It's a Brawl out There: Notes on Political Argument and a *Super Smash Bros* Dialogue

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ABSTRACT

People are often inclined to get into political arguments, but it is not always clear why we bother. In this thesis, I establish a provisional definition for what makes an argument political, explore reasons why political arguments may be more vitriolic than their nonpolitical counterparts, and lay out a set of reasons why a person might want to start a political debate. I determine that the main reason will generally be to move an opponent's position slightly toward one's own.

Once I have established some better and worse reasons for arguing, I look into ways that unequal power dynamics cause many arguments to be unfair. I suggest ways to mitigate unfair arguing practices with categorical rules of thumb, employing Miranda Fricker's *Epistemic Injustice* to support a virtue ethical account of avoiding arguing unfairly.

My final chapter is an extended case study. I trace out a lengthy argument between four players of a popular series of video games. I analyze these arguments in part using the techniques developed in the first two chapters, as well as making some observations

about expertise and the role of extreme positions in contextualizing debates between relative moderates.

Approved by: ____

Aron Edidin

Division of Humanities

Opening Remarks and Summary of the Project

Like many students, I've experienced plenty of anxiety about the thesis project. For a long time I put myself in a phase called brainstorming, in which I generated lots of ideas and was wary about settling on any of them. Some of these brainstorming sessions did not result in much of anything. Others, to my surprise, grew into long, detailed discussions. My thesis turned out to be a collection of a few of these discussions, put together as one project. I hope the result will not seem disjointed. I also hope that it will seem less disjointed than it might have if I am explicit, up front, about how I hope the project goes.

The central topic of my thesis project is political dialogue. I think that my notion of political dialogue is necessary for most of what we'd like to call political discourse, but it's probably not sufficient. In the first chapter, I will sketch out my notion of political dialogue, and then explore what people can reasonably expect to get out of one. Generally, I will focus on arguments. When I refer to arguments in this thesis, I am using the definition most often employed in quotidian speech. I do not mean a set of premises followed by reasoning and a conclusion, but rather an interpersonal interaction in which at least two parties offer perspectives that are at odds with each other, and all parties are attempting to be persuasive. I will try to figure out how good and bad political arguments are likely to go, and try to identify base cases for when to approach an argument and when to avoid one. My discussion will not be exhaustive, but I think it will make my notion of political argument pretty clear, as well as my basic stance on when it is good to start one.

In my second chapter, I will briefly explore ways in which my recommendations about political arguments might be problematic. I will touch on how unequal power structures might make an apparently fine argument deeply unfair. In order to provide an uneasy solution to these concerns, I will lean on Miranda Fricker's *Epistemic Injustice*. I will employ something like a virtue ethical account in order to factor the presence of unequal power structures into making decisions about when and how to argue. Specifically, I'll conjure up some social tests that a person might use prior to starting an argument, to make sure no hidden issues of unequal power distribution will thwart the whole enterprise. These tests won't be at all exhaustive, but they may help temper what would otherwise be a pie-in-the-sky exercise in imagining really nice arguments where nobody is in a privileged position of power.

In my third chapter, I will embark on a case study that will comprise the remainder of the thesis. Specifically, I will show an argument between various factions of a video gaming community: players of *Super Smash Brothers* games. It is a community I have been a member of for a long time, and I find its politics very interesting. I will examine in my third chapter arguments by four different (imagined) players for playing these games a particular way. The players will argue with each other and temper their perspectives, in what I hope will be a good model for political argument as I describe it. But I hope these arguments will not be exclusively illustrative. In part I include the *Smash Bros.* dialogues to demonstrate the machinery I have developed in the thesis's first chapter. But also in part I bothered to think up the machinery so that I might have a good approach to writing up sound dialogues about the *Super Smash Bros.* series

in the first place.

If the potential weakness of my project is being fragmented, that is also its strength. It is very possible that for some readers, my account of political dialogue will seem too cursory or insufficiently connected to prior theories about dialogue or politics. But perhaps for some of these readers, the particular insights into what would otherwise be a foreign community will be interesting. Similarly, perhaps some readers will find my characterization of a certain type of competitive video gamer completely uninteresting. I hope not, and think that a little academic poking at this sort of community is merited – maybe even a little overdue. But if this is the case, then perhaps my prescriptive gestures about starting fights will be more compelling. Given that the final resting place for this thesis will be in the New College Thesis Room, I admit that I hope future students, and in particular those that happen to be gamers, will be interested in how I try to tackle gaming issues philosophically. But to the professors on my committee, and to the non-gamers that I hope have occasion to read this in the future, I hope that I can make my third chapter compelling to you as well.

Of course, I'd prefer if all the pieces were interesting to all my readers. But I hope it's clear at this point that my project is largely exploratory, and that some arguments, for some readers, will probably have to be left behind along the way.

Gutting and Politics

In a recent article (8/2/2012) in the online New York Times column "The Stone," Gary Gutting asks about the difference between political and nonpolitical disagreements.

It's an interesting line of inquiry, especially in a nation with severe political polarization. It is also probably important, because a widespread inability to have *good* political arguments is likely to lead to political gridlock, a tyranny of the majority, or plenty of other undesirable outcomes.

Gutting asserts that in most cases of disagreement between two equally expert parties, the correct course of action is generally to reevaluate and reach consensus. His example for this is two people who agree to put down a 20% tip, and who find themselves paying different amounts. Clearly, one of the two of them is incorrect. Both parties in this situation, Gutting supposes, would do right to check their work and recalculate until they agree.

Gutting is trying to get at the difference between political and nonpolitical disagreements, but his choice of examples does not work very well for me. At least two features of political disagreements are that there is no clear answer to a political question upon which everyone can agree (if there were, it would no longer be political), and that holding political opinions is a precursor to (or may even qualify as) political action. The Affordable Care Act, Gutting's example of a ripe political subject for disagreement, is so dramatic not only because its adherents and opponents disagree so strongly, but also because the very act of agreeing with or opposing the legislation is a political act. Political opinions are unique (particularly in democracies) in that each citizen's aggregate of them is meant to directly translate into a certain sort of action, namely voting, which transforms the opinions directly into a kind of social power. So insofar as a democracy is working, political arguments will be not only speculative but also informative of policies.

It might be valuable to compare political disagreements with nonpolitical disagreements, and see how much less willing we are to admit the other side may have a case during the former than the latter. And the way to do this is indeed with an example. But Gutting's example (in turn borrowed from David Christensen) is not only nonpolitical but doubly trivial. Not only is there a single correct and discrete answer to the tip problem, there is also an agreed upon process for reaching that answer. At least one of the two parties, if there is a disagreement, has accidentally deviated from that process. To compare such a case with political disagreements makes no sense.

A more reasonable example should look to a domain that is as much like a political example as possible, but is clearly not something we'd call political in everyday conversation. If Gutting is correct, then we will be less likely to rethink our position in a political case, and more likely to assume that our opponents are deluded, evil, or working from a deeply different set of basic assumptions. For an example of a disagreement that is nonpolitical but also not trivially decidable, I will turn to grammar.

Suppose that two people have a disagreement about the words 'lie' and 'lay.' One of these people, Sally, believes that 'lie' is the only correct present tense of its associated verb, and that anyone who says 'lay' is simply wrong. Her rival, Suzy, believes that 'lay' is so widely used as a present tense, especially in popular music, that 'lay' is now true by convention. This disagreement does not qualify as political, since there is no clear mechanism by which these people are able to transform their opinions into relevant political action. But although it is not political, it does have many of the qualities that make political disagreement so maddening.

The first thing to notice is that unlike in the case of the tip, it is not going to be anyone's first impulse to recalculate. I imagine a conversation might go something like this:

Suzy: Whew. I'm pretty tired, even though I've been laying around all day.

Sally: You mean lying. 'Laying' refers to the past tense, or if you're laying an object somewhere. In the present tense, you lie down, or lay a book down. In the past tense, you can say you did lay down, but only if you're not doing it anymore. Make sense?

Suzy: Actually, I don't agree.

Sally: It's simple grammar. There's not much of anything to disagree about.

Suzy: I can think of plenty of cases where 'lay' has been used in the modern mainstream as a present tense version of 'to lie.' I'm not ignorant about the recent historical usage of the word. But language evolves, and the verb 'to lie' has undergone recent evolution. In fifty years, everyone will think it was quaint that people used anything other than 'lay.'

Sally: That's an easy projection to make, Suzy, but you can hardly be certain about it. Language does evolve, but erosion of a word with two distinct tenses into one vague sound for both is not evolution. It is simple laziness. And more crucially, it is distracting. If you say, “I am going to lie down,” then nobody, not even someone who would mistakenly say “I am going to lay down” will be confused. But when you say “I am going to lay down,” anyone who knows the proper form is likely to be irked. So, clearly, there is nothing lost by making my choice. It's strictly better.

At this point in the argument, I consider both parties to have recognized each other as worthy peers. Neither Suzy or Sally would reasonably believe that the other has simply made a basic reasoning error. There are different ideologies at play, at least with respect to grammar. In that sense, this is much like a political argument.

Suzy: I agree that 'I am going to lie down' is also acceptable. I could have said I've been lying around all day, and I wouldn't have been wrong. But you aren't merely arguing for the superiority of your spelling and pronunciation. You are arguing that mine is wrong. There is a substantial difference. Maybe you are correct and the word 'lie' is less likely to cause a fuss, and therefore almost never a worse choice than 'lay' as a present tense verb. But that does not make 'lay' a bad choice, or a choice worth correcting. In my experience, many more people say 'lay' than 'lie.' To me, that is convincing enough. Just because I might happen to please a grammar snob by saying 'lie' doesn't mean I am at all obligated to do it.

Sally: Many people make plenty of grammatical errors. Frequently, the difference between 'their' and 'there' is misapprehended, which slows reading and causes serious problems in clarity. If a majority of people were sufficiently illiterate to get that difference wrong, would you consider those words interchangeable as well?

Suzy: The word 'lay' does not slow down anyone's comprehension. It perhaps enflames certain people's sense of superiority, but that's about it. You're conflating illiteracy with linguistic drift.

Sally: I don't see how 'lie' becoming 'lay' is any kind of linguistic improvement, or a

product of anything beyond the same kind of ignorance that causes confusion about 'their' and 'there.'

Suzy: My own theory is that 'lay' was first favored by musicians, since the word 'lie' meaning “to deceive” is a popular word in modern music. Also, plenty of modern music is about laying down. Musicians didn't want their listeners confused about which they meant. Think of “Lay Lady Lay,” for instance. If it was “Lie,” it wouldn't have been at all clear what Dylan meant. Lay, by contrast, sounds silky and seductive. People hear popular songs very often, and internalize that usage of language. Snow Patrol's “Chasing Cars” also comes to mind. In any case, there are plenty of plausible explanations other than rising illiteracy.

Sally: I see I have not thought this through as thoroughly as I had thought. I can't say I agree with you, but I admit that my view of language can be a little bit monolithic. But even if I was too quick to dismiss your choice as a simple error, I do still think that for the time being, 'lie' is strictly better.

Suzy: That line of your reasoning is strong, and I hadn't thought of it before. It is true that people like yourself will always be lurking in the shadows, waiting to correct we laysayers, and if I say 'lie' there is much less of a chance that I will be silently judged for an alleged lapse. Then again, I'm mostly convinced that it's your camp, by virtue of judging the emerging convention so harshly, that creates that problem.

Sally: I suppose you have a point. Anyway, I'm tired myself. Let's both take a rest. I'll lie, and you can lay.

Of course, this is an artificial dialogue. Any two positions, including the most wildly disparate and political, *could* be written to come together for civil and productive discussion. But I think that the above dialogue is easy enough to imagine as a plausible discursive arc. And, considering that that two parties begin with quite opposite perspectives, that is worth paying attention to. Once the parties understand that their conversational partners have reasonable and interesting ideas, they are inclined to listen and compromise, and treat the presence of another discerning mind as a resource rather than as an obstacle. In the case of many modern political issues, such a positive attitude would be much more difficult to envision, and would likely seem hokey if forced. This may simply be because the modern political climate in the United States of America is substantially more toxic than it used to be. A few decades ago, friendly relations across political boundaries might have felt much more plausible. Plenty of books have been written on the subject of America's political polarization, and there is rich debate that I do not plan to get into. But in recent times, political arguments featuring two friendly, accommodating parties are more often found in parody than in public discourse. The idea of legitimately convincing someone over to your political perspective is, in fact, rather bizarre. And even if it used to be less bizarre, it has probably always been more unusual than converting someone to one's own opinion on other issues. So what's going on with political contention, and why might it predictably turn out differently than more general quibbling?

There is far too much substance to political disagreements for me to produce an exhaustive list of problems. So I will stick with Gutting's central question for now: not

why such disagreements are so vitriolic or why we are disinclined to change our minds, but rather why we so often don't even take the presence of opposing expert views to even be *evidence* that we may be mistaken, *at all*.

In the course of any constructive and enjoyable argument, both parties are bound to try to find common ground at some point or another. If there is no common ground about the topic at hand, a familiar strategy is to venture into neighboring territory. Sally's use of the words 'their' and 'there' is a clear example of this. She realizes that Suzy and she are at an impasse with respect to the main topic of their discussion, lie vs. lay, and hopes to flank her opponent by appealing to what she sees as a more egregious but fundamentally similar situation. Suzy, for her part, makes explicit that she agrees that "I want to lie down" is a correct phrase, even though she disagrees that it is the only correct formulation. Even before the rivals are honestly attempting to come to an agreement, they are looking for points of entry in the logic of their opponents. And those points of entry are often deep enough in their opponent's logic that they have to accept a few of their opponent's premises, first.

Why doesn't this work in politics? Gutting has an insight here. You can't move through neutral territory when your rhetorical battleground is completely surrounded by other battlegrounds waiting to happen, and you can't pick a single logical move of your opponent's to attack when you can't find a single premise you agree with. If I disagree with you about healthcare, as Gutting alleges, it really *is* unlikely that I'll agree with you on gay marriage, welfare, or reproductive health. And the list of topics stretches on. Political positions do not stand alone, but rather have a tendency to form platforms. To

make matters worse, group politics is innately polarizing; in a group organized around a platform, the leaders will be those whose views are slightly further in the platform's direction than the average. To an extent, this combination of problems leads political discussion into strained territory. To engage the enemy (and it does begin to feel like the enemy) is to open a seemingly bottomless can of worms.

And then we should remember that political opinions, opinions about which it is extremely improbable to have a robust and friendly debate, are spring loaded to transform into political action. If I *did* convince you, my side might get one more vote, and if my side gets enough votes then the world changes. And on top of that, the basic assumptions from which political opinions are derived are anything but basic, and certainly many are not only dismissed but rather actively mocked by the other side. To many conservatives, for example, the idea of battling oppression is often displayed as mewling about redistribution of wealth. To many liberals, the idea of a self-made man seems at best delusional, and at worst like the stuff of satire.

The question, then, is what are we to do?

Bob and Susan

First off, let's take a very basic example of a political disagreement. Suppose Bob is on a long drive with his acquaintance Susan. Their carpooling is mutually beneficial, and gas money has already been exchanged such that neither of them is particularly dependent on the other. They are, however, trapped in the same small space for the duration of the drive. Bob has strong beliefs about gay marriage. He believes that any

person should be able to marry any other person, provided they are unrelated and over eighteen years of age. Susan, as it turns out, has an opposing belief. She makes this clear with an offhand remark about a billboard in passing.

Bob has at least two options. He can shrug off the remark, or he can engage Susan in a conversation on the topic. Because Susan is not free to escape Bob's company, there are merits to keeping quiet. He is likely to maximize their collective enjoyment of the car ride, for example, if he keeps quiet. Also, it is much more clear what will happen if he does not engage Susan on the topic. Not much will change about either of their opinions. If he chooses to talk to her, the situation becomes complicated.

