Character and . . .

Play

Volume 9 / 2023

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Editors

Annalee R. Ward, Executive Editor
Mary K. Bryant, Managing Editor

The faculty essays presented here emerge from a semester-long process of reading and writing together in an environment of critique and review. Nevertheless, this invited journal of essays represents the authors' views and not necessarily the views of the Wendt Center for Character Education or the University of Dubuque.

Contact Information

Wendt Center for Character Education
University of Dubuque
2000 University Avenue
Dubuque, IA 52001

563-589-3440 (office)
wendt@dbq.edu (e-mail)
www.dbq.edu/wendt (website)

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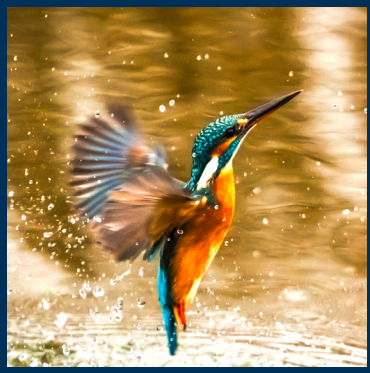
Character and Play

Worth Playing Together

Annalee R. Ward

As Kingfishers Catch Fire
By Gerard Manley Hopkins

As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies dráw fláme;
As tumbled over rim in roundy wells
Stones ring; like each tucked string tells, each hung bell's
Bow swung finds tongue to fling out broad its name;
Each mortal thing does one thing and the same:
Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;
Selves—goes itself; myself it speaks and spells,
Crying *Whát I do is me: for that I came*.



Í say móre: the just man justices;
Kéeps gráce: thát keeps all his goings graces;
Acts in God's eye what in God's eye he is—
Chríst—**for Christ plays in ten thousand places**,
Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his
To the Father through the features of men's faces.

Gerard Manley Hopkins' poem may sound strange to our twenty-first century ears. His phrases and use of language call for second and third reads to figure out the meaning. Yet one phrase speaks plainly: "for Christ plays in ten thousand places."

That phrase encapsulates shades of meaning, including that Christ shows up and speaks in both nature and humanity. In a contemporary slant, think of it as a headliner cross-world tour: *Christ is playing at a site near you!* In the "10,000 places," Christ doesn't just perform—he also "plays"—that is, expresses creativity and delight in extraordinary and surprising faces and places, shows up in a variety of spectacles. Christ living in people, created in the image of God, affirms the delightful diversity in humanity.

Memories of play under the deep blue sky

The positivity and joy that play brings to people—young and old—sets the stage for experiences that often transport us. Consider for a moment, what comes to mind when you hear the word *play*. I am whisked back to childhood memories of swinging so high I could touch the deep blue sky of the west, where I grew up. I see neighborhood children racing bikes, playing make-believe, marbles, and made-up games. I watch my brothers disassemble roller skates to create their very own skateboards. I smile in the memories. But of course, the darker sides of that play dissipate with distance—the being left out, the accidents, the intrusiveness of lived lives, illnesses, parental woes impinging on that sacred space of play. Yet, somehow, the spirit of play shaped who we were (and are) and how we responded to the realities back then (and now).

This volume of essays begins to explore the ways in which play intersects with character formation both as an action and as an attitude. Emerging from the crises of a pandemic brought us a longing for freshness, a longing for lightness, a longing for play. With that recognition, our authors quickly settled on the subject as one that would be both instructive and delightful to explore.

The wide range of play-related topics may surprise you, but that diversity only highlights the heuristic power the term *play* has. For example, how is it possible to have a translator/media producer, a musician, a cultural historian, and a research scientist write on the same subject? By taking a broad understanding of play as action and attitude, we are able to employ the concept as a prism through which varied interests and expertise

examine a particular hue of the concept. Using common readings, including Johan Huizinga's classic *Homo Ludens*, to provide the shape of our prism means we began this journal volume with a triangulated conversation between play, virtue, and particular applications. Authors "played" with terms from their unique standpoints.

Children at play

Play and Character

While research on the subject of play grows,[1] limited explorations of its relationship to character exist. The noteworthy *Handbook on Character Strengths and Virtues* suggests there might be a link between good character and humor or playfulness, but this remains more suggestion than researched quality.

We need to take play seriously and consider how it may relate to our character.

Play theorist Stuart Brown, founder of The National Play Institute, goes so far as to say, "Play is the vital essence of life. It is what makes life lively."[2] It helps us "harness a force that has been built into us through millions of years of evolution, a force that allows us to both discover our most essential selves and enlarge our world. We are designed to find fulfillment and creative growth through play."[3] As it is a significant force in life, perhaps we need to take play seriously and consider how it may relate to our character.

Dogs at play

To do that, I begin with a reminder from animals. Mark Bekoff, a professor of ecology and evolutionary biology has spent most of his career studying animals. He argues that different species exhibit morality—be it related to cooperation, empathy, or justice—behavior that is often illustrated as they play.[4] That animals exhibit in their play what

we consider to be virtuous behavior suggests that we should look at human play for its connections to morality, as human animals are innately moral beings—endowed with the capacity for good and evil, virtue and vice, yet always bearing an etching of God. Returning to Hopkins' poem, we see that Christ is playing in moral beings—people living in the grace of God, capable of practicing justice. Play activity provides opportunities for virtue development and expression.

Nevertheless, play and humor may not rise to the top when one thinks of virtuous character. On the other hand, as an auxiliary virtue—one tied to other virtues—playfulness shines. Play enhances life with a dimension of joy and hopefulness. A summative chart that the National Institute for Play created highlights qualities that are especially enriched by play, describing what life looks like with and without them. Notice how many are intertwined with virtues.

When Life is . . .	***Play-filled***	***Play-Deprived***
Trust	*Life is experienced as a playground filled with chances to learn*	*Life is experienced as a proving ground—and often a battleground*
Flexibility	*Change brings exploration and new possibilities*	*Change creates fear and resistance*
Optimism	*Well-being and pleasure are expected*	*Discomfort and disappointment are expected*
Problem-Solving	*Problems are acknowledged and often foster skill development*	*Problems are hidden, denied, or avoided*
Emotional Regulation	*Stress is handled with resilience; the response is most often stabilitiy*	*Stress responses are often anger, rage, or withdrawal caused by low self-efficacy*
Perseverance	*Motivation is sustained from internal drive, mastery is sought*	*Motivation dissipates; equivocation, procrastination, and apathy arise*
Empathy	*Others' feelings are recognized; support is often offered*	*Others' feelings are not recognized; discord occurs*
Openness	*Life is vital; a strong sense of belonging fosters social cooperation*	*Life is dull; people become socially withdrawn, often with mild depression*
Belonging	*Behaviors are altruistic, leading to teamwork, community creation, and participation*	*Behaviors are callous, uncooperative, bullying, and self-centered*

Chart created by National Institute for Play[5]

While not all of these qualities are necessarily considered virtues, many are. Perseverance, empathy, altruism, and resilience, for example, especially contribute to good moral character. Other virtues could be added to expand this chart, as aspects of justice and civility are also inherent in good play.

Whether or not play is an expression of virtue, stands alongside of virtues while enhancing their growth, or acts as the ground on which they "play," it is clear that character should be considered when we discuss play. What is not clear, however, is whether we are all operating from the same definition in this volume.

Characterizing Play

Delineating what we mean by *play*, it turns out, challenges scholars to such diverse work that there is no simple definition. That may sound odd, but let us consider the breadth of meanings *play* has. We begin with parts of speech. Is *play* a noun as in "that was a tricky play" or "we watched a play" or "let's go outside to the playground" or "push play"? Or is it a verb holding numerous meanings, from children's frolics to goofing around, to an attitude, to performance, to participation in sports, to cooperating in a group activity, to manipulation—and these are only some of the ways we use the word.[6]

Play on the playground

Johan Huizinga, a scholar of cultural history, argues that play is "a free activity standing . . . outside 'ordinary' life as being 'not serious,' but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly." It holds "no material interest, and no profit. . . ." Other characteristics show it has "its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner. It promotes the formation of social groupings. . . ."[7] Huizinga's definition of play as profitless contradicts the positivity of social connections. When we bring in the moral realm, we see the power of play to augment virtues like compassion and justice in social settings.

Building on Huizinga's work, Brown defines play as "an absorbing, apparently purposeless activity that provides enjoyment and a suspension of self-consciousness and sense of time. It is also self-motivating and makes you

want to do it again."[8] Brown argues that its meaning is so varied and is such a "primal activity"[9] that any specific definition threatens to "take the joy out of it."[10] Even as we look at the qualities in his definition, exceptions pop to mind. What about playing games with educational purposes? What about mandatory gym class games? What if I don't like a game and don't want to play? The exceptions continue yet some generalizations make sense despite the exceptions, and all of these properties begin to suggest a bounding definition even if that boundary is porous. Nevertheless, argues scholar Peter Gray, the attitude of play may exist more on a continuum than a simple on/off experience as motivations and experiences of play can be mixed with mindsets of work or negative emotions.[11]

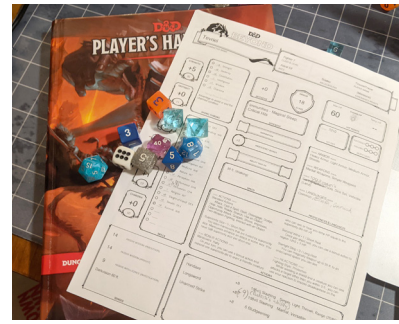
Ambiguity is the word that Brian Sutton-Smith, another scholar of play, uses to address the diversity of definitions and approaches to studying play.[12] Using multiple disciplines and a lens of rhetorical studies, he examines words and studies that surround play rather than assuming a simple, direct definition and describes studies around play as an "omnibus" area of study—it's huge![13]

What that means is there is room for exploration—for play even—in the boundaries of our topic. For, notes Brown, "Play, by its very nature, is a little anarchic. It is about stepping outside of normal life and breaking normal patterns. It is about bending rules of thought, action, and behavior."[14] The difficulties of defining play also emerge from the fact that play is both *action* and *attitude*. We will see this at work in the articles in this issue.

Play is both action and attitude.

Character and . . . Play Essays

Mary Bryant's essay, "Gameplay and Human Flourishing," is the one article focusing on the *action* of play. She expands the relationship to character in broad ways, arguing that play, particularly gameplay, contributes to human flourishing by growing social engagement, providing opportunities to steward one's integrity, and offering learning opportunities. Her essay addresses the action of play most



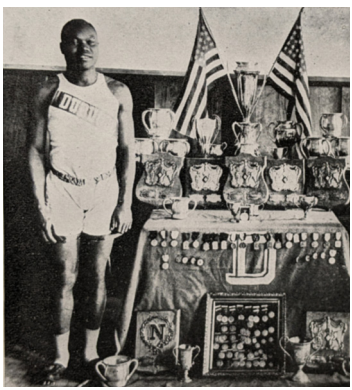
D&D, a common sort of social gameplay

directly as she explores what gameplay contributes not just to our well-being, but also to our character formation, particularly in its social nature. Virtuous play has the power to grow qualities of compassion, patience, civility, and justice.[15] Taking up the nagging question of productivity in use of time, she leads us on a nuanced study of why games matter in a well-lived life,[16] especially when play is monitored by moderation.[17]

Place for play and hospitality

Bryant's essay focused on actual gameplay, but the next essays look at the *attitude* of play employed in performance, social navigation, and scientific research.

For Kristen Eby, an attitude of playfulness and hospitality combine to make performances excellent and enjoyable for both performer and audience. In her article, "Performance, Play, and Hospitality," the artist in Eby evidences in how she weaves her argument with grace, a style that illustrates what she is calling for in performance. Too often our experience with performance—either as performer or audience—is framed by a celebrity mindset in a consumer environment. Focusing on play and hospitality as key components changes the experience into a more hopeful one, centering the joy of art and inviting us all to participate in ways that make us better humans.



Sol Butler, star athlete at Dubuque College

To navigate the potential dark side of humanity, play becomes a critical survival tool, argues Brian Hallstoos in"Diffusing Racism: Olympian Sol Butler's Serious Playfulness." While the action of play oriented much of Sol Butler's life, his attitude of playfulness is the focus of Hallstoos' article. Hallstoos remedies history's neglect of a remarkable person whose achievements, especially in athletics, demonstrate what a rare and gifted person he was, but here Hallstoos helps us move beyond athletic achievements solely (which are monumental) to consider his character.

An ambitious young Black man (who wrote a book to help him in his college application process[18]), Butler, evidenced in old photographs, played a central role in the campus social life. In addition to being the star athlete on almost every team, including quarterbacking the football team all four years, he liked to have fun. He liked to play. But for Butler, that play carried nuances which helped him navigate the racism of the era. The activity of play was crucial for giving Butler access to education, but his attitude of playfulness helped him succeed both on and off the fields and courts of competition.

The focus on scientific research in the final article might be surprising, as scientific research connotes rigor, discipline, and replicability. One might imagine no room exists for play if it is to be work that is taken seriously. Adam Kleinschmit, in "Transformative Discovery Science: Character and Play as Key Elements," counters that assumption. As a scientist himself, he faces the current pressures for pursuit of funding and projects which will continue the cycle of interest in funding and publishing the material. Sometimes scientists succumb to those pressures, engaging in unethical behavior or work in order to enhance their reporting. But using examples from history and his conference experiences with agar art, Kleinschmit highlights the potential for discovery science. This kind of science best occurs when an attitude of playfulness allows researchers a more free-ranging tinkering—a kind of playing—where outcomes are not necessarily spelled out and narrowly focused on the replicable. Coupled with an emphasis on good character, on integrity, the unrealized and undeveloped ideas become possible, leading to transformative discoveries.

