activities.

Again, this picture is painted with broad strokes but is roughly enough for our purposes here. The achievers need socialisers who can share the tantalizing possibilities of the world discovered by the explorers. The explorers need the killers' expert combat abilities and the achievers to progress further into more dangerous and unexplored parts of the world. The socialisers need achievers, explorers or killers to do things in the world that are worth talking about. The killers need socializers who will talk about their feats, explorers who will discover the combat potentials that exist in the game, and achievers who will blaze the first trail towards obtaining the powers the game provides – and at times they need other killers to fight with and against. There does not

necessarily need to be equal proportions of each player type, but there does need to be an appropriate balance between them.

The analogies to be drawn between these 'game ecosystems' of the virtual world and the environmental ecosystems of the natural world are suggestive[2]. The danger in creating a game that caters exclusively to one style of play or one set of activities – and therefore caters to just one type of player – is that it becomes difficult to retain and re-engage the other types of players. In the same way that an overpopulation of one species can disrupt the balance of an environmental ecosystem leading to its eventually disintegration, so too can an MMORPG's player base unbalance, disengage and dwindle. Such a game becomes 'niche' and well-suited for the few rather than a vibrant ecosystem in which there are many different ecological niches that can be filled by a many. Of course, some kinds of games are intentionally niche and do not have ambits of reaching beyond being anything more than a specialized experience for a few. It is the difference between being 'something for everyone' or 'everything to someone.' MMORPGs do not appeal to every kind of player even though appeal to many kinds of players. Substantial portions of the unique appeal of MMORPGs results from the special possibilities that emerge from the unique interaction of its diverse collection of player types and the systems that support each of them.

3.3 Asymmetrical design and variation

One of the other design choices that makes MUDs and MMORPGs successful is their 'asymmetrical design' and the balanced but unequal allocation of resources between players. For simplistic example, a wizard-class player may have access to powerful elemental magics that strike a large area at once, and so can easily handle large but weak crowds of foes. But powerful enemies that can withstand their wide but weak magic can survive and counterattack dangerously. Whereas a rogue-class may have powerful skills that can devastate a single powerful foe from the shadows yet does not have the means by which to efficiently deal with a swarm of small threats or those that can dispel the shadows. This sort of design choice creates a possibility-space with enormous variation that forces different players to learn and adapt differently to the same situations. In practice, this means that the 'optimal' choice for players can differ wildly in proportion to the differences among player capacities as well as the resources at their disposal that can be mobilized.

Let us re-examine this concept of 'optimal choice' from a ludological perspective rather than a game-theoretic one. Consider the following scenario: A powerful and malevolent faerie is blocking progress further into a mountainside dungeon. As a faerie, it is highly resistant to magical attacks but succumbs quickly to powerful sword strikes. The player is currently role-playing as a wizard-class who casts powerful magics but is incapable of dealing significant physical damage with any metal weapon. What is the 'optimal choice' in this situation?

On one level of analysis, the 'most efficient' method of clearing this foe would be to deploy a warrior and not use a wizard at all. But this player is currently a wizard – and she finds meaning in this game experience precisely because it is being cleared *as* this wizard and not some other class. Furthermore, the player has invested over 300 hours of time and emotion cultivating and powering up *this* character as a wizard. To return as a warrior of asymmetrically comparable

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[2] The comparisons to be drawn with 'cognitive environments' and other concepts from social epistemology are likewise intriguing, but beyond our scope to explore here.

capacity would require another 300 hours of gameplay and would not help *that* wizard-character progress in its journey. This option is a non-starter.

A second possible solution is to enlist the aide of other players – one of which may be of the warrior-class – who can pitch in with their asymmetric benefits and in turn the wizard player can cover for the warrior's asymmetric weaknesses. Fortunately, in this massively-multiplayer game, there are a host of built-in tools and functions that enable socialization and communication with both friends and strangers. Travelling to a public hub to recruit party members willing to team up for the greater good is no tall task. Unfortunately, this player is prideful and has a strong interest in expressing herself as ruggedly self-sufficient in this fantasy digital world. Therefore, if at all possible, she would prefer not having to rely on others. For similar prideful reasons, she will not reach out to the community of explorers to find out if there exists some 'trick' that will let her simply bypass this challenge.