If Bob chooses to talk to Susan, it's easy to imagine one of a few different kinds of conversation taking place. For example, a common form of dialogue might be something like this, which I'll call Conversation Form One:

Bob: I really don't agree with you about marriage equality. Marriage is about love, and gay men and women deserve to express their love the same way.
Susan: Let's not get into politics, Bob.

At which point, the conversation is pretty much toast. If Bob keeps trying to push the line, he's holding Susan captive. This is especially egregious because they are trapped in a car together, but it would be rude even if Susan could easily escape the vicinity. Once someone calls for a ceasefire, there is little chance for anything good to come if the dialogue continues. Bob could be unwisely ardent, and push with:

Bob: I understand that it's a touchy subject, but I think it's important that we not be on the wrong side of history. Maintaining silence benefits the oppressor, never the oppressed.

But to Susan, this point probably sounds like a bunch of hollow cliché and misplaced passion, so it won't get Bob anywhere. She could reiterate her desire to keep quiet, or she could advance a hasty argument of her own in anger, but it seems clear enough that at this point nothing good is going to come. From the moment Susan established non-consent for the discussion, hope was lost.

Bob could have replied with something more psychologically insightful, or tried to prod Susan for her position, but in any case he'd be rude to insist on more conversation.

The plausibility of a non-conversation is a strong deterrent to initiating political dialogue. While it may not be immoral to make a long car ride (or a dinner with family) awkward, it's certainly a fair thing to try to avoid. But of course, it's perfectly possible that Susan would *love* the chance to argue about a cause she believes in, to spice up a long drive. That might look something like this, Conversation Form Two:

Bob: I really don't agree with you about marriage equality. Marriage is about love, and gay men and women deserve to express their love the same way as anyone else.

Susan: They can do whatever they'd like in the privacy of their own homes, but when they want society in general to endorse their unnatural desires, it's a problem.

Bob: There's nothing unnatural about it. Homosexuality is a simple biological fact, and suppressing it has been shown to have all kinds of terrible effects.

Susan: I'm not convinced it's as biological as you say. I've heard many times that many women become gay because they are hurt by men, for example, or that men become gay because of bad relationships with their mothers, or being molested as children. These people need healing, not a socially mandated justification for their lifestyle choices.

Bob: The research suggesting any of those claims is extremely weak, and invariably spouted off by religious interest groups. No unbiased scientific study supports anything like that.

Susan: Perhaps I'll look into it a bit myself, but I'll suppose for the sake of argument that you're right. Even if some people are simply gay from birth, that doesn't change my stance. Some people are attracted to animals, or children. Clearly, we cannot allow people like this to act on their sick desires. Homosexual relations, given that they cannot create new life and are purely hedonistic, have no position being recognized by the state.

Bob: That's an unfair comparison. Bestiality and pedophilia are immoral because they hurt others. An animal or a child cannot consent to sex with an adult, of course. But gay men and women can, and do.

Susan: Sure, I'll admit maybe those examples weren't the best, because bestiality and pedophilia are each wrong for multiple reasons. Sex with an animal is wrong because it hurts the animal, and also wrong because it degrades the human practicing it. But your argument still presupposes a hedonistic worldview.

Bob: I have no idea how you mean that.

Susan: Sex between two women or two men is never procreative. It is only pleasure for pleasure's sake, and it is not how sex is intended biologically or from a religious perspective. I agree that people should have the right to do as they please. If gay men and women wish to act, hedonistically, on those desires, then that is their right. But when you are asking me to recognize their union as valid in the same way mine is with my husband, who have sex to start a family, then you are being unreasonable.

At this point, it is clear to both Bob and Susan have different values, and their disagreement is not just merely that one or both of them is misapprehending the available data. They could argue plenty longer (and probably would), but chances are they would continue to back their respective lines. Bob might talk about how the social benefits that marriage affords are not fair to keep from some citizens, while Susan would keep saying that it is an unfair imposition on her to allow same-sex couples the same recognition.

Whether any good is done in a dialogue like this is not at all clear. A single dialogue of this sort is certainly not likely to make any big difference. Susan might not use the same misinformation about gay people being disproportionately damaged, if she actually does take Bob's objection to heart. But even if she does, her core position is unlikely to change. Similarly, Bob is unlikely to think of gay marriage as any kind of innate moral violation, so Susan's argument will have made very little difference to his view.

If Bob starts an argument, what he'd *most like to see* is something more like Conversation Form Three:

Bob: I really don't agree with you about marriage equality. Marriage is about love, and gay men and women deserve to express their love the same way as anyone else.

Susan: They can do whatever they'd like in the privacy of their own homes, but when they want society in general to endorse their unnatural desires, it's a problem.

Bob: There's nothing unnatural about it. Homosexuality is a simple biological fact, and suppressing it has been shown to have all kinds of terrible effects.

Susan: Gracious! Tell me more about these terrible effects. I suppose I've been letting my prejudices get the better of me, and gay people deserve the same rights I enjoy.

But this almost never happens. So when we are examining Bob's decision to engage Susan from a moral perspective, there are a few questions that come to mind:

1. Is Bob trying to engage Susan in the hopes that there will be a conversation of form three, making his hope unrealistic?
2. Does Bob have good reason to believe that the conversation will go like form one, and if so does he pick a fight with Susan despite the understanding that she will be unwilling to engage him productively?
3. If Bob hopes for conversation type two, is he as open to learning from Susan as he is open to teaching her?

Notice that none of the questions have to do with whether Bob is prepared to be convinced away from his worldview. Chances are, he is not. But even if he is sure he will maintain his perspective, he may be willing to learn about some evidence that might

support an alternative position, or make him a little less comfortable with his own.

For question one, things go bad quickly if Bob answers yes. Bob's hope is not really a dialogue in this case at all, but rather a chance to reaffirm his own views to an uncritical audience. Not only that, but Bob's expectations are clearly unrealistic. If Bob expects Susan to simply agree by virtue of his argumentation, then his choice to talk to her is morally suspicious. It may not be immoral; Bob's desire to stand up for what he believes in may not be a bad desire. But by talking to Susan without accepting that his own views may be tweaked, Bob is not doing anything praiseworthy.

For question two, Bob is not acting in good faith if he chooses to pick a fight with Susan while simultaneously knowing she'll refuse to engage him. Once again, it's not clear if it's wrong to do so anyway: Bob might feel it's his responsibility to aggress against bigotry in any of its forms, or his responsibility to let the people in his vicinity know when he disagrees with them about something important. But since not much good is likely to come out of Susan telling Bob to please shut up, he's at best being obstinate if he knows there will not be a productive conversation.

So the major hope for Bob's talking to Susan as morally useful is if he is both aiming for something like conversation form two, and he has reason to believe that Susan will take him up on it. To say nothing of the kind of social calculus Bob might need to do to come to such a conclusion (how Susan will respond is not clear to him), suppose he is pretty sure that his argumentative advance will be met spiritedly. Now might we be looking at a political dialogue worth having?

In order to figure this out, we'll need to first determine a few things. First we'll

need some inventory of the goods that could come of such a dialogue, and an appraisal of how plausible those goods are to actually come about.

We're already assuming that, most likely, nobody is going to be straightforwardly convinced in most political arguments. But, as in the case of conversation form two, both participants in the argument may be fully engaged and happy to share their own opinions. In such a conversation, what good outcomes might happen? A few are easy to imagine:

1. A person with a good position may, by arguing it, strengthen their understanding of their position. By being pushed to respond to criticisms, and succeeding (in their own estimation), they may shore up their belief and focus on the reasoning that underpins it.
2. A person may, by making concessions for the sake of argument and attempting to empathize partially with their opponent, obtain a more nuanced position than they had previously. Even if they do not obtain a **more** nuanced position, they may become aware of pre-existing nuances that they had never been forced to consider.
3. A person may, even if not convinced by an opposing view, be moved incrementally in the direction of agreeing with such a view, such that enough arguments might eventually collectively change their position. If true arguments, in the long run, tend to win out over false ones in this kind of drift, then it would most often be a good thing. That true arguments do tend to win out in the long run is not necessarily clear, however.
4. A person may, by hearing the arguments and perspectives of an ideological

> opponent, further understand what might lead a person to hold those views. This might humanize other people who hold views that otherwise might have seemed irrational, crazy, or evil, rather than just incorrect.

The first of these, at least in the short run, seems extremely likely. Most political issues, for most people, rarely occupy the forefront of the mind. Even if I am completely convinced that gay marriage should be legal, I'm not likely to develop my thoughts on the matter until something in the world reminds me of them. In the example of Bob and Susan, Bob will probably have his political position shored up by the recent conversation.

It may be the case that oftentimes, we're already about as convinced of our convictions, especially moral ones, as we are going to get. Plausibly, Bob will not believe any harder in gay marriage after arguing with Susan. But his passion for the issue is likely to be more invigorated for the next few days than if they had discussed sports. Maybe this will manifest in political action, and maybe not, but in any case vigorous beliefs may be better than passive ones.

There's no guarantee that a strongly held belief will have better consequences, of course, and vigorous beliefs are probably more likely to culminate in atrocities. But supposing I am ready to argue for a belief, I probably already believe it is a good one. So if I am engaging in moral calculus, and I know discussing an issue will make me more actively engaged with it (and I believe my active engagement is on the right side and therefore beneficial), then I have more reason than previously to discuss it.

Probably, this should not be the primary reason for choosing to talk about something. At the very least, it's a hollow way to interact with others. Chances are, we

should not just use interlocutors to make us more excited about the ways we disagree with them. Moreover, because our partners are similarly reminded of their belief, we may be invigorating an opposing political agent as well as ourselves.

This reason, while not a good motivation in itself for most forms of discussion, is a good one for the organization of dialogue-centered events. Impartial organizations that believe in political passion have good reason to host debates and discussions, less in order to convince anyone and more to bring life to issues that otherwise might only be divisive and stagnant. There's an assumption here that vigorously held beliefs are better than tepid ones, which may or may not be true. But certainly if I already hold a belief, I am likely to think that believing it robustly is better than believing it merely by force of habit.

The second possible reason, that arguing might temper one's position without fundamentally *changing* it, is shakier. Certainly, this can happen. It's easy for anyone to remember times when they have gotten a minor point completely wrong in an argument, were corrected, and stopped using that point in subsequent arguments. By talking to Susan, Bob is forced to think through why he believes what he believes, and may brainstorm his way into new and better reasons to support his belief. In the exchange between Bob and Susan, when Susan drops her argument about gay men and women "needing healing" and moves instead to the point that she believes that gay unions are hedonistic rather than reproductively viable, she is discarding a vaguer position for a more concrete view about how the world works. This is an argument she will be able to stand by in the future, that defines her marriage as in some crucial way different from the

sort she would prefer be against the law. Similarly, Bob has a good opportunity to fortify his own position: now that Susan has connected marriage to reproductive viability, Bob can ask why other reproductively nonviable marriages (like those between older couples, or where at least one party is infertile) should be allowed. Rather than the less sophisticated claim that homosexuality is a "simple biological fact," Bob will be able in the future to point out apparent hypocrisies with denying gay marriages on account of their inability to produce children. Both parties are more prepared to deal with the challenges raised by their opponent, and may no longer settle for more easily deflected arguments in their own private rationalizations.

Any time a party makes a concession for the sake of argument (a concession they would probably not consider in the deliberative quiet of their own mind), they are able to open up new ways of thinking and patch up holes in their reasoning. Perhaps Bob has only ever thought of the issue of marriage equality as just that: an issue of distributive justice. The institution of marriage in general, and its purposes, has not garnered much of his thought. But his irritation at Susan's insistence that marriage is for reproduction probably will not prompt him to say something like this:

Bob: You're implying that marriage exists primarily to produce families through pregnancy. But I don't think of marriage as an institution with a purpose, so your argument is incompatible with the way I think about this issue.

This would be a weird way for Bob to behave, and might lead for Susan to either

decry his relativistic attitude as ridiculous or to simply say they must agree to disagree. In fact, claiming innately different assumptions is something like a call for stalemate. In an argument, I suspect most parties would rather feel like they are winning than accept a tie. Embroiled in debate, a person is much more likely to take advantage of the assumptions of an opponent to make an effective counterargument. So, probably, Bob will say something like:

Bob: While you may have sex to start a family, what about couples where one of the parties is infertile? If I found out my wife could not bear children, would it suddenly be immoral for me to sleep with her? Are couples who adopt children invalid? Surely, reproductive viability has nothing to do with moral marriages, unless you think genetic happenstance makes some people unworthy of love.

Bob is not only responding to Susan's argument here, but also taking up (for the sake of argument), the basic idea that marriage might have some purpose. He disagrees with her dramatically what that purpose is, and in fact doesn't discuss his own view on the matter. But he is developing an argument to use outside of his comfort zone, which is talking about the issue in terms of liberty. Bob is not usually concerned with people fulfilling an idea of purpose, but rather with having the choice to do as they please. In discussion with Susan, however, he is able to maintain his position while looking at the issue with a different set of assumptions.

In almost any good argument, even one between staunchly opposing views, there

will be some concessions. One has to give up ground, or admit common ground, to get almost any powerful point across. And this giving up of ground, though generally temporary and only for the sake of argument, makes everyone's thinking more flexible. This is true even if overall positions do not budge an inch.

The first two reasons discussed have had to do with two unchanging parties. Reason one involves arguers reinvigorating their interest in general, and reason two involves arguers finding new ways to endorse their positions in contrast to those of their opponents. In both cases, however, the other party is mostly being used as a reflective surface: their argument is basically only a tool to engage the feelings or argumentative apparatus of the self. Surely, however, there are reasons for arguing other than to increase self-satisfaction with one's own thoughts. Which brings us to the most intuitive reason to argue: to change, if only minutely, somebody else's position.

Very few arguments about important and established differences of opinion end in one arguer being won over by the other. There are a few different ways to convincingly account for this rarity. One reason that looks plausible is that changing one's opinion takes effort, and humans prefer not to exert that effort unless there is no other option. The psychological concept of moral dumbfounding, where many people stick to their first moral intuition even when logic compels them otherwise, lends itself toward this interpretation. John Haidt's *The Righteous Mind* has some particularly funny examples of moral dumbfounding in action. In one of his studies, a subject was asked if they thought an act of incest was wrong, even when it was between two consenting parties and there was no risk of pregnancy. Even when people's reasons for objecting to the incest were

specifically canceled out by the circumstances of the question, the people just went looking for more reasons (Haidt, 39-40). And in this experiment, the subjects were confronted only by a friendly and probing psychologist. When people start arguing, we may even be *less* likely to change our minds than before, because by saying "I believe x," we are asserting our position about x as a part of our identity, which we are then inclined to protect. To change one's opinion from one side of an issue to to the other is not only tiring, but also scary. Not to mention that once a person is arguing a point, to concede to the opposition often feels like a personal defeat.

It seems clear that people tend to get more excited about an opinion when they're defending it against an opponent, and even more so when it's an opinion with strong connections to a cultural allegiance. But conceivably, this could be seen as an unfortunate fact about human nature, and one that moral people ought to try to mitigate. It is easy to imagine that if everyone behaved properly, then arguments would frequently cause mistaken people to change their positions. But I think that chances are, this is just wishful thinking. Wanting to win a fight and not look stupid are bad reasons for refusing to revise a position in the average argument. But there are also good reasons. If everyone consistently treated their conversational partners, and their opinions, with respect, then would people flip sides in cultural conflicts more often? I suspect not.

Suppose I get in a political argument with someone. Suppose also that, through impressive exertion of willpower, I am willing to consider their statements as evidence for their position, rather than exclusively as opportunities for counterattack. Presumably, my own position on the subject has developed over a long time, and it's likely I share my

position with many people I trust. Even if I *do* find my interlocutor's argument compelling, it's unlikely it will be so compelling that it will cancel out the reasons I disagree. Those reasons have developed in me over an entire lifetime, and possibly have been supported by many conversations and personal reflection. The argument of my interlocutor is only one data point, or a few drops in a less full bucket.