Agar art—a melding of science and play

Our respondent, Naaman Wood, illustrates how the social concern over the role colonialism has played in our country's history and its challenges to justice intersect with considerations of play and character. He takes these essays on their own terms but then urges them forward toward a telos of justice, noting that their serious engagement with play helps point to a better world. He masterfully weaves his concerns for being more Other-centered with the topic of play. Play, while initially thought of as lighthearted, has potential to carry the weight of seeing a better world. His

work brings this issue's wrestling with Huizinga's "profitlessness" of play to a place of deep moral significance.

Benefits of Play

Video of a bee playing with a wooden ball

We observe play in the natural world—creatures[19] and humans. It is endemic to our natures and necessary, notes Brown, to our "neural evolution," promoting "the creation of new connections," a safe arena for testing, and a "penalty-free rehearsal of the normal give-and-take necessary in social groups."[20] Affective neuroscientist Jaak Panksepp identifies play as one of our core emotional systems that instigates joy.[21] We play because it is built into our beings, but we also play because it is fun, pleasurable. It can be relaxing and yet energizing. It can take us out of time, out of present worries. Play can help form friendships and form social connections.

The built-in nature of play, Robert Johnston argues, comes from its being part of the creational order as rest from work. When God finished God's days of creating, God rested. The gift and rhythm of Sabbath, of regular rest from work, brings restoration and glory to God as we practice what might superficially be called "useless" activity.[22] "Entered into freely and joyfully, it [Sabbath] has its rules and order for the sake of its integrity . . . for the sake of playing the 'game.'"[23] God has designed us for play, not just work.

Play (in balance with work) is enjoyable—joy bringing. The change of pace can also be creative. Brown comments, "When we play, dilemmas and challenges will naturally filter through the unconscious mind and work themselves out. It is not at all uncommon for people to come back not only reenergized, but also with fresh ideas for work."[24] Brown's enthusiasm for play is contagious.

The benefits of play for character are real. Brown speaks to the social element Bryant highlights, noting how it is interwoven with the moral realm. He emphasizes benefits such as "cooperative socialization," and its power to build "trust, empathy, caring, and sharing." Games have the power to "set the foundation for our understanding of fairness and justice."[25]

Despite the association of play with children, adults need play in their lives too. It continues to provide equipment for living. For example, notes Brown, "Play gives us the irony to deal with paradox, ambiguity, and fatalism."[26] Play serves to bring light to dark moods, to enrich times and places with joyful fun, and to divert attention from daily worries and concerns.

Playtime for all ages

Bryant expands the understanding of play's benefits. She notes that play may even impact our health for the better reducing stress, building relationships, and contributing to our education. The hopefulness and positivity embedded in play contributes to human flourishing, she argues convincingly. Play impacts attitudes, socialization, character formation, mental and physical health. Yet despite all the good inherent in play, we cannot conclude without some caution.

Modern life often delineates play from work. That perspective, moving beyond the attitude of playfulness to the action, does presume the privilege of time and means to make a space for play, to be able to afford play. When someone is so exhausted from work, play can be a luxury. When someone is struggling to get their basic needs met, play's seeming unproductivity can appear to be a negative. And when done to excess, life falls out of balance, and it does become an unproductive vice.

God has designed us for play, not just work.

While play might enhance good character or provide character practice space, Brian Sutton-Smith, in *The Ambiguity of Play,* cautions that play is not strictly an innocent activity. At times playfulness degenerates into cruelty, another vice. Other times dark fantasies take play into disturbing places.[27] Perhaps leaning into Aristotle's preference for the middle way, the moderation between extremes, needs to be held congruently with the idea that character and play complement each other.

We hope you enjoy these essays as conversation starters on how play might contribute to good character and help us flourish. The spirit of playfulness infused in our lives—leisure and games or work—holds great promise for working with virtues like hospitality to bring joy to performances for

performer and audience. And that spirit of playfulness, which may seem childishly light, has potential power to free us from sometimes unproductive confrontations so that we can come at issues such as racism and colonialism from a "side door," which ultimately may break down more walls than directness. Finally, that spirit of playfulness maintained in our work, particularly our scientific research, allows for creativity and discovery that more narrowly determined attitudes and actions may preclude. Character and play—worth playing together.

Annalee R. Ward is the Director of the Wendt Center for Character Education at the University of Dubuque in Dubuque, Iowa. Through programming and curriculum, the Wendt Character Initiative seeks to shape character for lives of purpose. Ward researches and writes on communication, ethics, and popular culture.

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p. 7: photo by Mary K. Bryant

p. 8: (Sol Butler and his trophies) *The 1919 Key*, p. 191

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p. 10: (freeze frame) "Do Bumble Bees Play?" CC by 4.0 https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/

Notes

1. See the Summer 2021 Theme Issue: Play in *Christian Scholar's Review* for a similarly diverse set of essays on the topic from a Christian standpoint
2. Brown, *Play*, 12.
3. Brown, 13.
4. Bekoff and Pierce, *Wild Justice*, 1, xiv, xii, 6.
5. "Play Science."
6. *Merriam-Webster.com*, s.v. "play," https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/play (accessed July 10, 2023).
7. Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 13.

8. Brown, *Play*, 60.
9. Brown, 15.
10. Brown, 16.
11. Gray, *Free to Learn*, 140.
12. After highlighting a variety of rhetorics, functions, forms, values, and disciplinary scholarship, Sutton-Smith concludes that there are multiple definitions of play. He tries to encompass those when he calls play "the potentiation of adaptive variability." See *Ambiguity of Play,* 231.
13. Sutton-Smith, *Ambiguity of Play*, vii,viii, 3.
14. Brown, *Play*, 193.
15. Bryant, "Gameplay and Human Flourishing," 18, 20-21.
16. Philosopher Bernard Suits took this "contribution to flourishing" argument to an extreme in *The Grasshopper* and subsequent *Return of the Grasshopper* where he argues that all of life is a game.
17. Bryant, "Gameplay and Human Flourishing," 25.
18. Butler and Butler, *Three Years of High School Athletics*.
19. London, "Astonishing Experiment"; Galpayage Dona et al., "Do Bumble Bees Play?"
20. Brown, *Play*, 41, 42, 32.
21. Panksepp, *Affective Neuroscience*.
22. Johnston, *Christian at Play*, 83–95.
23. Johnston, 93.
24. Brown, *Play*, 128.
25. Brown, 198.
26. Brown, 201–2.
27. Sutton-Smith, *Ambiguity of Play*, 133–34, 56 151.

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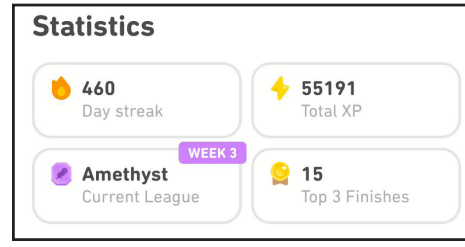
Gameplay and Human Flourishing

Mary K. Bryant

Abstract

Flourishing as communities and individuals requires well-being in a variety of areas so that we thrive and grow toward our human potential. Playing games can contribute significantly to our flourishing. If we engage with games in responsible and thoughtful ways, gameplay can help us engage with the world, steward ourselves, and enhance our learning.

When I launched into the engaging mobile app, Duolingo, which turns language learning into a game, I eagerly anticipated my imminent fluency in Mandarin Chinese. While I already enjoy learning languages, I struggle to get very far studying new languages outside of the classroom. Using the app lit a fire that kept me coming back. Unfortunately, the fire was not a metaphor for my internal motivation—it was literally the image of a flame on the screen that tracks how many days in a row I practiced. By the 411th day of my streak, I was at 53,448 experience points, with 1,008 gems available for unlocking future challenges.



Duolingo's stat block for tracking progress

You might think that stats like these mean I am really developing my skills in Mandarin. No such luck. I can recognize some Mandarin characters and am able to say a few basic sentences, but it is not the progress I had hoped for. Worse, while I started out enjoying the app, it now feels monotonous, pointless. I often get annoyed with the inflexible, repetitive questions (how many times do I have to spit out the *exact* phrase, "He doesn't play sports, he only likes to sleep"? I honestly can't tell if the app designers are trying

to be funny) as I attempt to hurry through my daily lessons so I can earn enough points to stay in the Diamond league and see my "Day streak" increase by one. The desire to beat out the competition and earn bragging rights has overshadowed my original interest in the Mandarin language. This isn't the experience I had hoped for, but I can't stop. I made it this far without interruption—not because I have made a habit of learning Mandarin, but because I am compelled to continue my streak!

Nearly every area of life has an app aimed at making mundane tasks more enjoyable. So much so that in 2010 Apple trademarked the phrase, "there's an app for that." I love gameplay in general and try to fit in a game when my free time allows it—especially puzzle games, board games, and roleplaying games—so gamification sounded great to me.

But as a descendent of the "Pious" Danes,[1] a group of Danish immigrants who formed a strict Christian sect that did not allow "entertainments," including dancing and games,[2] every now and then I get a nagging feeling that gameplay is not the productive activity I should be spending my time on.[3] It must run in the family—my mother, who remembers hiding her family's deck of cards behind the curtains when her grandparents came to visit, still hesitates to sit down to play a game rather than do something "useful." A gamified app that teaches me a new language is bound to fall into the productive side of gameplay, I reasoned. But once the joy of learning Mandarin with Duolingo morphed into an unrelenting desire to dominate, I realized I hadn't made much progress even when it *was* fun and the nagging feeling returned. And I began to wonder whether all this gameplay is truly that good for me—or anyone, for that matter. That is, does it contribute to flourishing?

Every now and then I get a nagging feeling that gameplay is not the productive activity I should be spending my time on.

Human Flourishing

I think of flourishing as thriving and growing, externally and internally, usually due to the presence of optimal conditions. The image comes to my mind of four pumpkin plants I grew last summer. The leaves, as wide as my torso, stood four feet tall. The thick vines climbed a nearby tree to benefit more fully from the sun's rays. The resulting eight pumpkins were huge and beautiful. Their rinds were thick and tough, full of large seeds.

The combination of soil make-up, drainage, rain, and placement for the best sunlight allowed my pumpkins to flourish together as they pursued all their pumpkin potential.

My small but flourishing pumpkin patch

Human flourishing is similar, with perhaps a few more dimensions to consider. While the concept of human flourishing has its roots in the philosophy of Aristotle, a variety of contemporary philosophers, positive psychologists, and social scientists have proposed ways to think about what it means to flourish as a human.[4] My favorite synthesis of the idea comes from Tyler J. VanderWeele, director of Harvard's Human Flourishing Program, who suggests that human flourishing is overall well-being in regard to six domains: happiness and life satisfaction, physical and mental health, meaning and purpose, character and virtue, social relationships, and material and financial stability.[5] The key here is *overall* well-being. Everyone's situation is different. While it may not be possible to reach full thriving due to barriers to well-being beyond our control, the *pursuit* of well-being in these areas ideally gets us closer to flourishing as a community as well as individually.

Surely gameplay must contribute to well-being in some of those categories! With this in mind, let's consider whether and how gameplay can help us flourish,[6] beyond the temporary good feeling we experience during play. Free, imaginative play as well as physical sports admittedly apply to much of this discussion, but to keep the scope of my exploration manageable, I will focus on video games, tabletop games, and gamified apps.[7]

Engagement with the World through Games

Although games often lead players to think about imaginary situations or turn their focus away from immediate needs of regular life, in many ways social gameplay and roleplay provide rich environments that allow for deep engagement with the world and society.

Social Engagement

Social games, or games that involve interacting with others (think Monopoly, Charades, trivia contests), offer opportunities to work with

others and develop relationships, and help to improve social skills and virtues, community-mindedness, and bonding. Evidence of the spread of games around the ancient Middle East indicate that people played games during times when different cultural groups interacted for trade purposes. Archaeologist Walter Crist and his colleagues drew the conclusion that board games served as "social lubricants" and "allowed individuals from distant regions to interact across real and imagined boundaries."[8] Games made room for growing empathy and community among strangers.

Similarly, today many game stores, libraries, and even restaurants have instituted game nights that invite and encourage a variety of people, often strangers to each other, to play games together, not to mention huge annual gaming conventions that see gamers of all varieties coming together for play. Massively multiplayer online video games (MMOs) offer opportunities for players to virtually play with friends as well as form new friendships with strangers. Playing with others has served to help people form connections throughout history.

While I have played my share of games at conventions and game stores, my favorite gameplay happens when I visit the friends I found in college. Still today—some twenty-odd years later—when we get together, it is safe to assume that we'll play at least one game. Spouses, children, and new friends have joined us in our play over the years, forming the foundations of a close-knit game-playing community.

Forming and maintaining community through gameplay

Whether collaborative or competitive, in person or virtual, playing games together gives us the chance to learn about and practice being good sports and to deepen our friendships.[9] We learn the value of letting others suggest the game for the evening, practice collaborative problem solving, and develop strategies for helping others have fun even when the gameplay is not going well for them or for being civil and patient when we are very irritated.

This is not to say that everything always goes smoothly. Sometimes I think I am on the same page as my fellow game players, only to realize that one person is not having fun because of how another player is playing. Years ago, I played a game designed to start out collaboratively until one player is

supposed to secretly become a traitor to the other players. But the betrayal never happened. The player who drew the betrayal card didn't want to cause strife among us, and simply kept playing as an ally. I was confused and a little disappointed, as I love the intrigue of trying to figure out who is behind the double-crossings and deceit. After the game, we talked about what had happened, laughed over it, and reflected on the fact that we had not picked the right game for everyone in the group.

Playing with others has served to help people form connections throughout history.

Sometimes problems arise from a difference in how seriously the players are taking the game. It can certainly be hard to get in the flow, and stay in it, when another player keeps disrupting the play with off-topic conversation; it can be equally frustrating for the person who joined the game for the social element to not be allowed to chat and enjoy everyone's company. Another common difficulty is a difference in competitiveness among players. Too much competitive zeal on the part of one player can suck the joy out of the game for someone who just wants to relax, and vice versa. Sometimes we don't play well together and have to patch things up, but that's part of living in community and learning from our mistakes—in fact, it is part of growing and developing into better people—kind, humble, patient people—who flourish together.