A third possible solution is to brute force or power her way through the obstacle. It may not be easy, efficient, or elegant – but it may be *extra* satisfying to overcome the obstacle with skill and tenacity *despite* deploying some of the *least* strategically-effective methods. It may not have been the *most* effective means – but it was effective enough such that there was no need to forsake this player's self-actualizing goal of overcoming all challenges as a solo wizard.

MUDs and MMORPGs are fascinating to consider for an argumentation theorist taking a ludological perspective because they highlight the 'socio-cultural dynamics' between subgroups of players/arguers; and they highlight the importance of understanding non-idealized player/arguer experiences. A theory of optimal strategic decision-making is not wholly irrelevant but – without refinement – is limited in how much it can illuminate about the enterprises of real argumentation.


4. The analogy of games to argumentation

The analogy at the heart of my argument is rather straightforward. If argumentation is similar to games in relevantly similar ways, then the analysis of one can be cross applied to the other. I contend that there is a strong analogy between Bartle's taxonomy of 'interest-based player types' and what I propose as a sketch of 'goal-based arguer types.' From this, I contend that the outline of three interesting conclusions begins to take form. 1) In the same way that one must understand the diverse features of players to understand what kind of game activity is efficaciously satisfying, so too must one understand the diverse features of arguers to understand what kind of argumentative activity they would find efficacious. 2) Similarly, just as the health of large-scale game ecosystems require interconnected diversity, so too does the health of large-scale epistemic enterprises – such as an argumentative community – require interconnected diversity. 3) Finally, since the breadth of user interests is not always internally consistent and is wider than just 'reasonableness' and 'effectiveness,' this greatly complicates how we might understand what it means for a product or process to satisfy one's goals and interests.

1) Bartle asks: 'what kind of player is well-suited to MUDs?' The answer is that MUDs can suit many kinds of players because a MUD is not a unitary activity; it offers many different sorts of experiences – achieving, exploring, socializing and killing just to name a few. If we were to ask the analogous question of 'what kind of person is well-suited to argumentation?' the answer would follow a similar pattern. 'Argumentation' – in its contemporary understanding – is an umbrella

term that encompasses a diverse set of activities, such as persuading, inquiring, deliberation or negotiating (and sometimes quarreling recreationally) just to name a few. Just as different game modes serve different purposes *and* satisfy different interests, so too do different argument types.

 2) The 'ecosystem of argumentation' will disintegrate – or at least grow inefficient – without an adequate diversity of activity types successfully being performed that in turn feed into the success of other activities. At a public lecture at the CRRAR weekly Speaker Series at the University of Windsor, a presentation on deliberation, dialogue types and dialectical shifts provided another two-factor, four-quadrant grid that incidentally helps illustrate my analogy. In Figure 2 below, the axes chart two aspects of the formal (shape-giving) features of different dialogue types: 1) the <Goal-Answer> orientation; 2) Co-operative-Competitive orientation:
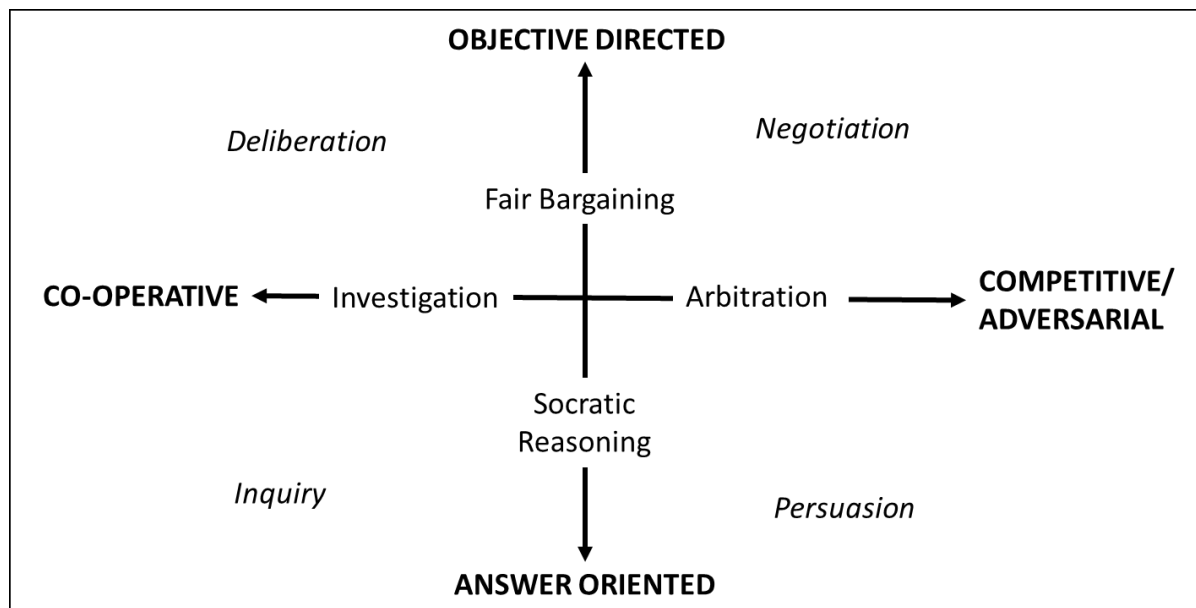
Figure 2: A two-factor grid of different dialogue-types, adapted from a discussion with Waleed Mebane, 8 Nov. 2019, used with permission.