It's not necessarily true that arguing produces any drops of political conviction at all, or even that it should. Maybe deep cultural divisions, and especially political divisions, are rooted in such radically different value systems that opposing arguments will be completely unconvincing to someone who is thinking clearly and arguing to learn rather than to win. But it seems too cynical to assume that evidence that compels one person will be not at all convincing to someone of a different political persuasion. Much of the time, our arguments must put at least a tiny seed of doubt in our opponents' minds. And if that's true, then if fifty people choose to argue with the same person, they might collectively tip the scale and cause a substantial shift.

It certainly seems likely that being inundated by a view makes it more difficult to reject. This is especially true of views that are not deemed crucial. If I am an ardent proponent of marriage equality, then there's little chance being surrounded by my opponents will change my mind. But if I don't give the issue much thought, and am bombarded with arguments for one side all the time, then that side is more likely to get my lukewarm agreement. Probably, most extended arguments are going to be between people who care about their positions. But there may be some merit to arguing as frequently as possible, in the hopes that some interlocutors won't care much either way

and will move a little closer to your side to avoid being argued with so often.

There are a few points to consider, in figuring out if an incremental change of one's opponent's opinion is a sound goal in argument. First, there's the question of if there is any kind of incremental change feasible on most issues. Next, there's the question of whether that incremental change is better accomplished by some method other than arguing. And even if it is feasible to nudge people in one's own direction, and arguing is a good way to do it, there's the question of whether pursuing such a goal holds some moral advantage over sneakier methods of persuasion, such as ostracizing or mocking dissidents.

The first question is easy to handle. Some issues have more room for nuance than others, but on the whole most can be nuanced in principle. It may be the case that human group dynamics cause people to gravitate towards polar views, but most polar positions have more moderate versions. Take, for example, the extremely divisive issue of abortion. Plenty of people believe that it is never acceptable, and others that it is always acceptable, and there are arguments for both of these extreme positions. But there are plenty of intermediate positions, such as that abortion is acceptable except very late in pregnancy, or that abortion is acceptable only when the life of the pregnant woman is threatened by taking the pregnancy to term. This issue is a decent example of one where incremental changes are very likely to occur, and very likely to be helpful. But it is far from a special case. If, through argument, a pro-choice activist can get even staunch pro-life advocates to accept that abortion is acceptable when it threatens the life of the mother, then that is a victory. Bob and Susan's case is the same way. Even if Susan will

never support gay marriage, she may eventually be worn down into believing that civil unions are an acceptable compromise. Similarly, Bob might decide that the term "marriage" is not essential to him so long as gay couples have the same legal rights that straight couples enjoy.

There might be issues that only have room for two positions, and incremental change might not work so well for those issues. But for many issues, at least, there are plenty of intermediate positions available. Furthermore, it's conceivable that being frequently bombarded by argument might lead one to begin to move toward a more easily defensible (and perhaps more moderate or nuanced) position. But just because frequent arguments *might* lead someone to tweak their position doesn't mean that subjecting people to arguments is one of the most effective ways to get them to change their positions. It might be so ineffective compared to other approaches that it's not worth doing.

The second question – whether arguing is a good method of getting people to slide a little bit toward your way of thinking – is hard to handle. It is almost certainly not the most effective method. Arguments often make people feel defensive, and perhaps even more set in their ways. Arguing does surely sometimes convince people, partially or significantly, but clearly not often. Chances are, sneakier social politics are likely to do a better job of convincing. Making someone feel embarrassed for their view, for example, might make them feel much more uncomfortable about their stance than attacking them with clear arguments. It's hard to verify what methods work best, but arguing is intuitively a clunky and unsophisticated method. If our goal is incremental persuasion,

and we are concerned only with efficacy, we'd be making a mistake by assuming that arguing will work best. In *The Righteous Mind*, Haidt maintains that rational argumentation does very little to convince us about almost anything important. According to Haidt, "The performance [of a vigorous political argument] may impress our friends and show allies that we are committed members of the team, but no matter how good our logic, it's not going to change the minds of our opponents if they are in combat mode too" (Haidt, 49). Haidt makes a compelling case that most often, our rational minds try to prove our intuitions right.

If Haidt is correct, it appears immediately dangerous to my project here. I would be commenting on a poor method of convincing people, when a better method would be gently attempting to manipulate people's intuitions. So why not just do away with arguing in most cases, unless our objective is to show our friends how passionately we agree with them? Fortunately, I think this does not end up being much of a problem for me. My project here is not to figure out how people are inclined to argue, but rather how I suspect people *should*. Maybe we are very likely to disregard any reasoning our opponents throw at us, and use our own reasoning only in the service of our intuitions. But that doesn't mean that we can't simultaneously keep good track of our reasons for starting arguments, and make sure that we're able to endorse them. I am interested here in conditions when a mutually useful debate is possible, not how to assure one. And while Haidt might be right in that intuitions are strong and opinions rarely change on their own, incremental change from exposure to others is obviously still possible. If I have a friend who agrees with me on most subjects, and suddenly she disagrees with me on one in particular, I am likely to

suspect my own position may be flawed. Haidt himself points out that even though confrontational arguing is very unlikely to convince anyone, people are often willing to reconsider their intuitions when "there is affectation, admiration, or a desire to please the other person" with whom a disagreement arises (68). And we are very bad, on his account, of looking for "evidence that challenges our own beliefs" (68). So even if rational arguments mostly happen in the service of intuitions, arguing with our friends is one of our only good options for changing anyone's opinions at all.

Even accepting that argument may not be the most effective tool of persuasion, a good debate has other merits. Using indirect or sneaky means of persuasion is simply not a very respectful thing to do. If I decide to try to make someone embarrassed about their view in a sneaky way, I am not opening myself up to hearing their reasoning for their view. There is little to no chance I will be moved at all. But if I consent to a bilateral argument, then both my opponent and I have a fair chance of being somewhat convinced. Dialogue is probably not optimal, and it is likely to put people's defense mechanisms up. But perhaps it is fair. People in different social positions have more or less power in discussions, based upon their epistemic authority, but these power relations are likely to be more mitigated during straightforward dialogue than during subtler attempts to manipulate and control each other's convictions. In a good argument, both parties have a decent chance of having their view shaken. If someone is in enough good arguments with their peers, then their view may well change, albeit not as quickly as under other circumstances.

Notably, slightly changing the opinion of an other is likely to be the most frequent

explicit goal for engaging in argumentation. But the knowledge of other potential boons, like the final reason I will discuss here, might make arguing at least a little more appealing.

In a good argument, both parties are willing to concede small points for the sake of making bigger claims. Finding common ground is a critical step in having a good discussion, even if there is very little common ground to be found. Sometimes common ground is found in the form of shared assumptions (that people should have the right to express themselves in society, for example, is common ground held between both the view that religious people have the right to lobby against marriages that they find impure, and the view that homosexual people have the right to marry whomever they love). But it can also be found in less kosher ways, like somewhat accepted appeals to emotion ("yes, it's terribly sad when a pregnancy kills the mother, but. . ."). Even in a belligerent argument, it's impossible to be convincing without making at least a token effort to accept the elements of an opponent's argument that *do* make good sense. Consider, for example, these two arguments:

Bob: If two people love each other, and it's a love without coercion, they should be able to be married. Neither of us is able to understand how difficult it is to have our rights denied that way, so we have no business getting between law-abiding citizens and happy, stable home lives. By lobbying against marriage equality, you are on the wrong side of history.

Susan: I understand that it's difficult for gay people to deal with their attractions, and it's

unfortunate that some people are subject to so much more temptation than others. And I do think that everyone deserves a shot at happiness. But homosexual attraction is not the best basis for love. Homosexual couples are not together for all the same reasons as men and women come together, and so to recognize them as marriages is nonsense.

Versus:

Bob: If two people love each other, and it's a love without coercion, they should be able to be married. Neither of us is able to understand how difficult it is to have our rights denied that way, so we have no business getting between law-abiding citizens and happy, stable home lives. By lobbying against marriage equality, you are on the wrong side of history.

Susan: The bible says that homosexuality is a grave sin, and I abide by the bible. So should you. That's all there is to say about that.

In the first case, while Susan clearly views marriage and attraction much differently (there are red flags for Bob like the charged word "temptation" for instance), she is making at least a token effort to acknowledge his central point and make clear the ways she agrees. Even if Susan's view is mostly motivated by allegiance to the Bible, she does better in the first argument by agreeing to take Bob up somewhat on his terms. By no means does she do so entirely, but she does admit that she and Bob hold in common the belief that some people really do have attractions to members of the same sex, and

that it's not entirely up to them that they have these attractions. In the second argument, Susan is simply dodging Bob's entire position, and appealing to a different standard that he might not care about at all. While things could get pretty nasty in the aftermath of the second argument, a viable dialogue is unlikely to continue. That's not to say that Susan can't appeal to the Bible in general for her argument. And if she does, it would irresponsible of Bob to say something like:

Bob: Religion is just a tool used by people in power to keep the masses complacent and fearful. If religion was stricken from the world, marriage equality would be a no brainer and things would be much more peaceful in general.

Because just like Susan's bland appeal to biblical standards and only biblical standards, Bob's vitriol about religion as a whole isn't doing the discussion any favors. In the process of a good dialogue, both parties are required to try out the outlooks of their opponents. Not entirely, and not even mostly, but it is pivotal in putting up a good fight to seize and appropriate the opponent's assumptions and emotional appeals whenever possible.

But there is a positive side effect, presumably, to taking up some of the more agreeable views of one's opponent. By saying “yes, but...” an arguer first gets a clearer idea than previously of where the opponent is coming from. Even if nobody is convinced, it may become clearer why a sane person might have the opposing view. It's unlikely people will often risk an argument *in order to* humanize those who disagree with them,

but over the course of a good argument humanization is likely. A good argument, one in which both parties are prepared to co-opt convenient parts of their opponent's basic worldviews to support their own claims, is an argument that by default encourages both parties to understand and not instantly dismiss each other's motivations.

Conclusion to the Chapter

In this chapter, I have attempted to explore why a person might get into a political argument, and speculated on which reasons are worth braving an argument. I concluded that generally speaking, it is not a great idea to enter a political argument with the hope of reversing your opponent's position. The most common reason to start an argument will probably be to move an opponent's position slightly closer to one's own, but other advantages are often likely. Other benefits of political argument might be obtaining a more nuanced understanding of one's own position, humanizing people with opposing positions, or, more basically, just learning new information.

For this chapter so far, I have gone without a definition of politics, and instead relied on intuitions about what counts as political. Some topics, like abortion, gay marriage, and universal healthcare are obviously political. Others, like grammar, are less clear. I don't think this has mattered so far. But because my final chapter will be an extended case study, I will conclude this first chapter with some necessary conditions for an issue's being political. They will almost certainly not be sufficient conditions. But for the remainder of this thesis, and especially for the final chapter, when I describe an argument as political, I will mean it has met these conditions:

1. Opinions about the issue will most often give rise to some course of action (like voting, for example).
2. The aggregate totals of people choosing one course of action or another have a concrete effect on whatever is being argued about, which is more broad than the total effect of each individual person's holding their opinion and acting on it in their own lives.

I will explain how my chosen case study happens to meet these conditions in the final chapter. I am pretty sure that, while political argumentation might have stricter requirements, an issue isn't really political unless these two requirements are met. Arguments that don't suggest and inform action aren't political, and neither are arguments that suggest only individual action. An argument that one should floss one's teeth, for example, is not political. No matter how many people privately floss their teeth, there is not much of a communal effect (beyond maybe lower dental bills and nicer breath). But if enough people think that climate change is not an issue, then policies will erode that might otherwise attempt to prevent it.

Chapter Two

I've argued earlier that plenty of good can come of political dialogue, though some are more likely to be explicit goals and others are more likely to be pleasant side effects. One apparently good goal, convincing an opponent to shift sides, actually turns out to be a bad expectation – it's unlikely that a single argument will move an interlocutor very far on a political spectrum. But a weaker version of the same goal, moving an opponent to a more nuanced or sympathetic position, is a decent enterprise. But other goods are also likely to come about. A good argument can humanize both arguers to each other, it can help both parties understand more carefully their own reasoning, and it can cause either party to doubt what might have previously been self-righteous or complacent beliefs. In general, a good discussion has plenty of potential to invigorate beliefs and illuminate reasoning that may not have been previously present. But *good* serves an important function there. A *good* argument usually has at least one central planned goal: to slightly sway an opponent's belief towards one's own. But there are plenty of ways arguments can go awry.

The notion of a good argument is closely related, at least apparently, to ideas about civil discourse in general. Both parties need to be on more or less equal footing, at least in the arena of discussion. It might be alright for a business owner and her employee to argue about which sports team is better, but it's unlikely that an argument between them about fiscal policy will be very fair. And some relationships between parties don't lend themselves to good arguments about just about anything. A parent arguing with a child, for example, generally does not make for a very good argument. Even though

children may sometimes convince their parents of something, parents enjoy the authority to dismiss the claims of their children in a way that children cannot reciprocate. Fortunately, this authority is generally grounded and sensible. Troublingly, however, many more relations than just parent/child involve an unequal distribution of power. Plenty of these distributions are unjust. When two people are two equal, consenting, and thoughtful parties, an argument between them might plausibly have a host of beneficial effects. But in actual society, how likely are these conditions to come about? Is it ever safe to presume they are obtained?

In *Epistemic Injustice*, Miranda Fricker talks about two forms of injustice. For most of the work, she discusses testimonial injustice, and for a substantial minority she discusses hermeneutic injustice. Testimonial injustice results from the ways in which some people are more automatically trusted than others, and how the testimony of some people is inflated or deflated in value. Hermeneutic injustice takes place in situations where some people are in worse positions than others for making sense of social situations in their lives (Fricker, 8). Fricker's project is feminist, so much of the book's discussion is around how women tend to be trusted less about what they say, while men are trusted more automatically. But it's clear, both from the book and simply from existing in society, that there are plenty of other factors that can cause a person's opinion to be honored or pushed aside.

I will first explain why the problems caused by incorrectly valuing the opinions of others counts as injustice, rather than just poor deduction. I will look into Fricker's discussion of testimonial injustice, and then touch on her discussion on hermeneutic

injustice. Both are relevant to my thoughts on dialogue, though testimonial injustice more directly so.

For Fricker, the use of power is related to controlling the actions of others (13) One always exercises power inside a broader social state of affairs than just the relationship between the powerful and controlled party. Sometimes, actions are controlled by a specific agent. Other times, a group's actions are controlled purely structurally. Notably, not all control has to do with keeping an agent from achieving some particular end. Power is not innately bad, but it is a good object for suspicion.

More specifically, Fricker is concerned with identity power. While social power in general can pertain to "practical social coordination," identity power concerns "imaginative social coordination" (14). Some people can have power because society's fictions end up being more workable for them than for somebody else. Fricker suggests, for example, that men are able to unduly influence or silence women by suggesting that their view as a man is more soberly rational than that of a woman (15). When men do this, it is not simply an example of bad behavior. It is an example of bad behavior, but it is an exercise of power that men have access to and women do not. Identity power gives some people the ability to be heard and trusted, and denies that same ability to others. In some cases, like that of adults versus children, this is probably fine. Adults really are much more equipped to make most decisions than children. But in many cases, identity power causes people's opinions and desires to be valued more than they deserve, or valued less. When identity power causes some people's testimony to amass either more credibility or less credibility than is justified, that is epistemic injustice. Epistemic justice,

by contrast, happens when a listener is able to negate unfair biases from their assessment of what another person has to say.