None of this means that I think all collaborative gameplay is bound to lead to good outcomes. There are certainly roleplaying groups who have engaged in and enjoyed misogyny, racism, and destructive stories together.[10] The anonymity made possible by playing MMOs can more easily lead to abuse and harassment with low risk of meaningful consequences.[11] This sort of reinforcement of damaging worldviews is likely the source of much of the vitriol some gamers displayed with Gamergate, a culture war that erupted within the video game world against an infusion of diversity, played out mostly in the form of harassment of marginalized groups and prominent women in video game culture.[12] Even when we are playing, it is important to evaluate whether we are in echo chambers that dismiss (or worse, degrade, suppress, or harm) others and, when necessary, change course.

Changing Perspectives

Just as our social groups and gaming activities can reinforce our current worldview, they can also challenge our worldview. Games that encourage players to think about other viewpoints allow for experimenting with

and discovery of new perspectives on the world. Roleplaying games in particular—video or board—make it possible for us to broach subjects and explore together possibilities that we do not normally have easy access to, or that we may be ignorant of. I am heartened by the publication of social action video games and board games that address serious issues for reflection, such as the environmental crisis, mental health, and the desperate decisions made in war time.[13]

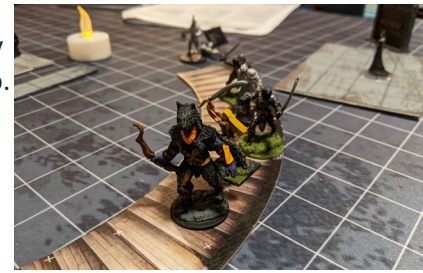
In *Playing as Others: Theological and Ethical Responsibility in Video Games*, Benjamin J. Chicka calls for theologians to enter the video game sphere to shape it, post-Gamergate, into a more inclusive, welcoming place to all. As Chicka says, "God is brought forth in meeting the other and realizing one's ethical responsibility to them in the cultural form of video games."[14] The opportunity to encounter or even play as the wholly unfamiliar Other may make it easier to interact with the Other outside of gameplay. Research has found that immersive games in which players actively play roles with perspectives different from their own have the power to impact player biases and grow their empathy.[15] Stepping into the shoes of Michael Sterling, a Black character in the virtual reality game *1,000 Cut Journey*, I witnessed realistic injustices that he faced,[16] which led me to reflect on how I can expand my own efforts to combat racial inequality. When our empathy translates into positive action,[17] it leads to better community-mindedness and promotes flourishing at a societal level.

When our empathy translates into positive action, it leads to better community-mindedness and promotes flourishing at a societal level.

We can also explore ethical decision-making in play. According to some recent research, not all immoral decisions made during gameplay represent players' morality outside of play. A player engaged in a first-person shooter video game does not necessarily feel inclined toward war or want to harm others in regular life. Some evidence suggests that this sort of behavior may represent exploration of possibilities or it may be cathartic, satisfying urges rather than allowing them to come out in immoral behaviors outside of the game.[18] Perhaps pretending violence goes beyond satisfying urges and allows for exploration of responses to bad behavior and its consequences.

Roleplay in science fiction and fantasy games offers a safe and separate realm of possibility and hope where the players can encounter the wonders

and horrors of reality, address, analyze, and ascribe meaning. Science fiction and fantasy literature have long been genres that allow for reflection, examination, and analysis of truths such as human frailty and meaning, but at a distance. In *Dangerous Games: What the Moral Panic Over Role-Play Games Says About Play, Religion, and Imagined Worlds,* Joseph Laycock writes, "Human beings need play and fantasy to be psychologically well. Play provides a mental space through which we can order our world."[19] Play makes the unapproachable approachable.



Taking on fictional roles to explore possibilities

Through roleplaying games, I, too, have reflected on reality. The characters I play tend to have much harder lives than I do. They lose loved ones, fight long odds, and struggle to make the best choice in an impossible situation—*do I save the townsperson dangling precariously over the fiery pit or go after the ogre who is running away with an ancient artifact that could lead to the destruction of the world*? Of course, it's all pretend, but it does lead me to think about possibilities and choices, mortality, the Other, and assumptions we all regularly make.[20]

With social games, we can develop a variety of moral virtues such as civility, compassion, patience, and humility. Games that offer the opportunity to take on new roles help us learn to value the Other, to look at new perspectives with open minds, and to reflect on important questions about life and meaning, which brings us closer to living in community, seeing the humanity in each other.

Stewardship of Our Selves through Gameplay

Outside the framework of community and worldview, gameplay impacts our selves—our health and satisfaction, for instance. Integrity demands that we steward our selves well—that we care for ourselves—through discerning what is good for us and acting on that determination.[21]

Health Impacts

Gameplay affects our physical and mental health. Adults who play board games are less likely to develop dementia[22] and more likely to stave off cognitive decline.[23] Board gameplay even helps us fight depression and heart

disease, through its capacity to lower stress levels.[24] When we find ourselves laughing during our gameplay (a common occurrence in my experience, though I admit that not every game turns hilarious), we may also benefit from laughter's many positive psychological and physiological effects.[25] Take note, however, that those who consider leisure activities a waste of time tend not only to enjoy them significantly less than they would otherwise, but they also miss out on many of the mental health benefits of leisure.[26] Unfortunately, there is concern that *video* gameplay may actually be linked to increased risk of cardiovascular disease, due to the longer amounts of time video gamers tend to spend sitting, as well as higher incidence of eye strain, problems with tendons in the hand and wrist, and back and neck pain.[27] Video game players can still benefit from other aspects of play if they take care to be aware of those risks and act to mitigate them by shortening the duration of play and learning healthy play postures, for example.

Challenging play

Cerebral puzzles and the challenges posed by games open our minds and we discover new ways of finding solutions. My favorite puzzle is *The New York Times* daily crossword. I love unraveling the wordplay and gimmicks hidden in many of them. Sometimes the struggle proves too much and I do not manage to complete the puzzle that day, but I feel so good when I figure out a particularly hard clue, discover the day's hidden theme, or in fact solve the entire puzzle. As Bernard Suits succinctly summed it up: "Playing a game is the voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles."[28] The relaxed, pleasant experience of getting into "the zone" is a focused state called "flow." Flow can be easy to enter when playing a game, likely because the best games satisfy the conditions necessary to enter it: the goals of an activity are clear, there is sufficient feedback, it is not too hard nor too simple. It is essential that our play have some level of challenge in order to draw and engage our focus.[29] Otherwise we get bored and find something else to do.

When we enjoy ourselves with these fun challenges, we are strengthening our brains.[30] The play doesn't necessarily increase our chances of solving other puzzles or add to our knowledge banks. But it is *practice* at considering problems and figuring out ways to address them within a relatively safe context, which helps us prepare for real problems that arise when we are not playing.[31] The practice I have had with the crossword and

other puzzles, taking my time to consider different ways to interpret clues, has even helped me think more creatively when faced with more difficult passages of text in my work as a literary translator.

Distraction and Coping

Gameplay provides distraction and relief from pain and hardship. The pleasure we feel when we are having fun or receiving rewards comes from the release of endogenous (naturally produced) opioids, such as endorphins, which, among other functions, also lower stress and block pain receptors.[32] These chemicals can trigger a simultaneous release of dopamine, which drives our desire for more rewards, motivating us to absorb ourselves in the activity, distracting us until further regulatory mechanisms inhibit the process and lead us to naturally transition out of that activity.[33] But beyond distracting us, researchers have found that playing games can actually decrease the level of pain, anxiety, or stress felt by the player.[34] Our endorphins dull our suffering in addition to pleasurably distracting us.

Humanity's use of games to distract ourselves and cope with hardship goes back thousands of years. Archaeologists have pieced together evidence that some ancient peoples played games while they waited for better work conditions, such as during the cold months between growing seasons. In one case, ancient Mesoamericans likely played games while they waited in their temporary harvesting site for the tide to go out so they could continue collecting shellfish.[35]

The Ancient Greek historian Herodotus wrote in *The Histories* of a famine that had happened hundreds of years previous in Lydia. The ruler of Lydia decreed that, in order for the kingdom to survive the famine, people must only eat food every other day. On the fasting days, they were to play games to distract themselves from their hunger.[36] Perhaps it was the enjoyment that was a respite from hardship, or the endorphins dulling the gnawing hunger, or it's possible that they found the flow and it made the time between meals pass quickly. Either way, the story illustrates the potential for play to help us persevere through hard times.

I can't help but see a connection to the increased interest in games and puzzles during the COVID-19 pandemic. Not only were people looking for activities at home to replace the activities they had previously pursued in public or in social groups, but perhaps the play element in particular made it easier to bear the heightened level of discomfort that many of us were feeling (whether it was due to anxiety, mourning, loneliness, or frustration).

When I had COVID, I was sick enough during my isolation period that I spent most of the days in bed and didn't have the stamina to do much remote work. I couldn't even manage to sit up on my couch long enough to play a solo board game at the coffee table. But I had *The New York Times* online crosswords to distract me. I lay in bed with my phone next to me, alternately napping and puzzling through the clues, and the time passed more comfortably.

Limitations of Coping

There are limits to how much play can help us cope, however. The mechanisms in our brain that allow us to feel pleasure, seek rewards, and transition out of the pleasure and reward cycle should work together smoothly but they can fall out of sync with one another. The problem of addiction arises when reward-seeking behavior runs unchecked, even in the absence of pleasurable outcomes.[37] When we fill all possible time with gameplay, seeking out the rewards of play at the expense of our responsibilities to ourselves and our community, it is no longer healthy coping.[38] Relationships suffer, we skip meals and showers, and subsequently our health might decline. If we neglect our work, we could take a financial hit as well.

There are limits to how much play can help us cope.

Neurological mechanisms should naturally limit how much play we want at a time. However, addiction is a real concern in video and online games because digital game designers have used what scientists have discovered about neurobiology to take direct aim at the mechanisms hidden behind our pleasure-seeking natures.[39] Adam Alter, author of *Irresistible: The Rise of Addictive Technology and the Business of Keeping Us Hooked*, identifies a number of elements of behavior addiction that video games and online apps use to keep our interest and attention, keeping high our desire and hope for imminent pleasure:

> compelling goals that are just beyond reach; irresistible and unpredictable positive feedback; a sense of incremental progress and improvement; tasks that become slowly more difficult over time; unresolved tensions that demand resolution; and strong social connections.[40]

While the digital technology industry may defend itself, claiming that designers do not want to encourage addiction because doing so would

cause them to eventually lose customers who stop playing to treat their addiction,[41] I am skeptical. The digital game industry is huge (the global video game market took in $184.9 billion (USD) in 2021),[42] and it would take massive numbers of players to recognize a problem and quit playing entirely to make a financial impact. An estimated 1.96% of the world's population suffers from video game addiction,[43] now recognized by the World Health Organization as an illness called "gaming disorder."[44] Too many people are suffering, but I wonder if even that is enough to motivate the less morally conscious designers to consider their digital users' health and well-being.[45]

To play games with integrity, in ways that lead to flourishing, we must remember to watch out for and avoid the ways games can lead to problems. Thoughtfully limiting time on video games and digital devices may help us avoid neglecting other areas of our lives, such as relationships and commitments. Being careful not to spend too long sitting without a break while playing video games or long tabletop board game sessions will help maintain good physical health—something to keep in mind with other activities, too, such as sitting all day at work and driving long distances. In addition, as noted earlier, immoral actions within a roleplaying game do not necessarily indicate that the players themselves lack moral character. However, we should still be cautious with gratuitous violence in our games, based on recent studies that suggest violent video games may have the capacity to increase aggression among those players already predisposed to aggressive behavior.[46]

Using games to strengthen the mind, learn to cope, and improve our health are all acts of integrity, as we practice good stewardship of ourselves. Certainly gameplay is just one of the strategies we have available to care for these aspects of our well-being, but it is a good one to consider implementing, especially in view of the variety of other benefits of playing games.

Learning through Gameplay

In many ways, caring for oneself includes pursuing knowledge and developing skills, as we work to improve our careers, financial situations, even satisfaction. And it turns out that the neurochemical activity behind the good, engaged feeling we often get when we play primes us for learning.[47] Play stimulates neural growth in areas of the brain that process emotions and executive decisions.[48]

Educational impacts of play are wide ranging, and not just on children. Play enhances creativity and innovation and leads to better problem-solving and motivation to stay with a task. It is also linked to learning to be less aggressive and developing life skills and risk management.[49]

Animals tend to stop playing once they have matured and developed the skills and knowledge they need to survive and reproduce. Among the notable exceptions to this pattern are humans and their domesticated dogs and cats.[50] It turns out that retaining the ability to play into adulthood allows us to continue to learn new things and adapt to new situations. According to play expert Stuart Brown, "Life-long play is central to our continued well-being, adaptation, and social cohesiveness."[51] So it makes sense to allow ourselves to incorporate gameplay in the learning and growth we do beyond early childhood.

Playing to learn about the dangers posed by newspaper rolls and the like

Research shows that games can be useful tools for teaching some topics and skills. While the evidence is not definitive, the findings are certainly promising.[52] Teachers have been using games more and more in secondary school and college curricula to teach a variety of topics. Students engage in simulations and play historical games to encounter information in spheres separate from reality. They play trivia games to prepare for upcoming tests. I remember a high school typing class that used timed challenges to help us practice. I could keep up but it challenged me enough to keep me focused on it. I found myself getting into the zone as my fingers flew across the keyboard. It was indeed fun, and I came out of it a proficient typist.

Digital developers have introduced many "games" for learning. There are thousands of apps in the Play Store promising to turn the slog of everyday life and lessons into a fun game. This is widely known as gamification, the use of superficial game mechanics to add competition to something not normally considered a game. Examples of such mechanics are badges, points for actions, countdowns, streak counts, leaderboards, daily "quests." Duolingo (the app I tried out for language learning), Habitica (for personal productivity), EpicWin (for getting chores done), Plant Nanny (for remembering to drink water) are a few of the gamified apps available. Even

the Red Cross and Audible have gamified apps that assign badges based on the user's activity in the app.