A quick conversion can recast these 'goal-based activity types' into 'interest-based arguer types': deliberators, negotiators, persuaders, and inquirers will prefer to participate in deliberation, negotiation, persuasion and inquiry respectively. So, a similar analysis of 'arguer types' can then be applied here as with the player types of a MUD ecosystem.

 Deliberators are needed by inquirers when they have need to decide between competing plausible models and explanations. Negotiators are needed by persuaders when they reach deep disagreements and compromises must be made to break the impasse. Inquirers are needed by effective persuaders, deliberators and negotiators since each require well-vetted facts that can be used as starting premises. Persuaders are needed by: negotiators for blazing the trail in determining what techniques are most (and least) effective in changing commitments; by inquirers who can be confident in their findings after they are defended against the strongest of stress-testing attacks; and by deliberators who may be well-served by having their action-guiding values challenged.

3) MMORPGs contain situations of asymmetric resource distribution and unequal capacities among its users. In argumentation, real arguers are differently well-suited, differently-equipped and differently disposed toward different kinds of communicative interactions. In practice, most of us have an abundance of comfort and experience in pursuing the argumentation equivalent of option two that our 'ruggedly-self-sufficient' wizard player eschewed. We readily hire expert persuaders to assist us in courtrooms; we have few qualms about relying on expert inquirers to help us understand a scientific world; we defer to expert negotiators when attempting to rescue hostages. We empower expert deliberators to hear arguments of great consequence in the supreme courts. There is a reasonable and pragmatic division of intellectual labour among our diverse cognitive enterprises in which none *need* be master of all.

This raises several interesting questions that are beyond the scope of this paper to explore more deeply. Walton and Krabbe write that a "dialectical shift is a change in the context (type, subject matter or setting) of dialogue during a conversation, from one type of dialogue to another" (1995, p. 119); a shift is licit if it is known, agreed upon and constructive with regards to the dialogue's goal and illicit otherwise. Suppose that in this thought experiment, 'persuasion' was less efficient but still sufficiently effective at achieving the users' goals compared to conducting an inquiry; but all the parties involved are especially good at rational persuasion and especially awful at conducting rigorous inquiry. For time-relevant reasons, they cannot feasibly go back and retrain in the ways of inquiry. Would it be a 'better' for these fellows to muddle through an inquiry, or should they power through with their persuasion, or should they enlist the aide of an outside inquiry expert to help them? This widened, ludological conception of arguers and their goals complicates how we might evaluate the 'licitness' of undertaking certain dialectical shifts or of embedding dialogues of differing types.

A game is successful if it can provide the kind of crafted experience or structured activity that satisfies the interests of its players – whoever they are and whatever those interests may be. Game design is not just systems design or user interface design; it is also *experience design* – and one cannot design an experience without taking 'the player' seriously. To design or craft a satisfying experience for a diverse, complex audience of interacting, non-idealized users, there is a great amount of complexity and diversity that must be understood and managed. Thus, player-centric approaches to game-design are popular precisely because one cannot understand how to create a satisfying or fun experience without first understanding those who would be experiencing it. In other words, it is imperative to know your audience; successful activity types and user interests are inextricably linked. This is true of both games and argument.