Fricker demonstrates that power structures really do unfairly influence who we trust as reliable sources of information, and then explains why and how we might try to mitigate that influence. I will take her demonstration of testimonial injustice to be generally accurate in this thesis. My point of interest is how she tries to characterize a good listener. I will try to look at the ways she recommends a listener ought to try to mitigate internal and structural prejudices, and try to use these as a jumping off point toward some general rules for dialogue in particular.

Fricker echoes Hobbes in the assertion that in general, when a speaker tells a hearer something, it is "first and foremost the *person* one sizes up" (70). This is pretty reasonable. We are not in a position to automatically believe everything that everyone tells us, and Fricker does not think that we should try to completely dismantle our creditability-assigning apparatus. Rather, we should strive to be virtuous listeners, and assign credibility in a virtuous way.

Notably, Fricker does not believe that there is any code of specific reasons that enables a person to figure out a speaker's credibility automatically (82). I will also not be seeking a code. In dialogue, as in pure listening, we're going to be using most of our cognitive ability to follow the argument, and only will be able to reflect and regulate ourselves secondarily. Perhaps because self-regulation is mostly a passive background process, offering up a few loose rules will probably be helpful. A loose rule is easy to refer to, even in a heated argument, without becoming too distracted from the point at

hand. And if Fricker is right about testimonial justice being a virtue, employing such rules habitually should build good dialectical habits. Surely case-by-case considerations might overpower whatever guidelines we come up with, but simply having the guideline offers an opportunity for reflection before breaking it. Fricker does believe that we can hone our skill of listening through practice, rather than through some sort of mathematical correction of a bias that isn't really quantifiable. In fact, constantly honing the skill through practice is likely the best way.

Sizing up a speaker tends to be largely intuitive, though we are free to employ reason along the way. It is very difficult, however, to assign credibility in a purely rational manner. It is in fact not clear what a purely rational credibility assignment process would look like. If the person we are speaking to refuses to make eye contact, or is way younger than us, there does not appear to be any purely rational way to factor that information into our assessment of their credibility. We might try to make up a complex and rigorous calculus to force reason into it, but we'd probably be wasting our time. But even though our judgments about people are not entirely rational, we're not wrong to factor judgments about some attributes in. And, conveniently, our intuitions factor in plenty of incidental facts about our conversational partners automatically. This enables us to weed out a lot of random data, and frees us from what otherwise might be an obligation to waste valuable mental resources trying to make sense of everything anybody says to us. If we tried to parse out only the analytic content of our interlocutors' arguments, we would have a very hard time making decent judgments. We would have to listen carefully to all kinds of poorly formed arguments, when our intuitions might have

informed us much earlier that whoever we were talking to would not be at all convincing.

We have good reason to factor in certain intuitive impressions into our appraisal of a person's reliability. Not only that, we probably can't help but size people up alongside what they have to say. But that doesn't mean that intuition is exclusively our ally. It's clear that of the things that trigger our intuitions one way or the other, some are worth honoring and some aren't. We shouldn't trust tall people more than short ones, or pretty people more than ugly ones (though in fact maybe we do). We should, on the other hand, trust people who speak concisely more than ones who blather nervously on, and perhaps we should trust people who appear to have decent hygiene more than those who do not. Insofar as our intuitive process of sizing people up apprehends only valid reasons to trust or distrust a speaker, our intuitive process is helpful. But nobody's intuitive process is attuned to apprehend exclusively valid reasons. We are motivated also by a number of unconscious biases that cause us serious interpretive problems. On Fricker's account, if we fail to correct for those biases, we are neglecting testimonial justice.

According to Fricker, testimonial justice is a virtue achieved when a hearer "neutralizes the impact of prejudice in her credibility judgments" (92). I take prejudice to refer only to biases that are clearly bad: biases, for example, based on the sex or race of the speaker. There are plenty of ways to do try to neutralize the impact of prejudice. Some ways are easier than others, even maybe automatic. If we know a person well, and trust them, we're probably less likely to be prejudiced than if we don't know them at all (a trusted friend is perceived as a trusted friend first and a person with a certain race and sex second, maybe, but we can't be too sure about this) (96). Hopefully, we may also be able

to correct for prejudice automatically and easily if we practice correcting it actively for long enough. By classifying epistemic justice as a virtue, Fricker hopes for this. If she is correct and it really is a virtue, then practicing testimonial justice will eventually cause it to become easier to achieve.

Suppose, however, that I do not have a lot of practice trying to correct for prejudice. I will have to do the hard work of analyzing myself for bias when I am listening to others, and pay attention to both their social situation and my own. I may also have a very hard time knowing to what extent my intuitions are being pulled by unfair things, and to what extent they are being pulled by causes that I think are reasonable indicators of trustworthiness. Suppose, for example, I am a man talking to a woman, and she makes a blatant grammatical error repeatedly. Suppose I have good reason to believe that she is well educated, and simply lacks grammatical facility. Suppose also that I think that bad grammar is a fine reason to doubt someone's intelligence. Once I perceive this error, I have grave doubts about the woman's argument. At first glance, it might seem like the fact that she is a woman has nothing to do with it. But if I am really trying to exercise the virtue of testimonial justice, I can't be quite sure. Perhaps if the same mistake were made by a man, I would have waved it off, and presumed that the man was just "not book smart," or something of the like. I am obligated to pay attention to my behavior next time I am talking to a man and he makes an egregious grammatical error, and make sure that I am consistent. And in the meantime, I would do well to temper my grammatical snobbishness with the knowledge that it does not exist in a vacuum. I may be not only a grammar snob in this case (which, for the purposes of this example, I am just fine being),

but also a sexist. Until I accrue lots of practice reflecting on my own social position and how I tend to react to different sorts of people, I will not be quite sure. I will, in the meantime, be at least obligated to be uncertain about my negative credibility judgments for grammatically misguided women, and uncertain about my waving off the errors of grammatically misguided men.

To summarize, developing the virtue of testimonial justice obligates us to be on the lookout for possible sources of bias, and to try to correct for them if we have reason to believe they might be present. Practice is likely to make us better at this. We should be self-aware of the ways we might be prejudiced, and then question our perceptions actively after and as they occur. For Fricker, this specifically includes examining the power dynamic between us and the person we are listening to, and wondering how it might cause us to distort the strength of their testimony (91).

For the most part, Fricker's ideas about testimony can be applied to concerns about dialogue directly. Even in a heated argument, we've got to make sure that we evaluate our opponent's claims with as little unfair bias as possible, and we've got to make sure that the way we address our opponents is not unduly dependent on factors like their sex or race. But in dialogue there is more to keep track of than only how we see our conversational partner. If we intend to initiate an argument, especially, there are more variables to keep track of. We have to worry not only about how we see our conversational partner, but also how they are compelled to see us. In some cases, figuring out how we are seen will make us proceed with caution. In other cases, understanding how we are seen will make us disinclined to risk an argument at all. I suspect categorical

guidelines are very helpful in figuring out when our relative social position makes an argument unwise or risky. Employing such rules may be a good first defense against an intuitive apparatus that might tempt us to pick fights that will make us feel powerful, and leave our opponents feeling cheated.

Testimonial injustice is a failure on the part of listeners: if we neglect to reflect on our biases and try to correct for them, we are likely to inflate or deflate the value of what others have to say. Hermeneutical injustice does not fall as clearly on people in one particular role. For Fricker, Hermeneutical injustice happens concretely when "the subject is rendered unable to make communicatively intelligible something which it is particularly in her interests to render intelligible" (162). Specifically, hermeneutic injustice happens when experiences typically had by disempowered groups are difficult to conceptualize or talk about. Fricker's chief example of this is a woman facing sexual harassment in a culture where there is no effective language to discuss sexual harassment. She faces a plight, but cannot effectively communicate the nature of her plight or how she is being wronged. Hermeneutical injustice is less relevant for my project than testimonial injustice, but it is good to keep in mind. Often, in an argument, it can seem as if a person with a superior grasp of the terms and concepts at play has much better points than their adversary (this is particularly apparent to someone when their own points are the apparently stronger. Sometimes, one person's argument really is more intelligible and sound. But quite often, hermeneutical injustice is at play, and one's conversational partner might have a harder time articulating points for unfair reasons. We would do well in dialogue, therefore, not to assume that terminological disadvantage suggests inferior

argumentation.

As an aside, and before leaping back into strict political dialogue, arguing with political media can make a mess of the motivations for argument discussed in the first chapter. If I choose to argue with one of my peers, I can find hope in an authentic human connection. No matter how ardently I disagree with my peer, we both have a fighting chance of shaking each other's convictions (though probably just slightly). But there are plenty of ways to encounter the view of an interlocutor other than face-to-face discussion. Many of these ways involve reading or watching media produced by someone else. Relevantly, this media can often be produced by a fellow layperson. *Mass* media is a source of valuable information, but watching TV is hardly engaging in a dialogue: there is no opportunity for response. There is probably not too much to be gained by watching TV, or reading a newspaper, that is targeted for a very different political persuasion than one's own. Not only is the material unlikely to be convincing, is is not even probably interested in engaging people with very different presuppositions. Almost definitionally, mass produced media doesn't have much room for a response, so it is hardly dialogue. So if I am interested in media as a vehicle for dialogue, it is probably media of more intimate forms: mailing lists, internet forums, and medium-sized political discussion blogs, for example.

Not all media is mass produced. Especially with the advent of the Internet, plenty of media is peddled by individuals, and much of it is politically charged. If I read a political blog, example, I am free to comment and disagree. I may be on equal ground with the webmaster as a non-famous citizen; I may even have my own blog with a

similarly-sized readership. In one sense, we are peers. But if I respond to them on their own platform, am I really engaging in a fair kind of argument? Surely our positions of power, and what we have at stake, are different for all sorts of reasons.

In an argument between two peers with no audience, there's plenty of chance for either party to be convinced. Because only two agents are involved, all goals are either going to involve self-development or shaking the opponent's faith. But when I am a member of somebody else's audience, and I choose to engage them, it's frequently the third parties who I hope most to sway. There is an exception, of course, if I am correcting a factual error. In that case (and perhaps others that I have forgotten), I am appealing directly to the producer. But in any case, my contribution may be read by plenty of other consumers.

On the one hand, arguments between public figures (such as political bloggers) and audiences seems like a vital sort of discussion. It seems that we have good reason to hold people accountable as a member of their audience, even if we disagree with them. Especially when we are given clear means to interact with a publicly available opinion, calling them out and offering alternative views seems intuitively to be good. But the reasons from before won't work. If I decide to comment on a political opponent's blog post with an incisive question, I am not only trying to convince the blogger. I am instead appealing to the invisible audience, and acting as a member of that base. This gives rise to some interesting questions. I mentioned briefly in chapter one the fact that impartial organizations often host events in order to help educate an audience to both sides of an issue. Going to an event like this doesn't indicate support one way or the other. I can go to

a debate about abortion as an ardent pro-life advocate, an ardent pro-choice advocate, or somebody with serious reservations about both sides of the argument. But when I'm addressing someone who is exclusively on the other side, at their own venue, I have to give my attention to that venue first. To what extent am I *supporting* my opponent by choosing to engage them on their own ground? At least online, I am inflating my opponent's page views and comment counts, which some use as metrics for success. If I am supporting them, then is that a good courtesy to extend? If my disagreement with them is deep enough, I think probably not. Picking a fight on a white supremacist website, for example, is not worth it. Better to let such communities fester than to add to their ranks, even as an enemy sleeper agent. Surely, though, there's some kind of tradeoff. Sometimes it's worth being a member of a political opponent's audience, if I can get my perspective included in the discourse as such a member. Other times, it isn't. Chances are this will mostly be a judgment call, to be factored in as a secondary concern to the others in this chapter. Being an audience member for even a hateful opponent is probably not a very grave crime. There are complex risks for venturing into enemy territory and challenging people with platforms, but the consequences of these risks seem pretty small to me. For the rest of this chapter, therefore, I will discuss cases where my main concern is the person I'm arguing with, rather than cases where my main concern is an audience that might overhear us.

To return to the central thread of the chapter, we are very often in positions where we and our opponents occupy different levels of authority. Even more often, we *believe* that there is such a difference. For the sake of analysis, it's useful to consider cases where

both parties are equal peers in temporary isolation from the rest of the social world. But not only are most cases not like this, most cases aren't like this in at least a few different ways. One person can be in an official position of authority over another, one person can be held more accountable for what they say than another, or one person can have a greater ability to amplify their voice, to name some possible differences. Some of these sources of asymmetry are more worth examining than others. But there is also a general question: to what extent are we responsible for understanding our social position relative to someone who disagrees with us, and how are we obligated to use that understanding?

According to Fricker, nobody operates from an epistemically neutral standpoint. Everyone is situated in society, and each person has a number of traits that are immediately observable to others. Everybody has a race, for instance, and everybody has a gender (Fricker, 91). It's never safe to presume that there is no prejudice hovering around. One of the central virtues for Fricker's account of good epistemic practice, then, is being perpetually on the lookout for prejudice. One must be aware of one's own traits, and how those of others affect our perceptions. Once we figure out that we may be prejudiced, then we've got to try to "correct" for the issue at hand. But Fricker admits that this correction is a tricky business. Certainly, we have to step back from our normal uncritical process of taking in information. We instead ought to carefully examine ourselves, as well as the content of what we are being told. It may be the case that the best we can do is to withhold judgment (92). For example, suppose I, as a man, find something a woman tells me about business implausible. I apprehend that I may be biased, and might find it implausible because she is a woman. Therefore, I should try to

abstract away from my intuitive reaction, and judge her words more carefully. Maybe I will become quite sure that if somebody else had given me the same advice, I'd have believed it. In that case, I could both recognize my bias as actual and overcome it. But it's also quite possible that I'd be unsure, and think that there's a good chance that *no matter what*, I'd disagree with her advice. In such a case, my best bet is just to withhold judgment.

The difficulty of this process is where the notion of virtue comes in handy. Maybe I will often fail to come to safe conclusions about the testimony of others. I may realize that I am overvaluing some people's positions, and undervaluing others, but on a virtual ethical theory the important thing is that I consistently at least *try* to recognize bias and correct for it as best I can. Ultimately, if this builds properly as a skill, I will be better at receiving testimony in a just way.

This translates to dialogue pretty straightforwardly. It's important to be aware of the same potential sources of bias in dialogue as in simply receiving testimony. As mentioned before, though, the problem is twofold. It's probably a good idea to pay good attention to how I am receiving my conversational partner's words, as well as how they are receiving mine. It might be fair to simply decide that the other's perception is their business and not mine, but I should at least try not to play into stereotypes and give them extra reasons to inflate or devalue what I have to say. Crucially, there's some risk in constantly searching for bias in many simultaneous directions. Uncertainty will become dramatically more common. If in dialogue we must constantly doubt our own intuitive reactions and admit that we're not sure about our level of bias, we may have a hard time

getting anywhere. So in this chapter, I will propose a middle ground. It's a good idea to, as Fricker suggests, be on the lookout for bias. But in dialogue, we are also able to apply tests that may work against bias without our knowing it's there. Fortunately, this works not only in dealing with demographic disparities, but also more explicit structures of authority.

Suppose that I encounter somebody with whom I have some kind of pre-existing relationship. I could be their parent, or their teacher, or they could be my boss at work. Although the fact may not be explicit, we are under some obligation to treat each other certain ways. If the other person is in a position of authority over me, I clearly have motivation not to make them mad. If I argue with them too much, I may be punished, whether deliberately or not. Some authority figures are better than others at avoiding this kind of punishment. A good boss might enjoy a friendly political debate with employees once in a while. But if I do not have that kind of boss, I should be careful. My motivation not to make waves does not appear to be a moral obligation, unless self sabotage is immoral. If I am in a position of authority over the other person, however, then I *am* morally obligated: I shouldn't mistreat or bamboozle my subordinates, even if I can get away with it. When I interact with a person in my social sphere, especially a person who's in an hierarchy with me, there is automatically an element of obligation in the interaction. Neither of us can very easily decide to stop interacting with the other, for instance, without being impolite (although the consequences will probably be worse for the subordinate who decides to abruptly disengage). So while starting an argument with a person I am beholden to might have all the usual benefits, it also creates a whole new set

of risks.