Some people call gamified apps "exploitationware" or "gamblified" apps, as numerous in-app purchases and pitches to subscribe reveal the monetary priorities of their creators. The companies behind gamified apps want you "to do something you otherwise wouldn't do," says YouTuber Chris Franklin. He identifies their strategies to exploit our instinctual urges to hoard and compete in a hierarchy, such as awarding badges, jewels, and experience points, and provide ways to level up that creates the illusion of productivity. When we do something that they profit from, they give us rewards.[53] They use the same strategies discussed above to take advantage of our innate neurobiology and get us hooked.

While gamification in theory strives to create a useful vehicle for motivating people to accomplish otherwise unattractive tasks, in practice there are often problems. Gamification via digital devices provides instant gratification, which cultivates impatience[54] and cuts out the reflection step of habit-building[55] that would help us directly accomplish our goals of our own accord, rather than through the app.[56] In gamification, the reward provided by the shell of game mechanics often supersedes the satisfaction of completing whatever everyday task that gamification was supposed to make fun (sometimes we're playing for the rewarding "ding" instead of the correct answer),[57] which complicates things. The never-ending challenges that keep us hoping for a reward, along with the lack of resolution baked into many gamified apps, are prime ground for behavioral addiction.

Instant gratification via digital devices, prime ground for behavioral addiction

When we encounter gamified lessons in school, teachers supervise our engagement. They make sure the content is of an appropriate level and direct students' attention to new activities when it is time to move on. Many gamified apps do not have that sort of oversight. The apps are designed to keep us coming back to them for more, not (or at least not usually) to help us take the next step to turn it into a habit free from digital control.

But maybe there is nothing to be concerned about. After all, doomsayers predicted the demise of society when crosswords took off in the early

1900s. They feared that puzzle players, addicted to the new diversions, would end up harming themselves and others.[58] The same things happened with novels in the 1700s and 1800s. In this case the fears were that women who read such escapist literature would become so lost in their imaginations or disillusioned with reality that they would not be able (or want) to continue in their usual tasks and responsibilities.[59] There is a difference with gamification, though. To my knowledge, novelists and crossword puzzle designers weren't taking advantage of behavioral science to manipulate us and override our self-control.

Perhaps we will find a way to overcome gamification's weaknesses and they will eventually help us develop personal motivation, so we can consistently accomplish our goals without artificial prompting. Maybe, as game designer Jane McGonigal hopes, games will eventually be used to reinvent the human experience and solve so many of the terrible problems in the world today.[60] But since it is unlikely that games and players will solve the world's problems immediately, we are left to consider how best to grow as people through gameplay.

Gameplay primes us for learning. We more easily learn useful skills and grow in creativity through games, which may lead to greater satisfaction, purposeful work, and stability. Gamified apps that aim to help us get over the hump of learning a good new habit can be just what we need if we can't motivate ourselves otherwise. But again, we need to practice awareness and discernment, to be thoughtful about any potentially detrimental effects of our gamified activities.

Conclusion

After researching gameplay and gamification, I finally quit playing Duolingo. It took me a few months of joyless, fruitless, rote "play" before I managed to quit, as I was unwilling to break my precious streak, which represented a commitment, a lot of time—something to brag about. I was afraid that if I broke the streak, I wouldn't have the pride-stroking, impressive number to motivate me to continue. But the feeling that the app was more in control than I was—that perhaps I had even formed an addiction—finally won out. At 460 days, I quit, cold turkey. I got out my old college books and signed up for another online learning program available through the library—this one much more like traditional lessons—and made it a personal goal to continue my habit of studying Mandarin, but at my own prompting.

And I have kept it up so far! I was shocked to learn that, indeed, through Duolingo I had been successful in establishing the habit of studying Mandarin. The fire has been re-lit inside me, rather than on my phone's screen. My study has now gone from gameplay to work, but it is fun work that challenges me to puzzle through and retain new information, not to race through it all in order to trounce the other players.

Fun work

Using Duolingo to help me over the hump of initiating this language learning and establish a good habit was the right thing for me at the beginning. I would not have gotten to the point when I was ready to work on my own if not for Duolingo. Though there was some struggle and discomfort as I transitioned from play to work (and I confess it's no longer on a strict daily schedule), I flourished through the experience—I exercised my brain, developed discipline and willpower, and practiced discernment and integrity.

My experience with Duolingo highlighted for me the necessity of determining whether an activity is truly beneficial, and acting upon that discernment—keeping in mind that an activity may be beneficial at one time and unhelpful in another. Though I love to play (even competitively), I don't actually *want* to play every moment of my life. I might use another gamified app someday to help me form a good habit, but on the whole, it turns out that I prefer gameplay that benefits me in less concrete or obvious ways.

Play does not have to produce a measurable outcome to be meaningful and helpful. We should not feel ashamed of leisure activities that do not satisfy society's idea of "productive," or we risk missing out on the benefits that play offers. We all have the opportunity, on some level, to pursue the well-being, the flourishing that we can achieve together through gameplay, whether it is engaging with the world to grow our community and relationships, stewarding ourselves to improve our health and cope with pain, or enhancing our learning to develop our minds and abilities.

Today's Puzzle: Unscramble the following anagram.

M E A L Y G A P

Clue: A strategy for flourishing?

Character and . . . Play

Answer:

G	A	M	E	P	L	A	Y

Mary K. Bryant is Director of Media and Programming for the Wendt Center for Character Education at the University of Dubuque. She is delighted to serve students and tackle creative projects such as editing this journal and producing videos, animations, and podcasts for the Center. With a BA in Biology, Theatre Arts, and German, along with an MFA in Comparative Literature—Translation from the University of Iowa, she pursues of variety of interests, including music, crafting, gardening, and, of course, playing games.

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p. 29: photo by Lela Bryant-Henry

Notes

1. Also referred to as "Holy Danes" and "Sad Danes" (as opposed to the "Happy Danes"—no, I'm not kidding. You see, the Happy Danes allowed games. Maybe that's why they were happy!).

2. Spiegel, "The 'Happy Danes' vs. the 'Sad Danes'"; Nebbe, "Happy Danes and Holy Danes."

3. For discussion on the culture of productivity and the need for play in the world of science, see Adam J. Kleinschmit's article in this issue.

4. For further readings on human flourishing, see Stuhr, ed., *Philosophy and Human Flourishing*; English and Love, eds., *Literary Studies and Human Flourishing*. For readings in the realms of psychology and sociology, see works by Deborah Carr, William C. Compton, Barbara L. Fredrickson, Corey L. M. Keyes, Martin E. P. Seligman.

5. VanderWeele, "On the Promotion of Human Flourishing," 8149, 8153–54.

6. I recognize that some people have such challenges with financial and material stability that leisure time is fleeting, but I hope that everyone can find space in their lives for a little gameplay, for the reasons laid out in this article.

7. Despite the limits I have imposed, a broad variety of games come under this umbrella, as there are many styles and genres within the realms of video games (online, console-based, virtual reality, roleplaying games, first-person shooter, sandbox, simulations, etc.) and tabletop game (board games, card games, dice games, tabletop roleplaying games, puzzle games, etc.).

8. Crist, Voogt, and Dunn-Vaturi, "Facilitating Interaction," 191.

9. I was very interested to learn from a music therapist friend of mine about a new tool for therapists, *Critical Core*, a game system very similar to *Dungeons & Dragons*, structured to provide a safe space for clients to practice skills such as self-regulation and collaboration with others.

10. Laycock, *Dangerous Games*, 191–92.

11. Suler, "The Online Disinhibition Effect," 322.

12. Chicka, *Playing as Others*, 2–5, 139.

13. A few social action games I find particularly compelling are *Gone Home*, a video game with themes around mental health and LGBTQ+ identity, *Daybreak*, a boardgame with a focus on fighting climate change, and *1000 Cut Journey*, a virtual reality roleplay promoting racial equality.

14. Chicka, *Playing as Others*, 152.

15. Fuist, "Agentic Imagination," 120–22; Schrier, "Reducing Bias Through Gaming"; Gutierrez et al., "'Fair Play'"; Stephan and Finlay, "The Role of Empathy in Improving Intergroup Relations," 736.

16. Cogburn et al., "1,000 Cut Journey."

17. Though empathy does not invariably lead to compassionate action or willingness to approach the Other, it can be a powerful tool in improving intergroup relations. See Warren, "The Utility of Empathy"; Eisenberg, "Empathy-Related Responding"; Stephan and Finlay, "The Role of Empathy."

18. Laycock, *Dangerous Games*, 190–94.

19. Laycock, 243.

20. I recently complained about the discomfort I feel when considering the Trolley Problem (a philosophical exercise that calls for us to choose who lives and who dies in a hypothetical trolley accident) and how awful it feels to weigh and compare human lives. While that discomfort has its place (see articles by Adam Benjamin Smith, Beth Lindquist McCaw, and Annalee R. Ward in *Character and . . . Discomfort*), at its worst it can also be distracting from the moral work at hand (see Hoffman, *Empathy and Moral Development*, 13, 203-206; Paciello et al, "High Cost Helping Scenario"). Setting moral struggles in a fantasy land, one layer further from reality, may be helpful for those of us distracted by the horror of practicing making life-and-death decisions.

21. Carter, *Integrity*, 10–11.

22. Dartigues et al., "Playing Board Games."

23. Nakao, "Special Series on 'Effects of Board Games.'"

24. Nakao; Brown, *Play*, 71; Osborne et al., "Disentangling the Links."

25. Louie, Brook, and Frates, "The Laughter Prescription."

26. Tonietto et al., "Viewing Leisure as Wasteful," 2, 6–7.

27. Gwinup, Haw, and Elias, "Cardiovascular Changes in Video-Game Players"; Lam et al., "Health Risks and Musculoskeletal Problems of Elite Mobile Esports Players."

28. Suits, *The Grasshopper*, 43.

29. Csikszentmihalyi, *Finding Flow*.

30. Huberman, "Using Play to Rewire and Improve Your Brain."

31. Bateson and Martin, *Play, Playfulness, Creativity and Innovation*, 43–45,

75–76.

32. Chen, “Please Stop Calling Dopamine the ‘Pleasure Chemical’”; Pilozzi, Carro, and Huang, “Roles of β-Endorphin in Stress, Behavior, Neuroinflammation, and Brain Energy Metabolism.”

33. Chen, “Please Stop Calling Dopamine the ‘Pleasure Chemical.’” “Endorphin - an Overview”; Froehlich, “Opioid Peptides”; Kringelbach and Berridge, “New Pleasure Circuit”; Barrot et al., “Braking Dopamine Systems,” 14094.

34. Mortensen et al., “Women with Fibromyalgia’s Experience”; Ünver, Güray, and Aral, “The Effects of Game Intervention”; Koushali et al., “The Effect of a Multi-Dimensional Play Program”; Inan and Inal, “The Impact of 3 Different Distraction Techniques”; Colwell, “Needs Met through Computer Game Play among Adolescents,” 2072; American Pain Society, “Video Games and Virtual Reality.”

35. Voorhies, *Prehistoric Games of North American Indians*, 6–7.

36. McGonigal, *Reality Is Broken*, 5–6. If you liked this tidbit of Lydian history, Jane McGonigal tells the full story of the Lydians who faced down famine through gameplay in *Reality is Broken*. The conclusion of the story is surprising, so make sure to read all the way to the end of the book to learn what we know today about what happened next!

37. Kringelbach and Berridge, “New Pleasure Circuit”; Robinson et al., “Roles of ‘Wanting’ and ‘Liking.’”

38. “Internet Gaming.”

39. Song, *Restless Devices*, 54–57.

40. Alter, *Irresistible*, 9.

41. McGonigal, *Reality Is Broken*, 43.

42. “Video Games - Worldwide.”

43. Stevens et al., “Global Prevalence of Gaming Disorder”; Jovanovic, “Gamer Demographics.”

44. Kamenetz, “Is ‘Gaming Disorder’ An Illness?”; “Gaming Disorder.”

45. For more on the moral responsibilities of game designers and consumers, see Rafic Sinno’s article, “Navigating a Pokémon Go World.”

46. In fact, the research on aggression and violent video games has led to ambiguous results over the years, with many studies finding no link between the two. Coyne et al., “Who Is Most at Risk for Developing Physical Aggression After Playing Violent Video Games?”; Ferguson, Bowman, and Kowert, “Is the Link Between Games and Aggression More About the Player, Less About the Game?”; Yao et al., “Violent Video Games Exposure and Aggression”; Kühn et al., “Does Playing Violent Video Games Cause Aggression?”; Przybylski and Weinstein, “Violent Video Game Engagement.”

47. Wang and Aamodt, “Play, Stress, and the Learning Brain,” 5–6; Ranjbar-Slamloo and Fazlali, “Dopamine and Noradrenaline in the Brain.”

48. Gordon et al., “Socially-Induced Brain ‘Fertilization,’” 1; Brown, Play, 33.

49. Bateson and Martin, *Play, Playfulness, Creativity and Innovation*, 109; chaps. 3, 5, 8.

50. Brown, *Play*, 48–73.

51. Brown, 58.

52. Nakao, "Special Series on 'Effects of Board Games.'"
53. qtd. in Ramirez and Squire, "Gamification and Learning," 630.
54. Selinger, Sadowski, and Seager, "Gamification and Morality," 380–81.
55. Reflection is a key component in developing virtuous practices, as described by Michael Lamb, Jonathan Brant, and Edward Brooks in "How is Virtue Cultivated? Seven Strategies for Postgraduate Character Development."
56. Sicart, "Playing the Good Life," 233–34.
57. Rigby, "Gamification and Motivation," 123.
58. Jacobs, *The Puzzler*, 8–9.
59. North, "When Novels Were Bad For You."
60. McGonigal, *Reality Is Broken*, 354.