5. Massively multi-modal coalescent argumentation-games

All of the preceding considerations about diversity and complexity in real games and real players circles back to our original point of departure in argumentation: the need to take arguers seriously. I wish to both highlight a key passage and echo the motivation that underlies Gilbert's call for a coalescent and multi-modal approach well-suited for 'arguing with people.' Underneath Gilbert's (1998) claim that we would be well-served to take-up a descriptively multi-modal and normatively coalescent approach to argumentation is the following position on language:

Claims, however, should almost never be understood as mere sentences, propositions, or what have you. In fact, claims are best taken as icons for positions that are actually much richer and deeper. A claim is merely a linguistic tag or label for something that is considerably more complex. On this model a claim . . . is like the tip of an iceberg that shows where the whole object lies (Gilbert, 1998, p. 105).

The 'something' of considerable more complexity is what Gilbert calls the 'position' – "a matrix of beliefs, attitudes, emotions, insights and values connected to a claim" (1998, p. 105). This explicitly rejects the idea that the *only* things relevant and permissible for use in argumentat are those that are made linguistically explicit and explicitly offered for public consideration.

There are occasions in which we may need all the relevant information we can possibly get to figure out the contours and composition of the iceberg – rather, the person who embodies the position for which linguistic claims are but a tip. This can become especially complex and messy since not every real arguer is conversant in – or even aware of – the entirety of their positions. The more means and modes by one can obtain relevant and acceptable information, the more effectively one can begin to discern what that larger, richer and deeper position is. Taking arguers seriously – and adopting a ludological perspective – requires expanding the scope of what counts as 'relevant information' that then qualifies as admissible 'evidence' that we can reasonably use in service of a great many argumentative activities. Hence, a multi-modal approach is promising.

The four modes of Gilbert's multi-modal argumentation are: 1) the critical/logical mode; 2) the emotional mode; 3) the visceral mode; 4) the kisceral mode. The first mode is characterized by linearity and a focus on verbal explication; it is the mode with which many academics are the most familiar. The emotional mode includes both the expression of feelings as well as the information that can be understood through their expression. The visceral mode includes visual, tactile and other embodied modes of expressive transmission. 'Kisceral' is a neologism Gilbert derived from the Japanese word for 'energy' in an attempt to find a minimally-connotative word that covers the intuitive, mystical, faith-based, ineffable or immanent dimensions of reasoning during avowed disagreements.

There are two[3] important things to note about these modes. First, there is nothing ontologically real or logically necessary about these four categories; these divisions are not meant to be a precise, tidy, non-overlapping, exhaustive taxonomical tool – neither were Bartle's categories. They are merely tools that are helpfully descriptive of large swathes of real argumentation. Second, these modes are not either/or; most argumentation is 'multi-modal' because its content or means of transmission fit in to more than one mode simultaneously (Gilbert, 1998, p. 80). It is not simply that there is a multiplicity of possible modes for different occasions. Rather, most argumentation takes place in multiple modes on a given occasion. Since real arguments made by real arguers happen in multiple modes, our tools of analysis and evaluation must be proportionately rich and versatile enough to deal with this complexity in high fidelity.

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[3] A third possible point of interest to note is that Gilbert also provides a two-factor, four-quadrant grid of argument types. It features a <Chaotic-Orderly> axis and an <Emotional-Clinical> axis (1998, p.35)

6. Conclusion

Certainly, it is not always necessary to get all – or even most – information; it is not always necessary to dig down to the bedrock of our framework beliefs until our spade can turn no further. To successfully resolve our real or avowed disagreements, sometimes language that is clean, clear and under control is enough. We need not always dive deep into chaotic swirls of emotion, nor always navigate buzzing, blooming bursts of a visceral heave, nor always grapple with the ineffable thing-I-know-not-quite-what of the kisceral. But we do need to always take arguers seriously, if a ludological perspective on arguers is of any merit. And insofar as real arguers and real argument are sometimes messy, we as argumentation theorists should be game to get down in the mud and down with the MUDs.

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