The first and most obvious risk, in arguing with someone who cannot conveniently escape, is that we may be trapping them. And even if an argument is likely to have all the normal benefits (humanizing opponents, nuancing positions, exposing reasoning, and incrementally moving opponents a tiny bit closer), it can hardly be moral if it is *coerced*. And even supposing I have no problem with coercion, haranguing my subordinates it is not likely to be very effective. If I'm holding my partner in argument hostage, the exchange is (at least intuitively) unlikely to be robust. Chances are, the person I am arguing with will mostly do their best to smile, nod, and escape the confrontation. If neither party has a safe escape strategy, then it is best not to start arguing. So we've identified at least one quick test to apply before engaging in an argument. More will follow.

Social Test One: Do not argue with a person who can't get out of arguing with you.

There are going to be exceptions to this rule. Public figures, for example, should probably be argued with, and also should probably be heavily pressured to respond to those arguments. And when arguing with a perfect stranger, even in a cramped situation like on a plane, the inability to escape isn't nearly as bad as that of an employee being harassed by her boss about a point of contention. This first social test applies to people who are generally in some sort of proximity to each other, and have to continue to peacefully coexist for reasons not immediately within their control. Not all hierarchical relationships are like this. A waiter and a patron of a restaurant, for example, may never

see each other again. But it's probably not a great idea to argue with your waiter, who can't argue back without potentially getting into pretty major trouble.

Social Test Two: Do not argue with somebody until you have a decent understanding of ways they might be threatened by you.

This test is tricky, but I think also important. It can be pretty difficult to gauge if another person is threatened, and even more difficult to figure out under what circumstances they *might* be. The main function of this test is as a less plausibly unequal version of a more common plea: be polite. Expecting politeness can be oppressive. Generally, people with power can more easily afford to expect others to abide by their own standard of politeness, so declaring that one should "be polite" or "be civil" can sometimes means "talk on my terms." Understanding how one might be threatening is safer.

There is a risk to saying "don't be threatening," which is that people with more power are likely to be threatened by arguments that call the legitimacy of their power into question. Not only that, but a prime example of hermeneutic injustice is that people in power are very likely to have more social ability to express discomfort and interpret the complaints of less powerful people as threatening. But notice that the rule is not to avoid doing anything that might threaten anybody. It is rather to *understand* the ways that you might plausibly put someone into that sort of defensive or fearful mindset. Once you know, deciding to argue anyway might be a good judgment. But if you argue with somebody without even *considering* that you might threaten them with your words or presence, there's too high a chance that you may cause needless harm (and steel your

opponent against even incremental change).

Social Test Three: If you argue with somebody, do not disguise the level of conviction with which you hold your position.

It may seem like this is generally a good thing to do, even without any obvious power dynamics at play. But particularly when one person is less affected by an issue than another, and chooses to use their lesser investment to get a rise over an opponent, clearly they are not having a good argument. Similarly, a passionate person pretending to be a centrist in order to lure an opponent away from their convictions is being disingenuous. It is safest to be clear not only about one's position, but about one's level of conviction. This holds especially true for a person whose testimony is likely to possess a credibility surplus: if I know I can get away with being dodgy, then it is my responsibility not to abuse that unfair advantage.

These three tests are by no means exhaustive. But they are generally important to keep in mind, and fit together well. I will attempt to demonstrate each in action, and how they intersect and are likely to avert unfortunate situations.

Social Test One: Do not argue with a person who can't get out of arguing with you.

Example: Suppose that Phillip is at a busy restaurant, and is a staunch believer in climate change. On his way back from the bathroom, he overhears his waitress saying "they haven't proven anything like that! Scientists disagree about global warming all the time." Phillip disagrees strongly with the claim, and has good reason to believe that he could win an argument with the waitress handily. He believes this for a few reasons:

1. He is a professor and familiar with current language to talk about climate change. He knows, for example, that is it more fashionable to use the term "climate change" rather than "global warming."
2. He knows how to argue about global warming, and has frequently engaged in arguments against doubters in the past. From the off-hand remark of his waitress, he assumes that she has not given the issue as much thought. He would, for example, be able to discredit her assumption about "scientists disagreeing all the time" as a relevant or cogent idea.
3. He is older than she is and wearing nice clothes, and since she's his waitress, she might get in trouble for disagreeing with him anyway.

So Phillip is very confident that if he chose to argue with his waitress, he would at the very least be able to make her feel slightly more nervous to say her opinion about climate change in public, for fear of being randomly accosted by belligerent opponents. And, in fact, he can reasonably suspect that there is at least *some* chance that her mistaken (he thinks) belief about climate change is simply a political accident: it might be loosely correlated to some other system of beliefs she has, and would be easy to dispel without an argument at all. But if Phillip is prepared to be introspective and realize that the issue is a *political* one for a reason, he'll understand that this suspicion is unlikely to prove true.

Suppose Phillip is flirting with the idea of arguing with his waitress, but does not employ Social Test One. He anticipates an argument much like one he would have with a peer, with the convenient exception that he considers himself more credible and

distinguished than his opponent. He might imagine an argument like this.

Phillip: I overheard you talking about climate change. You seem to be under the impression that there's wide disagreement in the scientific community. But really, the vast majority of scientists agree that humans are responsible for plenty of climate change, and its effects could be catastrophic.

Waitress: You only said vast majority. If some still disagree, then it can't be proven yet!

Phillip: Most of the alleged scientists who disagree are funded by oil companies and the like. We can't afford to ignore the calls of both international bodies and a clear consensus among the educated world. If we do, there will be terrible consequences for humanity.

Waitress: Sounds alarmist to me. There are crises like this all the time. Remember the hole in the Ozone layer? Once it started to get bad, we basically fixed it.

Phillip: Climate change is already driving species to extinction. It's not a looming threat. It's a big problem that's poised to get much worse.

And the argument, at least in Phillip's imagination, could go on from there. He expects his opponent to produce less sophisticated, but basically consistent, versions of arguments he's heard plenty of times from his peers at work. And he expects himself to be able to respond to each of those arguments, and ultimately either win over his opponent or at least win.

Of course, there's little chance of this happening. If Phillip does pause to reflect on the enacted social positions of himself and the waitress (she is being paid to provide

him with a service, and she is not the owner of the establishment providing him the service), a whole host of mitigating factors will occur to him. First of all, there is the concern that he is in a position of relative leisure. His role at the restaurant is to relax and eat. The waitress, however, is working. If he distracts her from her work with an unexpected demand (the call to argue), she is likely to be unreceptive and upset. Not to mention the fact that she might be intimidated by his word choice (especially if he is trying to razzle dazzle his way into a cheap victory with words he figures will impress her), by the fact that he's bold enough to pick a fight in a public area, or by the fact that he's an older man. And, most critically, she will likely feel backed into a corner. The waitress will not be able to choose to simply shrug Phillip's argumentative advance off.

What's critical is that this last reason is the only one Phillip is able to *know*. That's why it's the social test. For all Phillip knows, this waitress is in fact brilliant and well read on the topic of climate change. She might be a young and successful lobbyist who waits tables on the side (unlikely, but not inconceivable). She might also be extremely gregarious, and generally pleased to have a distraction from her normal ho-hum duties. Phillip can't be sure how his advance *will* be met. But he should be able, with Social Test One, to figure out how it *can't* be met:

Phillip: I overheard you talking about climate change. You seem to be under the impression that there's wide disagreement in the scientific community. But really, the vast majority of scientists agree that humans are responsible for plenty of climate change, and its effects could be catastrophic.

Waitress: Whatever, dweeb.

The waitress is unable to escape. If Phillip argues with her and is a jerk, or comes off as a jerk, or is condescending or overwhelming or commits any number of other undesirable conversational sins, the waitress will not be in a good position to punish his bad behavior by disengaging. Phillip can't know exactly what risks he runs by arguing with this particular person. But all those risks would be mitigated if the person he were arguing with had the ability to decide against talking to him. He would have consistent evidence that he was doing a decent job of communicating in an acceptable way: his interlocutor would stick around.

If Phillip realizes this, he avoids more than just a moral offense. Ignoring social test one and going for it isn't likely to be satisfying for him, either. Most likely, the conversation would go something like this:

Phillip: I overheard you talking about climate change. You seem to be under the impression that there's wide disagreement in the scientific community. But really, the vast majority of scientists agree that humans are responsible for plenty of climate change, and its effects could be catastrophic.

Waitress: Oh, haha, yeah.

Phillip: You agree?

Waitress: Well, I guess I just haven't given it much thought, you know? It's a big topic. Anyway, decided what you're having today?

Not much is accomplished at all. If Phillip pushes the argument further, he is being obtuse and more egregiously abusing the social situation at hand.

This test is appreciably complicated by situations where there are authority

structures that exist for good reason, and dialogue is a necessary part of those structures. Academic classrooms are a good example of this, as might be parenting. A teacher can expect a student to discuss something, or a parent can argue with her child, and in either case the authority probably doesn't need to worry about obligating their subordinate to speak. But we often intuitively cringe at teachers or parents who treat arguments with their subordinates like arguments with anyone else; we are usually much happier with these sorts of authority figures who are cagier about their own positions and try to guide their charges to their own understandings. So even in cases when we *can* press people for arguments who are not easily able to escape, it's good to tread more carefully than usual.

Social Test Two: Do not argue with somebody until you have a decent understanding of ways they might be threatened by you.

Example: Suppose that Paula is a college student who has recently been diagnosed with type one diabetes. She acquires preferential treatment in deciding which dorm to live in, and chooses a dorm room that has a large kitchen. Many other students with various medical issues (or purported medical issues), qualify for the rooms with large kitchens as well. Consequentially, many students without medical issues are stuck in rooms without large kitchens. Suppose one of these students is Claire, and she is upset by what she perceives to be a failing of the school to differentiate between legitimate and non-legitimate medical issues.

If Claire encounters Paula in the hall, she may be tempted to argue with her. Suppose she is an older student, and that Paula is still rattled from her recent diagnosis. Claire, believing that Paula manipulated the system to get a room she wanted, would like

to start a conversation like this:

Claire: Hey Paula, are you enjoying your new room?

Paula: Yes, it's really nice.

Claire: I'm happy for you that you get to have a nice place to stay, but I feel like maybe you cut in line. In society nowadays sometimes it seems like everybody uses everything they can as an advantage in competition. But when people game the system, then those who don't cheat suffer.

Paula: How do you mean I gamed the system?

Claire: The disability-preferential rooming policy is designed with wheelchair-bound people in mind, or people with other disorders that make it difficult for them to even access a room. Your diabetes is not relevant to those concerns, so you've secured a room for you and your friends through a loophole, and at my expense.

Paula: I guess I didn't look at it that way. I was just thinking that I'd been very unlucky, and might as well get something nice and free to make up for it. But I guess plenty of other people get unlucky, too, and I might have unintentionally cheated one out of a good room.

Of course, even Claire knows that her hope here is a pipe dream. But she can hope more realistically to at least plant doubt in Paula's mind, or make her reconsider her actions without explicitly admitting it to her. Suppose Claire does pick a fight with Paula, having this hope, and it goes like this:

Claire: Hey Paula, are you enjoying your new room?

Paula: Yeah, I guess, but I'm kind of in a hurry to get home.

Claire: I'm happy for you that you get to have a nice place to stay, but I feel like maybe you cut in line. In society nowadays sometimes it seems like everybody uses everything they can as an advantage in competition. But when people game the system, then those who don't cheat suffer.

Paula: I don't really feel like I cheated.

Claire: The disability-preferential rooming policy is designed with wheelchair-bound people in mind, or people with other disorders that make it difficult for them to even access a room. Your diabetes is not relevant to those concerns, so you've secured a room for you and your friends through a loophole, and at my expense.

Paula: Haha, yeah, well, sorry. Anyway, I have to go.

Claire: I just wanted you to realize.

Paula: Yeah, I get it.

Claire: Cool.

Claire might well feel like she has been successful. Paula seems a little guilty, and, Claire might think, will reconsider the error of her ways. But Claire has neglected social test two, and surely she is wrong. As an able-bodied person, she does not understand the way her perspective might be threatening to Paula. To her, she seems to be suggesting that she minimize the extent to which she accommodates herself, and that she get used to a more difficult life than her peers without seeking any help. Paula might not be used to standing up for herself against people who expect her to suffer quietly, and might be too intimidated or exhausted to tell Claire that she shouldn't expect someone to walk to a remote kitchen regularly in order to sustain a diet that will prevent her death. In

Claire's view, Paula is just like her, but has managed to leverage a random life problem into an unfair advantage. But from Paula's view, Claire is trying to quash her autonomy and deny her ability to figure out what she needs to cope with a new and overwhelming issue. Paula cannot be expected to carry on an argument in the face of this kind of oppressive force, so Claire is wrong to corner her. Not only that, Claire is unwittingly taking advantage of hermeneutic injustice against people with disabilities. It is very difficult for a person with a new health problem to find a way to describe their difficulties, so Paula may simply not be up to the descriptive challenge.

Notably, Social Test One is not what's at play here. Claire and Paula are in a populated hallway, and she knows she can leave or blow her off without any unusual or intense backlash. But the very idea she's projecting at her, as well as the standpoint behind that idea, is threatening to Paula. So while she is free to ignore her technically, she cannot fight back without feeling like her identity and autonomy are somewhat on the line. Since Claire has no such risk in the argument, she is being unfair and a bully.

In this case, if Claire understood Paula's perspective she probably would not have picked a fight at all, because she would have probably realized that she was wrong. But if she'd known that Paula might be threatened and decided to share her view anyway (maybe she felt she needed a kitchen because she is too poor to afford a meal plan, so she is disadvantaged in a different way and she considers his qualms valid), she could have broached the topic with that in mind. Perhaps opening with:

Claire: Hey Paula, I'm sure it must be really hard to suddenly have to adopt different dietary habits, and I hope you're enjoying the new room. I know you have a

good reason for wanting the room, but not having a big kitchen is putting a serious financial burden on some of the students who were placed in other dorms.

Paula might still be threatened, or think Claire is employing a holier-than-thou tone to make her feel guilty. But Claire is at least aware of how Paula might be threatened, and decides that presenting her argument is worth the risk. Whether she is wrong to start that conversation is a point for legitimate debate, rather than a clear example of bad form.

Social Test Three: If you argue with somebody, do not disguise the level of conviction with which you hold your position.

Example: Suppose that Becca and Tricia are mingling at a fancy party. Becca is strongly against same sex marriage, and has signed many petitions trying to prevent it from becoming legal. Tricia has a gay daughter, and has a strong personal stake in same sex marriage's legalization. They begin discussing the issue.

Becca: Have you heard that gay marriage is legal in Washington now?

Tricia: Yes, I've heard about it. Seems like the trend is spreading.

Becca: I can't believe that as a nation, we're allowing this to happen. Marriage is an ancient institution, between a man and a woman.

Tricia: You really think so? What's the harm in letting people make their own choices about who they marry?

Becca: Marriage is hard enough in modern society for normal couples, with temptation everywhere. If anyone can marry anyone, then people will take marriage less seriously.

Tricia: My daughter has been in a serious relationship with the same woman for several years. If my daughter's partner get very sick, my daughter has no automatic visitation rights.

Becca: Oh, well, of course. I was just playing devil's advocate. Really, it's hard for me to wrap my head around it either way.