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Performance, Play, and Hospitality

Kristen Eby

Abstract

Performance, at its best, is a gift of play and hospitality. The act of performance is rooted in play, and playfulness within performance is necessary to present new and excellent artistic experiences. Performing with hospitality—as a gracious host—allows the artist to be focused on the audience and the work of art itself, thereby allowing them to perform at their best. A hospitable audience in turn gives their attention and energy to the performance, which maximizes the communal artistic experience.

As a voice teacher, part of my job is preparing young students for recital performances, and I rely on stories from past recitals to encourage them, allay their fears, and give them tools for maximum success. My favorite story involves one of my former students who is now a rising star in the opera world. I figure if a middle schooler learns that a Met tenor once had to navigate his own recital jitters in Dubuque, Iowa, the youngster might take comfort in the comparison. This tenor, though now a seasoned and reliable professional, had a propensity to forget his lyrics in his younger years. During one musical theater performance, an entire verse left his head. Rather than panic or look to me at the piano for assistance, he let loose with the most expressive and confident series of "la la la's" ever to grace our stage. They lasted a full lengthy minute, with no one wise to the fact that he had substituted nonsense for what should have been a coherent story line. If they had known, I'm not sure they would have cared. The audience was all in, returning his energy with an attentive energy of their own. Music was made, hearts were stirred, and a young playful performer learned that improvisation combined with confidence will win the moment every time.

To arrive at that place—a place where one's response to the unknown is to walk forward boldly with whatever wits one can muster—is my hope for every student who comes through my studio. Not only does it improve their chance of success, it fosters an openness and confidence that goes hand-in-hand with their development as people of character. They become first-rate performers when they take a playful and creative approach to performance, one in which the audience is not viewed as an adversary to overcome or a panel of curmudgeonly judges, but as a welcome guest who is eager to join in the experience. The audience is then primed to return this artistic welcome with an appreciation and attention due a skillful host. Performance, at its best, is a gift of play and hospitality. As we give it and receive it, we have the opportunity to become our best selves: creative and communally-minded.

Performance and Its Challenges

The challenge of performing well, or of experiencing a truly excellent performance, is significant. Performance is a unique art in that it exists in time—a moment-by-moment unfurling of expression—and this temporal quality presents particular obstacles for performers and audience members alike. A performer, unlike a painter or novelist who can adapt a work until ready to unveil it, labors under the prospect that they may or may not give the live performance they practiced for and intended. An audience member, if they want to fully engage with a performance, needs to maintain relatively consistent attention throughout. The performance cannot be returned to later—other than in our fragmented and fallible memories. Yes, we certainly have recording technologies available, but watching what has already happened does not perfectly recreate the experience. Not only are the acoustical and atmospheric qualities different, but the anticipation of the next line, the next move, or the next note is robbed of some crucial energy when we are aware that the event has already passed.

Performance, at its best, is a gift of play and hospitality.

This temporal quality, however, is also essentially the great joy of performing; we share art and knowledge, beauty and ideas with fellow human beings in a particular moment in time and, in the best of circumstances, we are caught up in those moments together as one expressive body. We have only to look to the COVID-19 pandemic to gain renewed appreciation for what live, in-person experiences mean to our

humanity and that sense of community. Our hours on Zoom could simply not satiate the desire for human contact and, as a result, we saw many impromptu performances on porches and balconies around the world.

Performance, this unique creative endeavor, is pervasive in our society and one of the primary characteristics of humanity.[1] The significant ceremonies and rituals in our society contain performative elements, and can seem incomplete without the inclusion of the performing arts. We put our children through the rigors of performance throughout their school years—music and dance recitals, athletic competitions, and of course, the dreaded public speech. And while not everyone continues to pursue performance activities through their lives, much of our society revolves around it. It is our primary entertainment. It is a key element of religious worship services. Even the dissemination of knowledge has become more performance-based in podcasts and TedTalks. It is hard to find an aspect of society that is not touched by performance.

Performance, a presentation to an audience

At its essence, performance is simply the presentation of art, knowledge or skill to an audience. And while this broader definition opens up tempting opportunities for discussion, I will be focusing this article on my own field of artistic performance, primarily as it relates to music and theater. It is my hope, however, that many of the thoughts here can be applied to our experience of performance in a broader context, and that the comparisons to play and hospitality may be applicable beyond the scope of this article.

Given the pervasiveness of performance, it is perhaps not surprising that we as a society often define and evaluate ourselves—our character, integrity, and essential humanity—through performing. Anthropologist Victor Turner refers to this as *reflexive performance*, a state in which "man reveals himself to himself."[2] Actors may come to understand themselves better through their roles and an audience may understand themselves better through observing an actor's performance. As the audience observes, they open their minds to learning through imaginative participation and analysis.

Reflection, examination, and judgement of moral issues all live in the performance spaces of our society.

Because performance permeates and influences our lives and culture, it seems worth our time to examine not only how we can perform at our best, but also how we can be our best selves while performing. What does it mean to be an excellent performer? An engaged audience member? How can we, in the arena of performance, access the best part of ourselves and live out strong character and moral integrity? I believe the answers are to be found, at least partly, in the concepts of play and hospitality, both of which have parallel characteristics to performance.

Play and Hospitality: Parallels to Performance

Play and Performance

Exploration through play

Johan Huizinga in his seminal book on play in human society, *Homo Ludens*, describes play as "stepping out of 'real' life into a temporary sphere of activity with a disposition all of its own."[3] Just as a game might immerse us in a world of an imaginary battle or other concocted stakes, so performance takes us to an alternate world where human experiences such as joy, love, and tragedy are intensified. As children might play with issues of right and wrong in a game of cops and robbers, so might we ponder the world's great questions through a creative presentation—a world in which the questions are real, but the medium is an affectation, allowing us to explore the deepest of issues in the comfort of entertainment. The child's entreaty to "come out and play" becomes the adult's invitation to explore the meaning of life.

A second similarity between play and performance is found in the temporal quality of both. The two exist in states of process, and may unfold in an infinite number of possibilities. In fact, it is the unknown that make both so enjoyable. What fun would a game of cards be if we knew each draw in advance? As we watch an accomplished dancer, don't we marvel at each new step and turn, delighting in the "what's next" of it all? Even when we are familiar with a dance or play or song, the fact that we are experiencing it

in real time creates an eager anticipation. Anything can happen—artistically or otherwise.

And while the purpose of performance is ideally more about artistic engagement than about a performer's potential success or failure, the presence of those stakes heightens our experience. Game play, as author Bernard Suits asserts, is "the voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles,"[4] and performance certainly presents its own obstacles—technical excellence, memory, artistic expression. If it was easy, if anyone could do it well, we likely wouldn't be any more interested in the offering than in watching someone breathe. We show up, at least in part, to see performers walk the high wire of their art.

Hospitality and Performance

While these links between performance and play are relatively evident in our society, the comparison of performance to the practice of hospitality is less common, but to my mind equally important. Important not only because of the apt comparison but because hospitality is an essential aspect of good character, and character brings value to our endeavors.

Hospitality is an essential aspect of good character, and character brings value to our endeavors.

Although the word hospitality is wide-encompassing—it can describe a simple domestic gathering as well as the mammoth hotel industry—I am employing it here in more of the Christian understanding: a scriptural admonition to welcome and serve those in need. The need in this case is the human hunger for art and beauty. Hospitality in the performance arena is a welcoming and openness between performer and audience, a generous sharing of art and attention.

We find a rationale for comparing performance and hospitality in simple linguistics. Although the language is a bit antiquated, the phrase "I'm entertaining guests" is still in use and indicates a close relationship between performing and hosting. Advertising a play or concert is akin to an invitation, and an audience or patrons are also often referred to as guests. Artists strive to provide an enjoyable experience for those guests, and, in many recital venues, even provide a reception of food and drink to close the evening.

As a virtue, hospitality is similar to love and generosity, but what separates it is its tie to space and time. I practice hospitality if I welcome someone into

a space that is mine. I am hospitable when I invite someone to share in my time, such as a designated meal. We have already seen that the elements of space and time link performance and play—alternative worlds and temporal process being foundational characteristics of the two activities. These same elements establish a common ground between performance and hospitality and help us find a path to becoming performers and audience members of character.

Why, then, does the goal of hospitality not figure more prominently in our discussion of performance excellence? Perhaps it is because the concept of hospitality can often conjure up notions of servitude and we have a tendency to treat accomplished performers with reverence and celebrity. Even the less accomplished aim for celebrity within their own spheres.

Celebrity is a relatively recent invention in society's understanding of artists. Prior to the 19th century, musicians and actors, while certainly known and appreciated, were usually relegated to the middle and lower classes of society. The artistic works themselves achieved fame more readily than their creators. Huizinga points out that Aristotle referred to performing artists as "low people" and that even hundreds of years later "in the 17th century a prince kept his musicians as he might keep his stables."[5]

Without begrudging today's performers their heightened status, perhaps we can admit that we have also lost something through this societal change. When celebrity limits us to view performance as a display of individual greatness, it can cause us to lose sight of the value of *what* is being performed. The artistic content can recede in the shadows of a spotlight aimed at the performing personality. Alternatively, performance viewed as a service to the audience as well as a gift of appreciation *from* the audience may result in great benefits to us all.

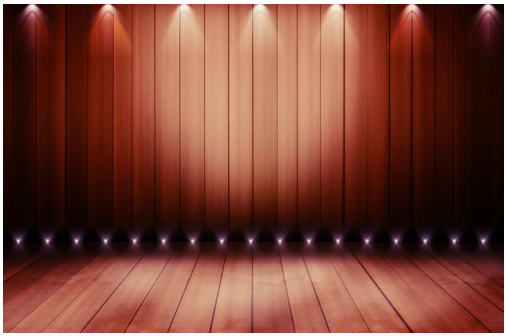
Performance viewed as a service to the audience as well as a gift of appreciation from *the audience may result in great benefits to us all.*

Performance Creates its Own World

Having established some foundational connections between performance, play, and hospitality, let's delve into further detail about how those comparisons may aid us in performance. For example, if play and performance both take place as alternate worlds, it stands to reason that

those worlds contain their own rules and sense of order, and we would do well to consider them from the perspective of both performer and audience.

About the world and order of play, Huizinga writes, "Inside the playground an absolute and peculiar order reigns. Here we come across another, very positive feature of play: it creates order, *is* order. Into an imperfect world and into the confusion of life it brings a temporary, a limited perfection."[6] Performers likewise play by, and often create, the rules of any given performance in order to sustain the world of their art. As I prepare students for recitals or concerts, I instruct them in the rules of our particular performance medium. These rules include what to wear, how to stand, where to look, and how to bow, among others. The performers are at their best when they have a clear path ahead of them—when they can navigate their performance world with confidence. The physical space itself also plays an active role in establishing our world. Well-lit or shadowed? Spacious or cozy? Colorful or stark? The best-designed performance arenas give the audience the gift of expectation and clue them into their appropriate roles and behavior in the world they have entered. A standing area in front of a rock musician invites the attendees to dance and move freely, while traditional theater seats hem them in, dictating that they be still and focus on the stage. The spoken and unspoken rules of each performance allow for a smooth process, one in which artists and audience know their parts and therefore contribute appropriately to the communal experience.



The essential role of the stage in establishing the world of a performance

I have been fortunate enough to work with hundreds of young singers over the years who are rule-followers in the best sense. I find that students have been amazingly capable of rising to the challenge of maintaining "the world" of each recital (despite the occasional rushed or forgotten bow) and they more often than not surprise and delight their audience with their professionalism. They seem to accept that broken rules endanger a performance, just as broken rules of a game ruin the fun and bring forth cries of "spoil sport!" on the playground. Or in the words of Huizinga, "As

soon as the rules are transgressed, the whole play-world collapses."[7] We play by the rules so that our performance has cohesion and integrity.

The one "spoil sport" I can recall was a young woman who stomped (literally) off the stage, a frown on her face, obviously displeased with her recital performance and making no attempt to hide it. I have little recollection of her performance (beyond thinking she did a passable if not stellar job), but the image of her retreat burned in my memory because of the shock of witnessing such raw emotion on display in our carefully crafted event. Not only did she disrupt the aesthetic of the evening, but I am sure she made the audience uncomfortable in the moment. Her lack of self-control and her concern over her own wants took her far afield of the playful nature of performing and equally hampered the important goal of hospitality to the audience.

We can't be too hard on her, however, when we consider the pressures that so many feel when it comes to public presentation. Our current culture has a tendency to forget that performance can be a generous act, instead pushing us to regard it as an egotistical display or as a competition to be won. Granted, competition in performance has existed long before our obsession with *American Idol* and *America's Got Talent*, and the combination can provide an enjoyable pastime. Many of the great Western European composers such as Bach and Mozart took part in occasional improvisational competitions, for example.

Any activity rooted in play has a strong chance of also being competitive. In fact, the French scholar Roger Caillois lists competition (or *agon*) as one of the four major categories of play.[8] The relationship between competition and performance, however, is not intrinsic; the two do not need each other to thrive. Game theorist Brian Upton questions the relationship when he writes, "There is an element of play in visual art, in music, in literature, but it's difficult to perceive it when play is viewed largely through a lens of competition and conflict and interaction. You can't win a symphony."[9] Perhaps not, but you can win a symphonic composition contest or a concerto competition. And while these can be fun challenges, we must keep in mind that our current obsession with performance competition can contaminate our ability to enjoy art for art's sake. It is important that we carefully establish our performance spaces and expectations, making room for non-competitive expression. Our young artists need to learn the benefits and importance of hospitable performance.

The performer or teacher is not the only determiner of performance space and structure. The audience also contributes significantly to the creation of any performance arena, whether intentionally or not. Their attire can speak volumes about their interest and expectation, and is a significant aesthetic player in any event. Tie-dye has lent a colorful and casual backdrop to many a Grateful Dead concert, and despite the current trend of relaxing dress codes for many operas, the continued sight of gowns and tuxedos creates an ambiance of pomp and sophistication. Attendance numbers also matter. Ask most any performer if audience size contributes to their success, and you will hear an emphatic "yes!" And children, though they can be welcome at many a play or concert, will put a significant stamp on the event through their own movement and sound. A stage may draw our attention, but our eyes and ears will take in the entire space as we absorb a performance.

The Grateful Dead aesthetic

These attributes of space, personnel, and expectations—primarily pre-determined aspects of a performance event—are what enable us to then experience creativity and playfulness within the process of performance. It is structure, after all, that facilitates freedom and creativity. Parameters and boundaries help define an artistic world, lend shape to a performance, and keep it from becoming an "anything goes" sort of free-for-all. Playfulness or creativity, in turn, keep that structure from becoming stale or stifling. As performance theorist Richard Schechner writes, "Human performance is paradoxical, a practiced fixedness founded on pure contingency."[10] We enter a performance with some knowledge of the event to come, and yet leave having had a one-of-a-kind experience.

Performance: A Gift of Play and Hospitality

Performer Play

While some genres, such as jazz or improv comedy, embody the extremes of spontaneous creativity and playfulness, any live performance contains

opportunity for such moments. We celebrate the public speaker who can respond to a pop-up question in an articulate and creative manner, or the stand-up comedian who can riff a series of jokes during crowd work, or the politician who can offer an unexpected, witty retort in a public debate.

Even when material is pre-determined, a playful spirit can serve a performance well. As Upton writes, a theatrical performance, while a presentation of a completed work, still invites the actor to play.

> Even within the narrow constraints established by the script, the actor is afforded a significant number of moment-to-moment creative choices. An individual performance is shaped not just by the mechanical execution of pre-determined dialogue and stock gestures, but also by improvisation—by spontaneous nuances of expression, timing, inflection, and tone.[11]

These nuances give life and definition to performance. When a performer is engaging in this playful process rather than creating a product, they open up themselves and the audience to infinite possibilities, each phrase, line, or move becoming an opportunity to play and express a new artistic thought.

When a performer is engaging in this play process rather than creating a product, they open themselves and the audience to infinite possibilities.

While solo performances may lend themselves to individual playfulness and hospitality, can we also apply these concepts to group performances? If a choir or a dance troupe has spent hours in detailed preparation, is there still room for play on stage? Certainly there is if we consider play as an attitude of openness and receptivity to those around us. A good choir listens and blends, each member constantly adjusting their own voice to match those around them. Dancers must practice continual awareness of their partners' moves in order to perform as a true unit. Actors must play off of each other's energy and emotion if they wish to present an honest scene.

In preparation for this play in performance, rehearsals then become as much about responsiveness as they do about memorization. I know that if I don't acknowledge and foster individual agency in my choirs, I pay the price when I need these individuals to physically move to the music or to make their own decisions in an aleatoric piece (when each singer must sing notes at random). If actors do not practice responsive listening, they can fall into

a dull pattern of predictability, limiting themselves to a product of dubious artistic value rather than embracing a process.

There is a tendency in young performers (either young in age or experience) to seek the comfort of product creation rather than to give themselves over to this nuanced and vulnerable process. More often than not, they attempt to recreate a particular performance that they have seen succeed. It is to this end that they will mimic an accomplished artist—recite a monologue in perfect imitation of a great film actor or perform a song note-for-note as heard on a cast recording—and perhaps that imitation is rudimentary play, necessary to build up their toolbox of skills and expressions. Ultimately, however, they will need to abandon the mimicry and venture out on their own journeys of expression, and it is then that we as the audience will benefit from their bravery.

Musician and author Bruce Ellis Benson describes the need for playfulness in music performance of all types, including music of the classical variety: "Like a living organism, it is ever in motion and constantly in need of care and infusions of new life to keep it alive."[12] All too often, our performance suffers as we confine ourselves to an exact replication of what we believe a creator intended, or what we imagine an audience might expect, rather than endow it with our own fresh perspective as thoughtful and expressive artists. Of course, the best performers *do* want to represent a creator's intentions, and they prepare their piece with that essential creation in mind, but it would be a mistake to assume that performers are not also creators, lending their unique voice as a layer to the art.

Audience Play

As performing artists engage in playful expression, so also may an audience engage in playful interpretation! Unfortunately, audiences often fail to recognize this practice, settling for passive observation. The entire burden of engagement then rests on the performer, who may need to exert a Herculean effort to prod an audience beyond mild entertainment. Active listening and observing, however, can lead us to a heightened experience of performance. By listening or watching intently, we enter a new level of engagement: perhaps we recognize patterns, contemplate what the creator may or may not be asserting, make connections with other performances, or formulate predictions about the direction of the performance. And this

By listening or watching intently, we enter a new level of engagement.

engagement can extend beyond the performance itself. Upton describes a "wind down" period which continues beyond the performance until we can "move onto something else without feeling the tug of unexplored potentialities."[13] Such absorption stimulates us as creative beings and has potential to magnify our future enjoyment of art and performance.

Audience Hospitality

Attention to performance not only feeds our own playful creativity, but also serves as a gift—we become the gracious guest to the performer's hospitable host. The gift begins before the performance in the manner of expectation and preparation. Do we come in the right state of mind, ready to engage? The gift continues throughout the performance with our attention and our energy. Do we suppress the urge to check our phones and decide to actively listen? Do we offer our mental and creative energy to this moment? If we do, we might even say that we become the host in this scenario. Hospitality is a virtue defined by space, after all, and we have invited the performer into the space of our minds and attention. The gift concludes with our response—most often applause, but not necessarily. I have been in performances when a lengthy awed silence was our spontaneous response—and a very appropriate and appreciated gift it was.

A hospitable audience

This gift of attentiveness, or the lack thereof, is keenly felt by performers. How common is it that an actor will declare "They were a great audience!" or "Typical matinee—it was a quiet audience." This audience description invariably clues us in to the energy and success of the performers: "We were really energized!" or "We just couldn't seem to get it on track." As much as performers may try to give their utmost for every show, we know that the audience is a critical factor in that success.

Performer Hospitality

If the gift of hospitality from an audience to performer involves preparation, attention, interpretive play and response, what does hospitality in the other direction look like? How may a performer be hospitable to an audience?

Let's begin with preparation, in which eagerly anticipating the audience rather than fearing their judgement is key. In her celebrated book, *A Soprano on Her Head*, Eloise Ristad points out the debilitating tendency of most musicians to give mind space over to our "inner judges," those imaginary and brutal critics of our every imperfection.[14] These judges of our creation are then transferred to the audience and we become afraid of them rather than enthusiastic about the presence of the concertgoers. What is Ristad's solution to this obstacle? In a word: play. Her workshops, the basis for her book, are full of creative exercises and roleplaying games designed to take the performer out of a place of fear and rigidity and into a place of freedom and enjoyment. The audience then loses its frightening aura and the artist can focus on the gift of song, story, or movement.

Just as a Christian is called to practice hospitality that not only welcomes strangers but rejects suspicion of them,[15] so a performer at their best will reject suspicion of their audience. In doing so, they become free to present their work, sing their song, or play their role without dreading criticism. It also frees them of the expectation of something in return. Expectation can be a formidable barrier to excellence in performance. Release from the anticipation of appreciation and adulation, as well as the anticipation of judgement, allows the presenter to live in the moment and to give full attention to the art.

Just as a Christian is called to practice hospitality that not only welcomes strangers but rejects suspicion of them, so a performer at their best will reject suspicion of their audience.

In the moment of performance itself, artists become hospitable when they accept the role of attentive host and treat the experience as a communal one. Author Aurelie Hagstrom writes, "As a historic Christian practice, hospitality is distinctly communal and self-giving, embodying a way of being and thinking about the 'other' or the 'stranger.'"[16] In the host to guest relationship, the guest is the focus through gifts and service. In the performer to audience relationship, the audience is the focus by way of the art. Just as a child starts or deepens a friendship by engaging in play, so a performer connects and responds to their audience by engaging in artistic play. And when they do this, they move beyond the dangers of mechanical recitation and enter into a dialogue of sorts, one that welcomes playfulness.

Take for example a 2012 performance I was fortunate enough to attend by renowned baritone Nathan Gunn at the conference for the National Association of Teachers of Singing. One would think that an audience of music teachers would have been diligent in silencing their phones, and yet one slipped through the cracks, causing an offending ring to insert itself into Gunn's beautiful performance. Without missing a note, Gunn raised an eyebrow, smiled, and laid a particular word emphasis in his next phrase that acknowledged the ring. It was an inspired moment. Laughter erupted in the crowd and we all felt included in the joke. He certainly had the option of becoming irritated that his voice was sharing the stage with an intruding tone (I could list countless examples of performers broadcasting displeasure to their audiences), but that choice would have cast a pall over the event. Instead, our entertainer became our host, engaging in witty dialogue and sharing a playful moment with us.

Realizing the communal nature of human expression

A hospitable mindset, one that is willing to engage in creative play, moves us out of an obsessive attention to ourselves and concern for *our* reception, and into an other-centered present. This allows us the freedom to focus on the art or the material of the performance, and increases the likelihood of its quality. If a performer's goal is to look good, the choices they make will not be organic to the art itself. How often have I had to encourage a singer to think about a line of music rather than the ease with which they can sing its various notes. *Yes, I realize you are able to really belt that pitch, but do you hear how it is out of place with the rest of the phrase?*

Acting has its own slang for such selfish choices in performance. "Chewing the scenery" or "mugging for the audience" refers to overacting, usually in a bid to draw attention to the actor rather than the work on stage. In contrast, an actor will be described as "generous" when they allow other actors to shine or place the needs of the play above their own need to be admired.

Conclusion

When we seek ways as both performer and audience member to offer and receive hospitality, and to welcome and appreciate the playfulness inherent

in an artistic presentation, we open ourselves up to a world of performance excellence, one in which the communal nature of human expression is fully realized and celebrated.

Performers, let's set a table of a well-prepared performance space and eagerly anticipate our guests. Let's invite them to play with us and present our art as a joyful act of service, keeping ourselves attuned to each moment, playful enough to follow where the muse may lead. At the conclusion, let's return our guests' appreciation with gratitude of our own, waving them home with the knowledge that we gave of ourselves in a process of mutual discovery.

For those of us in the audience, let's accept a performance invitation with intention and show up at the door with our own gift of attention and artistic curiosity. Let's acknowledge our essential connection to the moment and engage in the event with interpretive play, becoming hosts ourselves as we invite the performer into our thoughts and hearts. And when we have offered our thanks for a lovely evening, let's head home with the night's sights and sounds still playing in our minds, knowing that we have had the privilege of experiencing one of the great joys of humankind in this shared, expressive hour.

Whether performer or audience member, being intentional about a hospitable mindset and cultivating the gift of play brings meaning to our artistic experiences. We open ourselves up to a sense of wonder, the fascination of seeing issues from new angles, and the delight of childlike expectation. Given such prospects, wouldn't we in the world of performance do well to heed the child's plea to come out and play?

Kristen Eby is the Director of Choral Activities and Head of the Fine and Performing Arts Department at the University of Dubuque. She also maintains a private voice studio of middle and high school students. She received her Masters in Choral Conducting from the University of Oregon and her Bachelor's degree in Music from Westmont College in Santa Barbara, California.

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Notes

1. Victor Turner is a respected resource on this topic and, in his many acclaimed books and articles, offers an in-depth exploration of ritual and performance in human society.
2. Turner, *The Anthropology of Performance*, 81.
3. Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 8.
4. Suits, *The Grasshopper*, 54–55.
5. Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 163.
6. Huizinga, 10.
7. Huizinga, 11.
8. Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, 12.
9. Upton, *The Aesthetic of Play*, 112.
10. Schechner, Preface, 10.
11. Upton, *The Aesthetic of Play*, 200.
12. Benson, *The Improvisation of Musical Dialogue*, 126.
13. Upton, *The Aesthetic of Play*, 259.
14. Ristad, *A Soprano on Her Head*, 17.
15. Hershberger, *A Christian View of Hospitality*, 29.
16. Hagstrom, "Christian Hospitality," 120.

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Defusing Racism

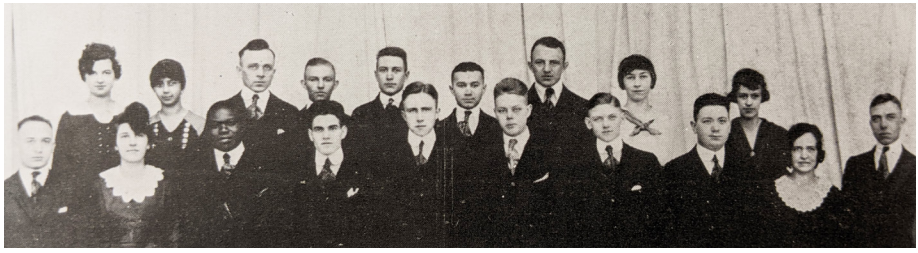
Olympian Sol Butler's Serious Playfulness

Brian Hallstoos

Abstract

Playfulness can be serious business, as illustrated in century-old publications from the University of Dubuque. By engaging in "playful play," Black student Sol Butler made friends and helped build a campus community that was less likely to express and tolerate anti-Black racism. Yet photographs and text also point to the limits of playfulness in combatting hate.

The young women and men of the Philaphronia literary club gathered together on an early-January 1919 day in the commodious lobby of Severance Hall, a men's dormitory at Dubuque College. Among the group's members was Solomon "Sol" Butler, a world-class athlete and future Olympian who in a few months would become the first Black graduate of the eastern Iowa school along the Mississippi River.[1]



Philaphronia Club (Sol appearing third from left, first row)

He was the only Black student in the room—and on the whole campus, in fact. This was the organization's first event in nearly a year. The Great War had recently ended, students had weathered the worst wave of a

devastating flu pandemic, and they now tried in earnest to rekindle the active campus life that had been put on hold during these times of crisis. Life for everyone had changed in the wake of numerous deaths, periods of isolation, and a fractured sense of safety. For African Americans, safety became increasingly tenuous over coming months as racial violence rose dramatically.