Clearly, Becca is being disingenuous here. She is concealing her true position for convenience, and making it very difficult for Tricia to respond. This is mostly an issue of her starting the discussion in the first place. She was unprepared to disagree with someone as passionate as herself, and so chose to back off by claiming that she was playing "devil's advocate?"

What's wrong with courses of action like this? Surely it's fine to bring up political topics with the assumption that the people around us will commiserate, and if we're not ready to be in an argument there has to be an escape strategy. In this case Becca is probably lying, but her offense here seems more egregious than just any old white lie.

The problem is that if we are prepared to hide behind a smokescreen and manipulate our opponents' views of our own intentions, then we are denying them the right to make an effort to influence us. Becca has decided not only that the conversation will stop there, but also that Tricia has no right to try to change her mind. If Tricia tries to push the issue forward, she may look ridiculous – she will be arguing with a position that Becca denies she holds. It would be fine if Becca said straightforwardly that she was unprepared to argue on the issue; that would amount to a surrender. It might be awkward and probably wouldn't make Tricia feel victorious, but that sort of escape is surely

acceptable. But by shutting down discourse without admitting one's own unpreparedness, we are assuming too much control over what should be a process shared between two different and entrenched points of view.

The same issue can arise as easily when an arguer pretends to be more passionate than they are, attempting to floor an opponent with emotionally charged rhetoric without actually having the relevant emotions. In these cases, the manipulative party is seizing control of the process and denying their opponent of options, and so the kinds of incremental change that come from good arguments will either not happen or be disingenuous.

On Tests in General

To reiterate, these tests are not at all exhaustive. Many other tests could be generated. Also, these three will have cases where they are unhelpful. But I do believe that generating tests like these is a good practice. Much as Fricker characterizes being a listener as a skill with its own relevant virtues, I would like to suggest that being a good political arguer is a skill worth developing. Categorical tests are good ways to quickly make sure that one is not steering into muddy water, and that a dialogue has at least a chance of accomplishing something other than the fulfillment of a whim.

Whether such tests are easy to apply in practice is harder to tell. It may be that when we get riled up, we just can't help ourselves, or it may be that we're inclined to rationalize our ways into having whatever arguments we feel like. But it seems to me like building and employing basic social tests is a good first step toward making sure our

dialogues are not weapons in unfair skirmishes of broader cultural warfare.

Overview and Contextualization

In this chapter, I first introduced the concept that arguments are often between parties on unequal footing. Some inequalities, under the right circumstances, are okay. There's not much wrong with an expert's position being privileged at a symposium where they are giving a speech, for example. It's also probably okay for teachers to wield some argumentative authority over their students, or for parents to be a little bit disingenuous in debate with their small children (don't eat that coffee bean because it's not good for you versus don't eat that coffee bean because you will become a holy terror for hours, say). Other inequalities are clearly not okay. Women being distrusted or patronized more than men, for instance, is an epistemic inequality that is worth working consciously to counteract. Some uneven power distributions can be dealt with, at least decently, and provisionally, by careful reflection during an argument itself: if I realize that I might have a subconscious bias against an overweight person when talking about health issues, I can screen my thoughts for such bias and try to correct it. But for some uneven power dynamics, it's best to avoid political argument altogether. Bosses should not politically harass their employees, customers should not politically harass the people serving them, and able-bodied people should not politically harass disabled people about their extra accommodations without being *extremely careful* not to be disempowering.

Making sound decisions about when to pick a fight is a skill, just like maintaining respect in a heated argument is a skill. I believe that as well as mere skills, they are

probably also virtues. It is good to choose one's verbal battles with discretion, and it is good to avoid stepping on an opponent's toes, at least in general. Like most virtues, good arguing is complicated and requires both the employment of reason and attentive intuition. To prime the intuitions and get in the habit of thinking about arguing as a risky but sometimes healthy endeavor, I recommend employing what I call social tests.

By social test, I mean a basic principle that an arguer can check before she dives into an argument. This should be clear from earlier in the chapter. I'll use Social Test Three as a brief example: suppose I am feeling contrary and am about to argue with someone just because they are so smug, but I don't really have a strong belief to back up my planned argument. When I consult Social Test Three, I realize that if I'm going to choose this battle, I need to make it clear that I am playing devil's advocate, and that really I am not so sure I believe what I'm saying. Maybe if I have a wide enough array of tests, derived from my own experience, my habits will get better.

I don't think a ton of good would come from everyone reading the three social tests I've provided here, and adopting them as absolute axioms. They are meant instead to give a good idea of how I think the deliberative process of testing oneself could and should go in general. Perhaps there are objections to each of these three tests I haven't thought of. There are certainly exceptions to each.

One clear and forceful issue comes to mind that someone might bring against my social test plan in general. That is that people are remarkably able to rationalize their own courses of action, and are remarkably unlikely to deploy schematics in a moment of passionate disagreement. Maybe the whole idea of building a list of no-nos and

guidelines for oneself is naïve, and the enterprise of arguing is so deeply intuitive that there's no way to even begin tracing rubrics for when and how to do it.

Surely, though, we do use something like my Social Tests all the time. Anyone who has gotten in enough unpleasant arguments, and especially anyone who has often been on the receiving end of an unfair dispute between unequally powerful parties, has reflected and learned from their (or their obnoxious opponent's) mistakes. Arguing is a prickly business. We have good reason to avoid political arguments that we know are only going to exhaust us. We also have good reason to avoid political arguments that will unduly exhaust our opponents in unfair ways. It just takes plenty of reflective practice to detect when unfair dynamics are afoot, and to decide when pushing an issue is worth the risks. This isn't easy in a social world, and more could be said about it than would fit in a single anthology. Miranda Fricker does an excellent job taking a stab at it, but she is far from alone.

I hope that it has been made clear, moving on to this thesis's final chapter, that not all political arguments are as friendly and productive as the one I will portray, and that I don't think we should expect them to be. This second chapter has been mostly a detour. I think, however, that it is a necessary one. It would be irresponsible to spend the entire project talking about good arguments, without considering the ways in which an argument might feel good but turn out to be bad. After this point in the thesis, however, I will mostly be celebrating one of those rare and robust cases where arguing is mutually invigorating and everybody is up to the task.

Conveniently, the particular case of my choice is one in which I have plenty of

experience, and many of the arguments are aggregated forms of ones that I have seen many times. I hope this section has given some occasion for reflection, though I am not equipped to resolve most of the issues raised.

Chapter Three

This chapter will consist of an extended case study of an argument. Like the lie/lay argument in chapter one, it is not political in a conventional sense. It is an argument between players of a popular game. The dialogue itself will serve to explain the nature of these players' disagreement. Insofar as it might not, there are comments with supplementary information and analysis throughout, The longest segment of analysis will focus on how the notion of expertise colors this particular debate.

I chose a topic that would usually be considered nonpolitical for two reasons. The first is that I know a lot about arguments between players of this game, and they do not get a lot of examination elsewhere in academic writing. The second is that if I chose any mainstream political issue as my main case study, it would be difficult to credibly express the arguments of both sides without alienating readers and undermining the actual complexities of modern political reality.

It is worth mentioning that by my provisional definition of politics from much earlier, the argument at hand is at least somewhat political. Each player is arguing for the game being played a certain way. If enough players choose to play the game one way or the other, then tournaments will be more or less available, and the competitive community will either flourish or suffer. The decision to view the game a certain way translates into a specific kind of action: playing it.

After my analysis, I will let two new players with more extreme positions enter the discussion. There will not be so much discussion on these two, but I hope their influence on debate will be thought-provoking and clear.

I will use the pronoun “they” to describe the players, rather than “he” or “she.” I do this because the competitive gaming community has some pretty serious problems with excluding women. I'd like to think that Smash games do abetter job including women than most competitive gaming communities, but the fact remains that at the average tournament, there will be maybe one or two women for every ten men. If I used male pronouns, I would be reifying this sad fact. If I used female pronouns, then I would feel a bit disingenuous. And if I used a mixture, some players female and some male, then I would risk feeding into stereotypes (or transparently trying to reverse them). I hope my stylistic pronoun choice will not be distracting.

Player One: Good afternoon, player two.

Player Two: Well met, player one.

P1: I don't suppose I could trouble you for a game of Super Smash Bros. Brawl?

P2: On the contrary! I love Brawl. I'd be thrilled to play you in just a minute.

P1: Sure thing. But in the meantime, I have a question. Which character do you play?

P2: I play Ganondorf. And you?

P1: I play Diddy Kong.

These characters were chosen as extreme examples, but this kind of exchange with these specific characters is far from uncommon. Many inexperienced players believe (and it's tricky to say they are wrong outright) that Ganondorf is one of the better characters in the game, and that Diddy Kong is basically unplayably mediocre. The competitive

community (a relatively small group of very practiced elites) ranks Diddy Kong as very good, and Ganondorf as the absolute worst, as a general consensus. As a general fact, there are 35 characters in the Brawl roster, and a player may use any of them.

P2: But Diddy Kong is terrible!

P1: On the contrary, Diddy Kong is the second best character in the entire game, while Ganondorf is the worst.

P2: That's surely nonsense. I've never met a Diddy Kong that my Ganondorf can't beat. And since there are 35 characters in Brawl, how can you possibly know specifically how characters are ranked? I'd understand if you had the opinion that Ganondorf was bad, although I'd disagree. But saying he is exactly the worst? That's an awfully specific opinion.

P1: It isn't just an opinion. There is a list that ranks the characters from greatest to least. Diddy is second on the list, and Ganondorf is last.

P2: Well then the list is clearly incorrect! Whoever compiled it must be a fool.

P1: It's a list made by the best players in the world. There is a panel of these best players, each with plenty of experience playing against the entire roster. They debate in private and then vote on how characters should be ranked. Their results are then released as a list, which is called the tier list. The group of people who compiled it are much better players than either of us.

There is often controversy in the tier list discussion process, but it tends to be over rather

small ranking disputes. The competitive community easily reaches consensus, at the very least, about which tier a character should be placed in. Conflicts in the listing process are mostly, say, about whether or not to switch the rankings of the characters in second and third place.

P2: Who says they are the best players? If they think that Ganondorf is the worst, they can't be all that great. I've been playing Brawl for years, and my Ganondorf beats all my friends.
P1: They're clearly the best players, because they win large tournaments with cash prizes. Consistently, they beat all challengers, only losing to each other. The record clearly shows their expertise. And since they vote on the ranking list, surely it is accurate.
P2: I may be forced to accept your point, but first I have a question. At these tournaments, what are the rules of play?
P1: All items are turned off, only the fairest stages are used, and one character is banned from play for being too powerful. All matches are best of three games, with three lives for each game.
P2: Aha! That's awfully narrow, isn't it? Items are a huge part of Brawl, and so is the diverse set of stages. These so called best players are actually only good at playing a certain tiny subset of the game. Of course when you limit gameplay, you also limit the utility of certain characters. So your list means nothing, and my Ganondorf has a fair chance of beating an equally skilled Diddy.

The way these arguments usually go, inexperienced players don't advance this kind of argument nearly this coherently. But interestingly, they do tend to say stuff to this effect in extreme shorthand. There are all kinds of slang terms (many offensive) used by the general gaming community to refer to the competitive community. One of the least offensive is "cheap," referring to tactics employed that don't really give an opponent much of a chance to respond. You'd think game theoretically that those tactics would be seen universally as the best, but most players hate them. A much more offensive term is "tourneyfag," used to describe tournament-goers and their persnickety, overly specific approach to the game.

P1: Tournaments have such a restrictive set of rules to minimize the effects of randomness within the game. Even with items on and doing battle on an absurd stage, a better player is still a better player. There is just a higher chance that he or she will suffer from some absurd fluke. No matter the settings, though, better players are better players and better characters are better characters. Diddy Kong will always beat Ganondorf more often than Ganondorf beats Diddy Kong, as long as their players are equally skilled.

P2: I know for a fact that this is false! I am equally skilled to a friend of mine who plays Diddy, and I consistently beat him.

P1: A fair point, and I believe you. Perhaps I spoke too strongly. There is a minimum level of technical expertise below which normal ratios of victory don't apply. But if both you and your friend understood the full arsenal at the disposal of your characters, then your friend would beat you every time.

P2: Ah, but let me make sure I understand your position correctly. You say that there is a list that holds true, determining the comparative ability of characters in Brawl?

P1: I do.

P2: But this list is derived by players who play with very particular settings, and only works when the game is played by those who understand the game through the lens of those settings?

P1: I'm not sure I follow.

P2: The players who make the list only play under certain settings. And the list they make only works for players above a certain skill level. But skill itself is defined by victory under those settings. So it seems like the list really applies to a certain community and standpoint toward the game, and not toward the game itself.

P1: I still maintain that highly ranked players and characters would do better in casual play, but I suppose I can't prove it. Even so, the players who win tournaments have more practice at the game than anybody. They play the most, and put the most of their time into the game. Who are we to disagree with that community?

P2: While it's true that competitive players play the game more frequently than noncompetitive players, I guarantee that in total, more casual Brawl has been played than competitive Brawl. Not only that, but the game was designed with fun in mind, to be played casually. So to assume that tournament play is more valid is silly.

That Brawl is designed with casual play in mind is pretty much indisputable. The game was slowed down vastly from its predecessor, all characters float in the air more readily

(further lowering the required level of technical skill), there are many more stages with random or ridiculous effects, and all characters randomly trip. The random tripping can win or lose a match sometimes, and is loathed by competitive players.

P1: I think it's a mistake to pay too much attention to the supposed purpose of the game. We're evaluating its internal workings, not the incidental intentions of its creators.
P2: Very well. But even so, you must admit that your tier list, which places Diddy Kong above Ganondorf, requires a certain set of rules to hold definitively true.
P1: I'll grant at least that this may be so, for the sake of argument.
P2: Well, I have a set of rules of my own. They aren't as formal as the ones used in tournaments, but I think they are far more reasonable. I believe that the game should be played in a way that's the most fun for all players involved. So I don't use cheap, inescapable combinations of attacks, and I don't like to play with others who do. I play the game with items on, so all players have a chance of a comeback. Tournament players rely on a tiny library of overpowered tactics, which drains life from the game.
P1: Not only is your proposed ruleset abstract and imprecise, it intentionally hamstrings those characters with what you call "cheap combinations." In fact, higher level play is organized around setting up such combinations, and avoiding being placed in them. Naturally if you refuse to play with a player who uses Diddy Kong well, then Diddy Kong will seem inferior.

This is actually Player One's strongest argument, in my opinion, and addresses the

biggest blind spot of noncompetitive players. Noncompetitive players are used to tactics being used against them that they can't possibly escape, but competitive players organize their entire play style around never being in a position to have those tactics used against them. So even if, say, one character has the ability to instantly knock another character out if they land a single grab, that doesn't mean that competitive play with that character is all about grabbing. Rather, it's about psyching your opponent out, and knowing they will do anything to avoid being grabbed, and therefore anticipating their evasions with other, longer ranged attacks. But a player unfamiliar with this is unlikely to want to pay close enough attention to avoid being grabbed, or even know how. So to them, such a character's ability seems to drain fun and diversity from the game. For tournament players, no diversity is really lost by this. In fact, the most vicious, flashy tactics tend only to work on noncompetitive players in the first place!

P2: It may be imprecise, but it maximizes fun. Ganondorf is better than Diddy Kong when the game is played in a way that makes sense, in a way that most people play it, and in a way that is most enjoyable to all but a tiny minority of players who are very picky about their rules.

P1: You raise good points, but you haven't really addressed my main one. Let me set it up more explicitly, to see if you have a response.

P2: Sure.

P1: We're talking about which character is best, right? And the way to determine that is which character wins the most matches?

P2: That seems fair.

P1: But surely you don't want to look over all *possible* matches. Matches played by five year olds or computers wouldn't count. Only by players who had some understanding of the game.