Sol in military uniform

Reflecting both the growing momentum of the women's suffrage movement and the increasing presence of women on campus, the socially-engaged literary club focused attention on shifting gender roles. The central activity of the "jolly party"—which occurred in front of the fireplace and perhaps with the latest popular music wafting from the dorm's new phonograph player—involved testing the domestic skills of the male students, who would soon assume the "duty to be the home-makers" since "women were taking their place in the business world." Male students competed in button sewing and a recipe contest. Another male student "easily excelled Sol Butler in dishwashing."

Sol and fellow choir members sharing a joke

Butler was the best football player and long jumper and fastest runner in the region—and for years he had assisted his father, Ben Butler Sr., back home in Kansas in his streetside service work—but he could not compete in the kitchen! The men reportedly performed most tasks poorly, a point highlighted in the yearbook account that was intended to magnify the light-hearted humor of the competition.[2]

Women and men had separate spheres—cooking, sewing, and cleaning versus working outside the home—the author implied, and it was funny to see one sex attempt to function in the other sex's sphere. In contrast, the story normalized the interracial nature of the event by not leading readers

to laugh at, deride, or even question the normality of a Black man having fun with white people. Many students supported the idea of women gaining the vote, which became reality the following year with the ratification of the 19th Amendment.

The playful spirit animating the pseudo-contest, which traded winning and losing for a shared nod to social change, helped all participants enjoy each other's company in spite of their different, even opposing attitudes regarding women's place in society. It also created an atmosphere that was nearly unheard of at that dangerous point in time where a Black man might exhibit his skills as a viable mate among attentive and unwed white women.

Serious Playfulness

Like the ambitious women attending Dubuque College, who represented a small minority of the student body helping to bring gender inclusion to campus through their very presence, Sol Butler pushed the school to be racially inclusive by being present. It wasn't enough for him and other historically excluded students, however, to simply show up and blithely adapt to mainstream expectations or tolerate behavior, no matter how racist or sexist it got, for the sake of a college degree. They all recognized an opportunity at this culturally diverse institution to create meaningful social bonds. Co-educational playfulness in a dorm lobby served members of the literary club to strengthen these bonds by navigating new gender and racial realities together.

Butler was the best football player and long jumper and fastest runner in the region.

This spirit of play amid high-stakes social change is not a topic that historians frequently take up. I have spent nearly a decade researching, writing, and presenting on Sol Butler, but until recently had not thought deeply about the serious implications of his lighthearted moments.[3] While previously assuming that Sol's experience with fun reflected his "serious" interactions in other realms, like on the sports field or in the classroom, I now believe his merry engagements helped create the conditions for success in these other realms. In this way, I take my cue from biologists Patrick Bateson and Paul Martin, who introduce the notion of "playful play," which is a type of play that "is accompanied by a particular positive mood state in which the individual is more inclined to behave (and, in the case of humans, think) in a spontaneous and flexible

way."[4] This playful mood state, they argue, promotes creativity and can even lead to innovation. These innovations, which we may see in action in extant images of Butler, could even occur in the social realm and regarding otherwise stubborn and divisive race relations.

Butler appears to engage in playfulness—whether consciously or not—to defuse potential racial tensions and hostility. His fame rested on the amazing things he did in sports, like single-handedly winning team track and field meets and dominating in all aspects of football; yet his hopes for educational achievement and upward mobility rested on social skills and the things he did *off* the fields of play, activities that received much less attention than scoring a touchdown or winning a race. Not only did he make many friends, people respected him because of his leadership skills and strength of character. His courage, intelligence, strong work ethic, modesty, and wit made favorable and lasting impressions on his predominantly white teammates. I suggest playfulness helped those around him see these positive traits rather than defaulting to the era's dehumanizing stereotypes of Black people and can be seen in the historic images.

Playful Camaraderie

Sol returning home from an away game with affectionate team members

The warm feelings his classmates had for Sol may be seen in surviving images, like the photographic detail to the left from a school yearbook. Seen here shoulder-to-shoulder on the banks of the Mississippi River in fall 1916, Sol and his football teammates will soon board a steamboat for their return trip to their school. The night before, he led them in soundly defeating a Wisconsin opponent. Now they are all smiles and relaxation, enjoying each other's dapper company in their hats, suits and ties. His immediate neighbors warmly embrace him, their team leader, placing hands on his shoulder and arm. As we can see on his face, tilted up slightly and lit fully by the raking sunlight, he appears to feel safe and at ease in their company.[5]

Certainly, his exceptional athletic talents helped make this moment possible. He ended up as a student in Dubuque and made this particular set of friends *because* he was an exceptional athlete—the country's best in high school[6]—and had searched for a good place to further his schooling and amateur career. His athletic gifts opened up doors that would have remained closed no matter how socially skilled he may have been. In coming years, he would long jump in the Olympics, play in the NFL and on some of the best all-Black basketball teams, and become a sport celebrity, but not solely because he was a likable guy.

Butler appears to engage in playfulness—whether consciously or not—to defuse potential racial tensions and hostility.

But this 1916 photograph and many others taken during his college years suggest that something more than admiration and respect for his athletic talent is at play regarding his teammates' embrace. The yearbook editor would not have fondly recalled Sol's less-than-stellar dishwashing skills. In fact, he wouldn't have been present to put these "skills" on display, if he had been anti-social, arrogant, cruel, or, most importantly considering the general racial climate, someone others viewed as socially beneath them.

Pretend Pretensions

Rather than beneath or above them, Sol was one of them. Sometimes he proved this by demonstrating who he was not. Take for example the two photographs below that come from an undated scrapbook (the image on the left) and the 1919 yearbook (on the right). In both we see Sol dressed well, like students often did back then for activities as seemingly mundane as

Sol dressed as a "dandy"

eating dinner or returning home from a distant sporting event. He has added one new item to his wardrobe, however, a monocle, which has transformed his demeanor.[7]

This visual prop, ostensibly used to enhance one's vision, serves a different purpose for Butler. Here his body language evokes the affectations of a pompous scholar or dandy. In the photograph with friends, he tilts his head to one side and, with eyes closed and a faint smile, gives the impression he is blissfully lost in thought. The other image finds him posing on the walkway up to the front door of Peters Commons, a building used then as it is today as a cafeteria. With imaginary lapels in hand and head tossed back, he looks full of himself, like a proud peacock on display. This is all in fun and he intends anything but to be taken seriously. Rather, he mocks pretensions and any haughty person who feels superior to others because of his social class, fancy dress, or intellectual achievement.

Through the dynamic interplay of gesture, posture, and facial expression we see Sol and his friends express their joy in being together (we also can imagine the photographer with Sol in front of the cafeteria laughingly egging him on). We see in their frenetic energy one source of their joy: the indulgence in a playful spirit. It is this spirit that Sol helped spark.

Playfulness Builds Community

We see this spirit on display again, a playfulness that strengthened interracial bonds, in a photograph of Sol with his track and field teammates. They pose once more in suits—did these college students ever dress down!—most of them on their bellies, for an informal shot on campus grass. The pixelated, somewhat blurry image is a bit difficult to read. Does Sol rest his chin and cheek on his hand or is it a light-colored, collared shirt that helps frames his face? More vexing, are the two young men situated behind Sol resting their weight on him, perhaps even digging their elbows into his back like an annoying brother would do in order to get a reaction?[8]

Track team playfully posing on campus grass

While not everyone is smiling, judging by most countenances and the awkward pose, the dominant mood is one of playfulness. Rather than attempting to show dominance over Sol, the two comparably vertical and laughing men show affection toward their star teammate by, well, placing themselves as close to him as they can get, cramping his space. To my eyes and knowing what I know about how Sol brooked no disrespect from classmates, Sol appears pensive and patient rather than upset and would have pushed them off if they demonstrated something more threatening than goofy over-familiarity. In this instance, his mere presence has brought out some teammates' silly side.

Play helps make character—whether good or bad—visible.

In this loosely-staged photograph, which also includes two Latino runners, playfulness forms the backdrop against which we may see—or at least can imagine—the teammates' good character in the form of racially inclusive camaraderie. This and other images lead me to believe that good character benefits from and, in some circumstances, may depend upon engaging in playful play or maintaining a playful spirit. As some researchers have concluded, playfulness is hardwired into us—and other members of the animal kingdom—to serve a function or functions that connect with communal well-being and, at times, survival.[9] Attending to the ethical implications of play, some play can, perhaps must, build community, while other forms of play or the lack of play can tear people down or exclude them from community.

Character development benefits from play because of the profound ways play and playfulness have shaped cultures across space and time. If, as theorist Johan Huizinga argues in *Homo Ludens*, play represents the origin of our communal rituals,[10] then understanding play may help us recognize what makes us more fully human and united in our shared humanity. Play helps make character—whether good or bad—visible. Perhaps no social reality makes this point more apparent than playful interactions involving people of different races.

Race is a social construct that ascribes inner meaning to people primarily based on perceived visual/exterior differences; what we see, according to the concept of race, sheds light on a person's more important qualities, like their character and capabilities, that are not visible. Given the by-design optical nature of race, the rituals on a college campus preserved in the visual record—like the coming together of teammates for a team photo—

represent key historical information on whether participants played nice and fair or not. In short and as my visual analyses imply, in old photographs we may see racism or anti-racism at play.

Playfulness Prevents Prejudice

At a time when segregation deeply impacted interracial interactions at virtually all other American colleges, Butler had a relatively good experience on the sports teams and campus.[11] Campus culture played an important role. Following the lead of his parents, who moved their family toward integrated opportunities, Sol chose a school where he would be well received and experience less xenophobia and racism at a time when Black migration and heavy European immigration warped attitudes across the country.

This unusual degree of cultural hospitality stemmed from the origins of the institution, which began as a school to train German-speaking Americans and, thirteen years before Sol arrived, expanded its mission to include the training of Christian leaders from around the planet.[12] By the time he and his brother Ben enrolled, Dubuque German College had students who identified as Bohemian, Cuban, Filipino, Hungarian, Korean, Mexican, Persian, Puerto Rican, Russian Jew, and Syrian. It ranked near the top in the country in the number of foreign-born students attending, despite its relatively small student body.[13] School leaders took seriously the notion that all Christians were of one blood and equal in the eyes of God, a reality that paved the way for Sol's meaningful inclusion.

Excerpt from yearbook photo-collage page with team captains

Consider for example a photo-collage page published in the 1918 Dubuque College yearbook, which, through two neighboring photographs, depicts Sol

in a formal and informal setting.[14] In the larger image on the left, we see him sitting on a neatly arranged row of chairs wearing his track and field jersey with the other team captains. They all stare out stone-faced at the viewer, evoking the toughness and seriousness expected of one in their leadership roles. Above their heads a yearbook editor has written their shortened first names.

To the immediate right of this photograph is another one that depicts Sol along with the football captain, Cornelius "Con" Hook. Here the two men wear relaxed smiles that correspond with their casual poses, lying in the grass on their sides, propped up on one elbow. The editor has written "Lazy Boobs"—a teasing, yet benign and now-antiquated expression ("boob" in this context meant "fool")—over Sol's head, commenting on their leisurely comportment. The two men show their playful side. The side-by-side images give a more complete sense of Sol and Con as athletes than either image would on its own. To play their respective sports well requires both steely-eyed determination along with the ability to decompress and enjoy another person's company. A playful spirit at the right time helps maintain this healthy balance.

The editor's two-word description of Sol and the football captain is remarkable given the era's dominant racial ideologies. The term "lazy" had charged associations. Laziness was high on the list of character shortcomings used to justify the institution of slavery, perhaps America's most destructive example of projection, where white slave owners freed themselves from having to labor by forcing it all on the backs of others. Slavery was good for the enslaved, the warped reasoning went, because it forced upon them a "civilizing" work ethic. At a time when most history books available to Sol and other students portrayed slavery as a relatively benign institution under which the races peacefully and happily coexisted, mass media and popular culture reinforced this stereotype by depicting Black people as inherently predisposed to avoiding work. This misrepresentation would have frustrated someone like Sol, whose hard-working father, Ben Sr., had been enslaved in Alabama for the first two decades of his life.

This pernicious idea of laziness did harm during Sol's lifetime, one generation removed from slavery; it helped justify the blanket exclusion of Black people from most jobs, social services, and civic opportunities, as well as their over-incarceration, often on charges of vagrancy, idleness, and the like. Such justifications spoke to the evils of white supremacy and systemic poverty more than individual character flaws.[15] In stark contrast, the person who wrote the words "Lazy Boobs" on the photo does not appear to tap into

racist ideas about laziness that undergirded inequality. We are not supposed to see Sol as lazy because he is Black; we're not even supposed to view either man as truly lazy, knowing that they are the captains of the vaunted sports teams. Rather, the brief description simply highlights that this is the two men's downtime and, like any other well-adjusted and valued members of their campus community, they know how, stretched out on the grass together, to relax and be playful.

The Limits of Playful Play

During the Jim Crow era, Black people drew upon numerous strategies to make a place for themselves in society. Carefully used, playfulness had the power to disrupt some people's racism or misogyny, allowing friendships to blossom and community to build. Certainly, however, in many situations the spirit of playfulness would not alight in the hearts and minds of those incessantly wed to their hatreds.

Sol performing with minstrel troupe

Furthermore, playfulness had the potential to sabotage meaningful friendships and community; it could make things worse for Black people by affirming stereotypes. Among the hundreds of yearbook snapshots taken during Sol's time at Dubuque College are two that show him participating in a cultural practice with deep American roots: blackface minstrelsy.[16] His presence complicates interpretations of these productions, which without him might more unequivocally register as an expression of anti-Blackness.