P2: Right. But I think that matches between competent players should all be counted, and not only an isolated group of elites.

P1: But the definition of true competence is subjective!

P2: Anyway, what was your main point?

P1: That as long as players exist that can beat any Ganondorf with Diddy a majority of the time, under any settings, and players do not exist that can beat any Diddy with Ganondorf a majority of the time, under any settings, then isn't Diddy clearly better? As long as at least a few players can demonstrate that Diddy is *always* able to beat Ganondorf, then that seems like it's sufficient to establish his superiority.

P2: I'm not convinced there are such players.

P1: Well then. Shall we play?

Analysis

One interesting feature of this basic argument structure is that it is extremely common between actual players of the game. As a competitive Brawl player, I very often get responses of the basic form of player two's when I play a new casual player. Part of this is unique to Brawl.

Arguably, Super Smash Bros. Brawl is the most popular multiplayer video game

for casual play in general. Most people I meet under the age of 25 have played it. That's anecdotal, but it's certainly been true of my experience. Part of the reason the game is so popular is because it's goofy and easy to pick up, with tons of familiar characters to choose from. But weirdly, because it's popular casually and has so many players, it also has attracted a large competitive fan base. Over four years after its release, it is still played very often in both casual and competitive formats.

In this sense, Brawl is somewhat unique. Most competitive video games fizzle out for casual play pretty quickly, and most casually appealing games aren't particularly competitive. But Brawl is a casual game that people endeavor to play competitively anyway, with such a massive community, competitive and otherwise, that the capabilities of the characters are well understood. To make matters more dramatic, Brawl features characters with very different styles of play and moves, differentiating it from other fighting games on the market.

All this is to say, more or less, that Brawl and discussions about Brawl are pretty unique. This isn't a dialogue about competitive versus casual video game play or a dialogue about competitive versus casual game play (although many points do happen to generalize), but rather a dialogue about the various approaches to this specific game. So now that question arises, why Brawl? And if this isn't a dialogue about video games or games in general, then why is it worth discussing this particular game, and what implications does this discussion have on the analysis of expertise more generally?

To answer the first question first, Brawl has a special place in my heart. That's why I like to write about it. But why bother to read about it? I maintain that Brawl is a

relevant cultural artifact. It is a competitive multiplayer game that has been almost universally played by American youngsters at least once (or at least the ones I've met), and it is not quite like any other fighting game out there. This is a claim from my personal experience as a middle class white male kid, so I'm sure I could be wrong. But in that personal experience, and especially at competitive tournaments, I've been struck by how many different sorts of player there are. Naturally, children without access to TVs will not have played much of any video games at all. But within the population of young people with access to video games, Brawl exposure is ubiquitous. And helpfully, its cast of characters are drawn from a variety of Nintendo games, Nintendo being perhaps the longest running and most influential video game company.

There are very few games that almost everyone has heard of and that most video game players have played. Of the ones I can think of, only Brawl and Halo are multiplayer. And of those two, only in Brawl are all the players on the same undivided screen at the same time. Brawl does not try to be even nearly a simulation of reality, unlike many very famous first person shooters. The spaces in Brawl are simple and two-dimensional. To me, it feels more like a classical game than many other video games. Once again, this is all anecdotal. I am unaware of any statistical information to support my claims here. Simply pointing to how many copies the game has sold is insufficient. Many gamers have played only at friends' houses, and some competitive players have bought multiple discs throughout their careers (I've been through three or four). To readers who are members of the culture for whom Brawl is culturally relevant (casual and competitive console gamers), I hope my anecdotal claims ring true. To readers who are

not, I hope you will take my word for it. I hope that even if you do so cautiously, you will learn a few things about an unfamiliar community.

But now back to the second, more important question: assuming that Brawl is worth talking about, what can disagreements between hypothetical Brawl players tell us about productive arguing? I think plenty. This argument is useful for looking into how disagreement between experts and laypeople can go, and can provide a good example for political argument in general.

Discussion of Brawl involves a certain sort of expertise which I think is common, but which I have not seen discussed philosophically before. It involves expertise that definitely presupposes a certain way of looking at something, and is concerned with truth only after the presupposition has been made. A skilled Brawl player is an expert relative to the skilled play of Brawl, and is only really an expert to those players who assume that skill in Brawl is a good thing for a Brawl player to have. This is unlike, say, climate change or nuclear physics. Both of these cases are complex, but in both cases experts identify themselves as people with greater access to the truth than laypeople, and both would maintain that regardless of other convictions non-experts might have, the things they have to say are simply right. It really *is* demonstrable that humans have effected climate change, and atoms really *do* behave a certain way, say experts in these fields. Experts in these fields are concerned, in other words, with truth, and it is understanding of the truth that makes them experts.

Skilled Brawl players are experts by virtue of skill and experience. That's the only thing that really makes them experts. They know what it's like to play a variety of

characters as best as they can be played, and they can impart that knowledge. An unskilled player cannot do this, even if he or she has theoretical knowledge. An unskilled player cannot be sure that he or she was not simply playing a much better player, rather than a better character. But a sufficiently skilled player, versed in enough tournament level matches, having taken part in and seen enough, has an understanding of the patterns of high level play that an unskilled player basically cannot have.

This is far from unique to Brawl, or games in general. There is the old and compelling question of who knows more about childbirth, a doctor who delivers babies or a mother who has had five? But that is a question more of firsthand experience versus technical expertise. For a Brawl player, they are the same. There is no book knowledge to Brawl, really, other than theory that is specifically intended to inform practice. There are guides on how to get good at the game, but getting good at the game is the best way to understand it, on a competitive level. Like many skills, a jargon-dense language has emerged to describe competitive Brawl play. The sentence, for instance, "Samus's zair is one of the only moves with hitstun, so it's a key mixup if you want to use her for mid tier," is completely coherent for a competitive Brawl player. I can think of no way, other than repeated exposure to good players, that a person would learn to decipher these sorts of sentences.

I think that almost all games and sports have this quality, at least to an extent. One has to play a little bit with others to gain fluency about the game. Without a little fluency, watching others play is relatively meaningless. Seeing the plight of parents at a video game tournament makes this evident. They would like to be supportive, but most tend to

struggle just to figure out what is going on. Of course, not only games confuse the uninitiated. I'd maintain that most skills are understood first (and often best) through their practice. A cooking expert is someone who is a good cook, and that is different than being, say, a nutritionist. A music expert may know theory, but is also likely to be practiced at listening to and making music. But here, we run into a crucial problem. If it's not access to truth, but rather skill, that informs expertise with respect to many relevant activities, then what do we do about enthusiasts who have not developed much skill? Are they wrong about their convictions, or are they simply operating in a whole different epistemic space? There might be a case of hermeneutic injustice against casual players, who do not have a good way to explain exactly what it is they like about casual play, whereas competitive players have a private language of jargon to justify their own position. On the other hand, there might be hermeneutic injustice against better players, too, who cannot easily explain to someone coming from a casual player's perspective how a particular tactic is anything other than "cheap." Naturally, neither possible interpretation is nearly as serious as the sort of injustice Fricker means to talk about, but I think the concept fits pretty well.

This debate illuminates what I think is a broader tension: should skill translate automatically into authority, especially when it is at odds with majority opinion? When expertise is largely a function of skill, then is a disagreement between a skilled and unskilled person resolvable? Is either party obviously more correct? Especially in cases where skill often requires specialization (tournament specified settings rather than a wider variety of settings, for example), it's not clearly fair to say that a layperson is

wrong. Player two plays the game as a game, for fun. A great chef might be at a loss in a layperson's kitchen without fancy tools or premium ingredients, even though most cooking is done under those conditions. Even so, she might make a better meal that most cooks, and so we are back to the core tension at hand, that the expert probably still does better out of her element, but *not necessarily*.

Notably, at this point in dialogue, the players have reached an uneasy state of partial compromise. There are things they agree on, although naturally nobody's position will have totally flipped. They also have a better understanding of why their opponents think the way they do. These are all features of my account of healthy dialogue. Now let's see what happens after they play.

P2: No matter what settings we chose, you beat me much more often than I beat you. No matter what other arguments we make, I must admit your level of skill is greater in general.

P1: I appreciate that. But I've been thinking about what you said, and might doesn't necessarily make right. I certainly don't think I've been incorrect in my position, but maybe neither have you. I'm beginning to think the problem may have been our usage of the word 'best.' For me, 'best' has to do with the character's set of options, and overall ability to respond effectively to a variety of scenarios. Diddy Kong, for example, almost always has excellent options available. This works very much to his favor in a tournament setting. But I admit he isn't much fun to play against outside of the tournament mindset.

P2: I'll say! Every time you chose Diddy Kong, I hardly had any fun. It seemed that I was less responding to your attacks as having to guess the most vicious thing you *might* do, and keeping out of positions where you could do it. But as a result, neither of us could use our best moves.

P1: That's a feature of competitive play. Very rarely does a character want to employ their strongest option to the point that it becomes predictable. Many tournament level players try to make uncomfortable conditions for their opponents, and only decisively attack to capitalize on the opponent's resulting mistakes.

P2: Sure, and Ganondorf is far too slow to punish much of anything. When I was playing against you, I felt like I was never even in a position to attempt a hit. When I said Ganondorf was good, I had the strength of his attacks in mind. But that hardly matters when style of play makes slow attacks obsolete!

P1: Well, you see? When I said 'best,' I was thinking about capacity to control the stage and pressure opponents into slipping up. When you said it, you were thinking about strength of attacks. In some respect, we were arguing past each other.

P2: Now wait a minute! Just because you've clobbered me in game doesn't mean you have to coddle me in argument. We *were* talking about different sorts of best, but not in this new way you are describing. I was describing a version of best that might win matches most often under a variety of settings, and you were describing a version that might win matches most often under a hegemonic sliver of settings. But we were both describing one basic common idea: winning matches. And, having seen the way Diddy Kong can monopolize space, I concede that there are practically *no* settings under which

a Ganondorf like mine could most often win. So for both my version and yours, you were right.

P1: Naturally, I agree with you. But I wasn't trying to coddle you in argument. In fact, some of your earlier points have started to sink in, and now that I've won some matches I feel less defensive about my perspective. I think the way we're agreeing now is somewhat game theoretical. But there are other ways of looking at it, and they are much more sympathetic to your old position.

P2: Game theoretical?

P1: Yes. By which I mean, pertaining to game theory. In game theory, rational agents playing a game will take into account their own options and the options of their opponents, and make a choice that optimizes their outcome from their prediction of what will happen.

P2: I'm not sure I follow.

P1: In the case of Brawl, suppose two professional level players sit down to a match. Both players have the option to immediately attack, or to hang back and wait to respond to their opponent. If both players immediately move in for an attack, the game might be more robust and interesting. But that doesn't tend to happen.

P2: Why not?

P1: Because if one player moves in for an attack, and the other does not, then the cautious player will come out on top. She will be able to respond to the aggressive player's tiny mistakes, and ultimately gain the upper hand. And since both competitive players in a match know this, both hang back and wait. From that basic premise, called

camping in the competitive community, a whole diverse library of tactics emerges.

P2: Camping. Wow. In the group I play with, that's seen as an insult.

P1: Sure. It's not much fun. But game theoretically, it's basically required as a go-to tactic. Of course, high level play can be very entertaining. There are tactics to force an opponent's approach without approaching yourself, and so pressure does eventually come back into the game. But without those tactics, the game theoretical superiority of camping would make the game far less fun.

P2: I think I see where this is going. Those tactics were only discovered in the first place because camping was obligatory, right? And camping is only obligatory for players who acknowledge that their opponent's defensive options generally outclass their aggressive ones.

P1: Yes. And while players of that sort, like me, will almost always defeat players of any other sort, that might be more a weakness with the game than anything else. Surely, the developers did not anticipate camping. I personally find competitive play ultimately the most fun. But the transition from noncompetitive play to competitive play is a desert of unpleasant defense tactics. Building a play style based on oblique pressure is hard. And in the meantime, at the intermediate levels of skill, camping just doesn't make for a fun or balanced game.

P2: And getting through the intermediate levels is an awful lot of work, which simply isn't worth it for most players. I don't have the inclination to cross that desert of no fun, so it doesn't make sense for me to make the game theoretically rational move and start camping.

P1: I agree. And once you've decided not to adopt a campy play style, a character's quality is determined more by their aggressive options than a competitive player's more abstract control.

P2: Sure. But there's a ceiling. At a certain point, I will always lose. So I hesitate to say that my version of quality is real quality at all, and not simply a rationalization of laziness. There are numbers on my side; more people play the game and see the characters my way. But your way strictly dominates mine. The true source of quality, winning, will always favor those of your approach.

P1: I'm afraid that's true. Even though camping and control are perhaps not the most interesting fundamentals, they are the fundamentals that grant results with the game we have.

P2: I suppose there's no getting around that. The game is the game.

Player Three enters.

P3: You guys are playing Brawl? That game sucks. Let's play some Melee.

This segment of dialogue is the most delicate, because one player clearly has assumed a position of authority over the other. Even though both players certainly still have arguments at their disposal, Player One was proven correct about the core issue discussed earlier: Player One does win more often than Player Two, more or less regardless of the settings.

There are a number of ways this part might have gone, and I picked the one that was the most interesting to me. I chose a few things:

1. I chose the outcome of the play session, that Player One wins most often. In my experience, tournament players almost always do beat casual players under casual circumstances. But, as I discussed earlier, this outcome was neither obvious nor assured.
2. I chose for Player Two to behave well and defer to Player One's correctness about the original point of argument. Instead, Player Two might have easily reiterated that they find Player One's tactics cheap, refused to talk about the issue any more, or leapt immediately into a different set of tactics. One such set might have been focusing on the fact that as far as Player Two is concerned, matches of the sort Player One prefers are simply less fun, and winning doesn't matter compared to that.
3. I chose for Player One to behave well and use their newfound authority respectfully. Player One could have accepted Player Two's deference, and claimed that Player Two clearly had no argument at all. This would be pretty rude, and would have brought the dialogue to a halt.

The first choice was to keep dialogue realistic, or at least in line with my own experiences. The second was to keep dialogue interesting, because a sore loser's complaints are not much fun to read. The third choice is the most relevant to points more broadly in this thesis. Player One is being a good arguer on both Haidt's and Fricker's accounts. Player One follows Haidt's advice by treating their opponent well, and not

simply taking the opportunity to trample Player Two. Player One's willingness to compromise and engage Player Two thoughtfully, especially when Player Two in a disadvantaged position, is much more likely to foster an intuition in Player Two that tournament players really do have some good points. And Player One follows Fricker's advice by taking a step back, correcting for their prejudice against overconfident casual players, and helping Player Two salvage a better form of their original perspective.

To finish the dialogue, two new players will appear. They will present more extreme positions than Player One and Player Two, to which our two original players must react.

P3: I must confess I've been overhearing your conversation for quite some time, and I didn't want to interrupt. But it seems the two of you have come to an agreement.

P1: Something like that, yes.

P3: And since I know that you favor the competitive approach, Player One, there's simply no way you would decline a few rounds of Melee.

P2: Melee? What's that?

P3: Super Smash Bros. Melee is the game preceding Super Smash Bros. Brawl, in the same series. It came out several years earlier.

P2: Why not just play the newer game, then?

P3: Well, Brawl was frankly a step in the wrong direction. Melee is a far deeper game, with many more opportunities for technical skill. It is faster paced, and favors aggressive tactics over endless camping. For competitive gamers, it is vastly more compelling than a

game like Brawl. Brawl, in fact, was intentionally designed to be *un*competitive. The designers didn't like how alienating Melee could be for casual gamers, so they introduced all sorts of mechanisms to make Brawl uncomfortable for the more competitive crowd.

P2: Wow! I had no idea. I've never played Melee, but now that I think of it there are a lot of features in Brawl that would be frustrating in a tournament.

P3: You have no idea. Anyway, Player One, are you up for a few rounds?

P1: I don't like Melee. It's too fast for me, and I'm no good at it.

P3: I appreciate your honesty. I guess if you're just into playing smash games casually, then I can't fault you for it.

P1: I don't consider myself a casual player. I play in tournaments often, and generally do pretty well.

P3: But you're more casual than a Melee player, like myself.

P1: Melee and Brawl are different games. I'm only a casual *Melee* player at best, but I'm a serious Brawl player. They're not the same game, and they use slightly different skill sets.

P3: Sure, Brawl and Melee emphasize different skills. But that doesn't mean that they require an equal amount of skill. Brawl and Melee are different games, but there's plenty of ways to compare them. And if you care about competitive play, then Melee is clearly the better of the two.

P1: I'm pretty sure I disagree. But before I say so for sure, what ways do you mean?

P3: Well, both Brawl and Melee players have to be able to understand their own options and those of their opponents. It's crucial to be able to predict what an opponent will do,

and to be able to respond to it effectively. But in Brawl, each character has relatively few options. In Melee, there are many more options. The game's physics engine allows for players to string many attacks together into powerful combos, and various minor glitches make it possible to move around the arena in varied ways. Also, in Brawl all the options are pretty easy. In Melee, some of them are very difficult, so Melee players must be more technically skilled and have to keep more options in their heads at once. Not to mention that since Melee is much faster than Brawl, there's less time to think all this through. Melee is clearly tactically deeper and more challenging than Brawl.

P1: That's a formidable set of claims, and I'm forced to agree with several. You're right that in Melee, there are more options. I believe that in both games, however, a few options tend to dominate competitive play. There's innovation sometimes in either game, but more useless possibilities doesn't make a game better. Let's assume you're right, though, and Melee players really do have a greater pool of options to draw from. Let's also assume that you're right in that Melee players have to do more technically difficult stuff in order to use their best options. It's obvious that Melee is faster, so you're right about that. But in my opinion, this doesn't combine to make an automatically better game.

P3: How can it possibly not, for competitive purposes?

P1: Well, I think that the vast array of options and the breakneck speed create a difficult entry barrier for new players. Melee is unintuitive and very old.

P3: Sure, it's harder. But it's also harder to play Brawl competitively than non-competitively. If your main goal is inclusion, you might as well play four player matches with items.

P1: It's not only inclusion, though you're right that I can't rely on Brawl being easier. But I do think that there's another way of looking at the differences between the game. You seem to allege that Melee, by being more tactically diverse and more technically difficult, is more competitive.

P3: Yes, and I'm not sure how that's contestable.

P1: I think that those two features, tactical diversity and technical difficulty, are at odds. Melee might have more options, sure, but competitive play boils down to just a few mainstays. You mentioned powerful combos earlier. Those combos ensure that in competitive play, you see a lot of the same extremely difficult stuff time and time again. Who wins a Melee match very often comes down to who makes the fewest technical mistakes. The technical skill ceiling is so high that even the best player will make basic input errors.

P3: Sure, I think I see what you're getting at. In Melee, there are two axes of skill. There is technical skill, and there is tactics ability. A player with bad tactics but good technical skill might beat a player with good tactics and bad technical skill.

P1: Right, and competitive Brawl mostly just has one axis of skill. A couple hundred hours of practice and you get as good at the technical aspect as you're going to, at least mostly. So it's almost all about mind games and figuring your opponent out.

P3: I'm glad we can agree about that. But surely, two axes of skill is superior. A game that uses multiple sorts of skill is better than a game that only uses one.

P2: Wait a second. I'm not sure whose side I fall on, and honestly I'm not sure how much I care about competitive play in general. But I doubt it's safe to say that better games

require greater numbers of distinct skills. Following that logic, Monopoly would be a better game than chess. Monopoly requires both understanding of probability and political acuity to play well, while chess requires only analytic ability.

P3: I'll bet chess players would pick a fight with you about that, but I won't. Obviously chess is more competitive than a game like Monopoly because even though Monopoly has more varied sorts of skill, the main skill employed for chess goes extremely deep. Not only does Brawl have just one type of skill, it doesn't go particularly deep. Players have to try to guess what their opponents will do, but a lot of it comes down to making lucky guesses and keeping calm under pressure. Melee has that too. It's just that Melee also has more.

P1: I think you're getting a little carried away singing Melee's praises, and forgetting our original point of contention. Melee may or may not require more aggregate skill than Brawl, but that doesn't really cause me any problems. I'm simply not interested in developing lightning-quick reflexes. I'm interested in a game that focuses mainly on fundamentals, like Brawl. When I win a match against another tournament level player, I'd like it to be because I picked up on his patterns more quickly than he picked up on mine, not because I could hit more buttons per second.

P3: In Melee, it's both, not just hitting more buttons.

P1: Sure. But I prefer a game where precision of button hitting is just not a very big aspect. And since you've admitted yourself that Melee requires whole *different* skills than Brawl, it's perfectly reasonable for me to prefer one game and you the other. I'm not a less serious competitive player, just a player who prefers a game which calls for a smaller set

of abilities.

P3: I guess I have to concede you have a point, though something feels wrong about it to me. I'll never be a sort of player that chooses to play a game that doesn't reward technical skill. And I think that Melee requires at least as much tactical acuity as Brawl. But if you want tactics to make up the greatest possible proportion of what counts, Brawl is the best smash game for you.

P1: Sure. You have a point as well. I do have to concede that I prefer a game that has random tripping, and that had many advanced techniques removed by the developers on purpose. Brawl is harder to make competitively viable than Melee, though I do think it's still worth doing. And, though this shouldn't count as a major reason to prefer it theoretically, as a newer game it attracts more excitement for newer players. I'll always prefer a tournament with fresh faces to one with people who've been playing the game for the last ten years.

P3: Well, it's been good talking to you. If you get bored of randomly tripping and moving slow, you know where to find me.

Player Three exits.

P2: Huh. When I played you and kept losing, I realized that your arguments held some water and that I looked at skill a little narrowly. Having talked to Player Three, do you feel the same?

P1: A little bit. Melee has always been a shadow over the Brawl community in some sense, because when Brawl came out some players moved on and some stayed behind. Competitive Brawl players are often insecure that their game is ultimately more of a

beginner's version of Melee. It's good to be reminded that my own technical skill in Brawl isn't much compared to what's out there. But I don't think I'll be compelled to switch anytime soon.

P2: Me either. Brawl's challenging enough for me, and it sounds like Melee is not nearly as much fun to play casually. Anyway, it's been fun playing, but I've gotten a little bored of Brawl recently. Sooner or later the next smash game will come out, and then maybe I'll get really into the series. Until then, I suppose I'll wait.

Player Four enters.

P4: Actually, you don't have to wait. New versions of Smash exist already. And they're way better than Brawl or Melee.

P2: What do you mean, Player Four? The most recent Smash game is still Brawl, even though it was released several years ago.

P4: I'm talking about modding Brawl. If you hack your game system, you're able to download codes that change the way the game works.

P2: Hacking sounds a little too advanced for me, and also a little ridiculous.

P4: Take my word for it that it's easy. I could hack your system for you, if you'd like, and get some codes that enable you to play much better versions of Brawl.

P2: I like Brawl how it is just fine. What versions are you talking about?

P4: Well, the entire competitive community has some serious issues with Brawl. I'm sure Player One can agree with that.

P1: Definitely. One of the characters, Meta Knight, is far better than the rest. In general, some characters are way better than others.

P4: There's also the infamous random tripping.

P1: Sure, that too. And while I don't mind the speed of gameplay, a lot of competitive players would prefer if things were faster.

P4: Exactly. By modding Brawl, you can fix all these problems. A small but dedicated faction of smash players has taken Brawl's problems into their own hands, and fixed most of them. Great players and programmers have designed hacks that can be easily applied to Brawl. These hacks remove random tripping, speed up gameplay, and make all the characters about equally good.

P1: Sounds too good to be true.

P4: Well, it certainly took a while. The mod I use is called Brawl Plus. It has been through many different versions, trying to tweak it and make it the most balanced and skillful version of Brawl possible. Once people try it, they don't want to bother with Brawl anymore. Even a lot of Melee players enjoy Brawl Plus.

P2: Before today, I never really had a problem with character balancing in Brawl. But getting rid of random tripping does sound nice. If what you're saying is true, then downloading Brawl Plus is an excellent idea.

P1: Hang on. I'm not so sure. Maybe I'm just set in my ways, but there are a few reasons why I think I'll stick with Brawl.

P2: I'm curious to hear them.

P1: First of all, I'd like to be loyal to the developers of Brawl. They made a great game, and I'm not sure how comfortable I'd feel playing an edited version.

P4: Most games that are designed to be competitive are slightly altered over time by the

companies that manufacture them. Almost no game is released with good balancing to start off with. The only reason Nintendo never bothered to change Brawl is because it isn't designed with competition in mind. It just happens to be a good competitive game. Brawl Plus makes it a great one.

P1: Fine, you've got me there. But I was just getting started. Intuitively, I don't like doctoring a game I love. But I have better reasons, too. Even if modding a game system is easy, I find it very unlikely that most casual players will have access to Brawl Plus. So if I spend all my game time developing skill a this new version, I'll only be able to use that skill in a tiny minority of cases.

P4: That's true, but not as much as you might think. Many tournaments have events for modded versions of Brawl. These events tend to be smaller than the mainstream version, but they do attract some players.

P2: Also, Player One, remember we've been mostly talking about what version of the game is good, and what way of playing is good. The fact that Brawl Plus might be unfeasible to play at the average party or tournament doesn't make it a worse game. And if it is both better and unpopular, all the more reason for us to make it more popular, right?

P1: Sort of. Fortunately, that's not the end of my argument. I understand that you've said Brawl Plus has been tweaked repeatedly since its release. That's a good thing. But I also understand that Brawl Plus has way fewer players than normal Brawl, or than Melee. With such a small base of competitive players, Brawl Plus can't have been really tested. Brawl is in part such a good game because a large competitive community has worked

with it for so long. Brawl Plus having fewer players doesn't make it worse innately. But a game that's only designed and played by a small niche will never get true tactical depth.

P4: This seems like more of the same argument to me. If what you say is true, that's more reason for us to try to further Brawl Plus ourselves. If enough people did, then Brawl Plus would surpass Brawl in tactical depth pretty handily, if only because every character would be viable.

P1: No, it's not just more of the same argument. Consider the character Olimar in Brawl, for example. Nobody thought that Olimar was very good for years and years. Eventually, because Brawl was played competitively for so long, some people figured out that Olimar was actually very good. Today, he's one of the top few characters. With Brawl Plus, things would have gone different. Olimar would have seemed worse, and the game would have been edited to make him better. The small community of players would never have known that he was good to begin with.

P4: I'm not sure how this is related to your point about Brawl's bigger community making it more worth playing. It seems like now you're complaining about Brawl Plus being rebalanced over time.

P1: They're linked concerns. If a game changes to keep balance, then players never need to really adapt. They have only to wait for the next version. And if the community that plays the game is so small, then there will be less innovation going on. Intuitively, I feel like modded versions of Brawl will have less skill than Brawl and Melee.

P4: I disagree. I think that since Nintendo decided to make Brawl so much less competitive than Melee, it's our responsibility to help create the game we'd like to play.

P2: What about me, though? As a casual player, will Brawl Plus just give competitive players more ways to trounce me?

P4: Not at all. Brawl Plus awards skill, but it also makes good options intuitive to pursue. It's easier to get good at Brawl Plus than Melee, but the technical skill goes deeper than that of Brawl.

P2: I'd at least like to give that a try.

Player Three returns.

P3: Did I hear Brawl Plus is happening? It's no Melee, but I'll take what I can get.

P2: Can we do a four person match?

P1: I guess I might as well try it.

P4: Great. Let me drive home real quick. I've got to get my system.

P1: On the other hand, we do have normal Brawl right here.

P2: Player One, I think that might be your strongest argument.

Final Analysis of the Dialogue

Before Players Three and Four enter the scene, Players One and Two have come to an unsteady agreement: it's clear to both players that Player One's style of play will almost always beat Player Two's, all else being equal. But because both players were good arguers, their conversation is not a simple transfer of knowledge from the victor to the loser. Player One still thinks that competitive play is the superior way to enjoy Brawl. But Player One also comes to recognize how narrow the parameters of competitive play really are, and that the competitive approach could easily be seen as exploiting the game.

Player Two continues to prefer a more casual approach, but understands that competitive players have more fun battling each other than he has battling one of them: the frustration he experiences is because of the difference in styles, not because the competitive style is essentially less fun.

Notably, neither player fully switched their basic intuitive position. Also, neither especially presumed that they would be able to fully convince their opponent. Player One hoped to disillusion Player Two of a few false notions (my Ganon can beat *any* Diddy, for example), but did not expect to change Player Two's entire way of looking at the game. Similarly, Player Two wanted to temper Player One's confidence in a single approach, but didn't expect to destroy it.

Both players were successful in impacting each other's views, and both understood better where the other was coming from by the end of their one-on-one discussion. Player One was also careful to follow some of the guidelines described in this thesis's second chapter. Specifically, Player One acts as if they are applying Social Test Two and Social Test Three.

Player One applies something like Social Test Two by being aware that Player Two might find them threatening. Player One recognizes that Player Two is all too willing to concede losing the argument simply to avoid being a bad sport, and is careful not to pick a fight that will threaten Player Two's understanding of their self as a skilled player.

Player One applies Social Test Three by being honest when Player Four comes in. Player One admits that a big part of their resistance to Brawl Plus is intuitive, and does

not attempt to hide exclusively behind rationalizations. Player One also uses Social Test Three by refusing to simply shrug off Player Three's claim that Melee is more technical. Many Brawl players will let a Melee player get away with saying that Melee is better, but many just say so to avoid making waves. If Brawl players really thought Melee was strictly better, they'd play Melee!

It's worth noting that Player One and Player Two's good sportsmanship with each other makes it easy for them to process the more radical positions of Players Three and Four together. Healthy dialogue makes it possible to account for why Player One in particular chooses to hold a moderate position. To play Brawl competitively is actually pretty moderate within the competitive smash community, compared to diehard Melee loyalists and Brawl modders. Player One's position originally seemed extreme and cheap to Player Two. But after a good dialogue, Player Two is able to see Player One's competitive Brawl loyalism on a continuum. If Player One was bigger on technical skill and more afraid of change, Player One might have been a Melee loyalist instead. And if Player One were less loyal and more easily annoyed by inequality, he might have been a Brawl Plus player.

The parallels to common debates between political ideologies are far from perfect, but I have found them interesting to speculate about.

As for myself, I've mostly been playing a mod called Brawl Minus lately. It's a more casual, more frenetic version of Brawl Plus. In this sense, my own habits are a sort of fusion of those of Players One, Two, and Four. I do not much care for Melee, and haven't since Brawl came out. But this is because I'm too slow to be great at it. Player

Three's position, as far as I'm concerned personally, might well be the strongest.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have explored reasons for political argument. I determined that the main reason would be to marginally move another party's position on an issue closer to one's own. I also have examined reasons to be careful about starting arguments under some circumstances, especially when unequal power dynamics are at play. I have supported a virtue ethical way of looking at political argumentation, that we get better at being sensitive good arguers through practice. I also supported the use of so-called social tests, basic questions a person can ask herself before diving into debate.

Finally, I used different play styles of the *Super Smash Bros* series of video games as positions in develop my own philosophic dialogue. This dialogue was my case study for political dialogue in general, as well as a foray into one of my favorite subjects and pastimes.

The case study, in particular, comes from years of private speculation. I hope you've enjoyed it!

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