Around the time that Sol's dad was born into bondage on a southern plantation, white men in the urban northeast began pretending to be enslaved Black men on theater stages. They claimed to portray authentic portraits of plantation life, creating laughter in the process of spreading distorted images of blackness. Singing and dancing in ragged clothing, making ridiculous verbal errors, and projecting a carefree, irresponsible,

and dimwitted image, minstrel performers represented the antithesis of respectability.

Individual minstrels gave way to minstrel troupes that toured the country—mostly in the North—and then other parts of the world. Blackface minstrelsy became America's first and most pervasive form of popular culture, shaping attitudes about race through wildly disrespectful misrepresentation.[17] This history helps clarify why many students at the University of Dubuque (Dubuque College was renamed after 1920) felt hurt, angry, and unsafe after two white, female students donned blackface, the first of two recent anti-Black incidences on campus that attracted public notoriety and confronted the community with the stubborn legacy of white supremacy.[18]

Playfulness had the potential . . . to make things worse for Black people by affirming sterotypes.

In both yearbook photos we see Sol sitting among white teammates who have applied a blackening agent (either greasepaint or burnt cork) on their faces and hands. True to the long-established conventions, they have intentionally left skin exposed around their mouths and eyes to suggest exaggerated lips and bulging eyeballs. The poor quality of the reproduced image makes it difficult to determine if Sol dons any makeup. One of the five white minstrels, with cane, top hat, and no blackening agent, serves as the interlocutor, the one who hosts the event and announces each act. Their shows likely included monologues, music, and dancing. Highlighting the obvious, someone has written "min-strels" across the bottom of one photo. The other photo contains a derogatory term, akin to the n-word, for Black people and blackface performers.

Who's Playing?

These minstrelsy photographs likely document the Halloween fundraiser that aimed "to defray the expense of tennis courts which are to be built just south of the McCormick Gymnasium," where the event took place. At least one of these photographs was taken someplace other than the gym, illustrating the observation that "the amusement created did not cease with the conclusion of the program."[19] Indeed, the "amusement" did not cease, and everywhere one looked—for instance at the cartoons and advertisements of traveling performers in local newspapers—was evidence of blackface and its cultural impact. The form was as commonplace as our current televised comedy acts or community talent and variety shows. Take

for example what my now-deceased, white grandmother wrote down on growing up in Tennessee around the time Butler was in Dubuque:

> The school put on a minstrel show with two of the boys dressed like black men and had their faces and hands blacked and imitating the black manner of speaking and making jokes. This was very popular at the time and people enjoyed it greatly, never seeming to think of its hurting the black people's feelings. Actually there were very few, if any, black people in that community. I never remember seeing a black person while we lived there.[20]

My grandmother, who wrote this decades ago, implied that the practice was hurtful, even though white participants and audiences—including herself as a grade schooler—failed to acknowledge this. She also pointed out that minstrelsy often appeared in communities with few if any Black people, whose presence might have offered an undistorted perspective on blackness. In performing blackface with white classmates, like he would again in his senior year of college,[21] Butler asserted some degree of control over this ubiquitous and playfully harmful cultural form.

These college performances differed from those Sol performed in high school. In Hutchinson, Kansas, he shared the stage with other Black performers who performed for largely African American audiences. The scant information on these earlier shows reveal that audiences enjoyed the humor and musical beauty; as a local newspaper wrote about one production, "the big crowd was convulsed in laughter or soothed by the harmony of the colored minstrel men."[22] Journalists also commented on the skill of the dancers. Rather than offering dehumanizing commentary about the characters the performers played, the media remained focused on the quality of the various performances.[23]

Black minstrel troupes had performed across the country for decades, adopting the era's dominant theatrical form and transforming it to serve new purposes. While not all African Americans condoned blackface minstrelsy—for instance, abolitionist Frederick Douglass vociferously objected to it[24]—many viewed it as a form that had subversive potential; when performed by Black performers (most notably the towering comedian Bert Williams) for Black audiences, the entertainment value, full of culturally-specific social commentary, might supersede the anti-Black and dehumanizing elements.[25]

In Dubuque, however, Butler performed for a non-Black audience and with an otherwise all-white cast; rather than being transformed, the barely interracial group's messaging likely aligned more closely with that of mainstream, all-white troupes. A few years later in the 1920s at the nearby University of Wisconsin in Madison, blackface minstrelsy represented the cultural expression of an emboldened anti-Black racism that saw the rise of an on-campus Ku Klux Klan organization and racist hostility.[26] Fortunately for Dubuque College, no hate group found administrative and student body support, but the school was not immune to racist attitudes.

Violent Play

Butler encountered potentially harmful playfulness again in the context of a campus-specific ritual, the freshmen abduction of seniors. In the image to the right, we see him sitting next to a classmate.[27] Both appear to be smiling and at ease while perched on a wagon, a 1919 precursor to the now-classic red Radio Flyer. Just like adults choosing to share a kids' wagon today, the young men exhibit a silly side by squeezing next to each other in the toy-like vehicle. In this deceptively innocent and playful moment, a chain dangles between Sol's two boots that have been manacled together; he is the target of abduction. Is the man sharing the wagon a rescuer?

Senior kidnap

According to most sources describing this specific ritual abduction, events got a bit out of hand, yet Sol's loyal friends out-maneuvered the freshmen abductors and helped him get a degree of playfully rough retribution. The day began with around six men holding Sol down, tying up his arms, placing his legs in shackles, gagging him, and driving him to another town. True to the tradition, college sophomores then tracked down and liberated Sol and the other senior captives, driving them to an annual school banquet. They also tossed several abductors into a pond and required one of them to walk several miles back home wearing only his underwear. The other wet freshmen hitched a ride on a freight train.[28]

A final account of events, printed two years after Sol graduated, suggested that concern remained over how the freshmen had treated their lone Black captive. One of the abductors took pains to show that he and others treated him well, noting that they provided him breakfast at a hotel and inviting

readers to "see how well Sol was enjoying himself" in the accompanying photographs. The author then revealed that this good behavior did not reflect their desires:

> You see Sol was set to sail for France, to represent our school at the Army Meet, so we Freshmen solemnly promised ourselves that we would not injure Sol in any way. Me thinks, had it not been for this promise Sol's physiognomy would not have been one to present at a Junior-Senior banquet.[29]

In other words, this former abductor, now junior class historian revealed that he and his classmates would have beaten Sol up if not for the fact that he was on the verge of representing the United States in a prestigious international sports event. Such an implied threat is especially chilling considering the anti-Black racial climate.

Many books have been written about white people killing Black people and destroying African American communities in this precise post-World War I era. For instance, many hundreds of Black people were killed by mob lynching and in racial massacres like the ones in Chicago, Tulsa, and Elaine, Arkansas. We cannot know the exact numbers of the murdered because many—perhaps most—bodies of the victims, largely poor and undocumented in life, were buried in unmarked and sometimes mass graves.[30] The use of shackles on Sol, whose dad was born into chattel slavery, further emphasized that the abductors were not engaged in innocent play.

Still Playing

Much has changed for the good in terms of race relations since Butler graduated from Dubuque College. We no longer live in an era of legal segregation where state and federal governments participate in forced racial separation and ignore passionate, well-organized pleas for anti-lynching legislation.[31] At least according to law, Black people now may travel, eat, sleep, shop, live, and work where they wish and marry whom they wish, without the presence or absence of laws impeding their civil rights. While not unheard of during Butler's lifetime, interracial families like my own were rare and much less likely to meet benign indifference; a more common outcome then was societal ostracism, alienation, and discrimination.

Yet Black people today, as well as other people of color, still face greater hurdles in realizing their American Dream because we as a nation have a long way to go toward righting the wrongs of white supremacy and systemic

racism. Compared to white citizens, Black Americans are much less likely to own a home, amass wealth to pass down, and survive to a ripe old age; equally tragic, they are dispiritingly more likely to be incarcerated, given the death penalty, and murdered.[32] The ever-growing list of those murdered by police—including Laquan McDonald, Tanisha Anderson, Dontre Hamilton, Michael Brown, Philando Castile, and George Floyd, among others in the Midwest—is one of the more visceral pieces of evidence that Black lives are valued as less important than white lives. Racist ideologies (i.e. sets of related hateful ideas) still fuel injustice everywhere.

The history of Butler's alma mater reminds us that we do not have to accept this injustice as out of our control. Historian Richard Breaux concludes that the University of Dubuque, as Dubuque College is now known, "fell on and ahead of the curve of African American inclusion and equality in campus life" over the past century.[33] With some exceptions, Black alumni from different generations support this assessment and point to a pattern set by administrators, coaches, and faculty of nurturing inclusivity.[34] In ways both subtle and bold, members of the college community have rejected manifestations of hate and worked to build a supportive interracial campus. We all may benefit from the diversity such sustained and inspired efforts have made possible.

Noble and effective past actions, however, cannot represent the university's missional commitment to "a diverse and equitable community where Christian love is valued." We who compose this community may demonstrate this commitment only through future action, sustained nurture and care. My teaching follows from the premise that understanding the challenges of the past—in particular those that divide the human family—increases our ability to navigate such challenges today and mitigate their harm moving forward.

We do not have to accept this injustice as out of our control.

Courageous historical actors like Butler, who have pushed against oppressive social forces, provide my students vivid illustrations of how one person can create positive and meaningful social change. This is a serious point, one that I now see evoked beyond the narrative details in a book or from my lecturing lips. Picture this: a thoroughly multiracial room of a dozen or so students acting a little silly, engaged in a laughter that pulls them together and motivates their learning about something soberingly serious; you choose the topic. This is the gift, a special, collectively-shared form of human

agency that was modeled so well, set in motion at Dubuque College over a century ago.

Sol Butler played a crucial role in creating a university climate that embraced diversity and shunned intolerance. His example of a playful spirit helped make such a climate possible and is worth emulating today. He reminds all of us that the serious work of defusing racism may at times be fun.

Team playfulness while traveling for an away game

Brian Hallstoos is Associate Professor of History at the University of Dubuque, where he has taught courses on non-western world civilizations, African American history, and issues of race since 2012. He has published essays on musicians and cultural leaders and nears completion on a biography entitled Jumping Past Jim Crow: The Mobile Life of Black Sport Entrepreneur Sol Butler*. Brian enjoys singing, walking, and spending time with his spouse Sharon and their children Tatum, Elise, and Joplin.*

Image Credits

p. 57: "Philaphronia Society," *The Key 1920*, p. 72

p. 58: (Sol Butler in military uniform) Brian Hallstoos' personal collection

p. 58: "College Chorus," *The 1920 Clavis*, p. 92

p. 60: "Homeward Bound," *The 1917 Key*, p. 96

p. 61: (Group photo with Sol Butler in a monacle) Student scrapbook in UD archive

p. 61: (Solo photo with Sol Butler in a monacle) *The 1920 Clavis*, p. 156

p. 62: (Track team posed on the grass) *The 1919 Key*, p. 170

p. 64: (Team captains) and "Lazy Boobs," *The 1918 Key*, p. 125

p. 66: (Minstrels onstage) *The 1918 Key*, p. 121

p. 66: "Min-strels" *The 1918 Key*, p. 132

p. 69: (Senior kidnap) *The Key* (1921), p. 139

p. 72: (Team at a train station) *The Key* (1921), p. 154

Notes

1. Sol's brother, Ben Jr., had left the college after their junior year.
2. Laird, *The 1920 Clavis*, 104–5.
3. See my forthcoming book, *Jumping Past Jim Crow: The Mobile Life of Black Sport Entrepreneur Sol Butler*.
4. Bateson and Martin, *Play, Playfulness, Creativity and Innovation*, 13.
5. *The 1917 Key*, 96.
6. Butler was inducted into the inaugural class of the National High School Track and Field Hall of Fame. See National High School Track and Field Hall of Fame.
7. Untitled Student Scrapbook; Laird, *The 1920 Clavis*, 156.
8. Laird, Sisler, and Albrecht, *The 1919 Key: A Motion Picture of the Life and Customs of Dubuque College*, 170.
9. Bateson and Martin, *Play, Playfulness, Creativity and Innovation*, 18, 33–39.
10. Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 5, 15-17.
11. For perspective on his social experience compared to that of his African American friend Paul Robeson, see my one-act play *Sol and Paul* (2015) at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9kIDI2PK9yk and my poster session at the American Historical Association (2014) at https://aha.confex.com/aha/2014/webprogram/Paper14406.html and at https://digitalud-dev.dbq.edu/omeka/files/original/0c605b45ac5a87282b41f9cec51f286f.pdf.
12. Mihelic, *A Survey*, 17–25; Straatmeyer, *Child of the Church*, 4-5, 48-50.
13. Steffens, "The Genius of Dubuque," 3.
14. *The 1918 Key*, 125.
15. Blackmon, *Slavery by Another Name*; Oshinsky, *Worse than Slavery*; Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, chap. 1; Taylor et al., "The Historical Perspectives of Stereotypes on African-American Males."
16. *The 1918 Key*, 121, 132.
17. Mahar, *Behind the Burnt Cork Mask*; Johnson, *Burnt Cork*; Bean, Hatch, and McNamara, *Inside the Minstrel Mask*; Thelwell, *Exporting Jim Crow*.
18. Associated Press, "Dubuque Students Apologize"; Myers, "Students Outraged."
19. "The Dubuque Student," 15.
20. Baggett Cox, "Childhood Memories."
21. Laird, *The 1920 Clavis*, 102–3.
22. "Minstrels Made Hit," 9.
23. "Just Like Real Thing," 10; "For Benefit of Church," 10.
24. Neklason, "Blackface Was Never Harmless."
25. Chude-Sokei, *The Last "Darky."*
26. Messer-Kruse, "The Campus Klan."
27. *The Key (1921)*, 139.
28. "May 27, 1919"; "Butler Rescued"; "'Sol' Is Wearing a Wide Grin."
29. *The Key (1922)*, 47.
30. Here are just a few sources on just these three of many more instances of racial violence during these years: McWhirter, *Red Summer: The Summer of 1919*

and the Awakening of Black America; Sandburg, *The Chicago Race Riots, July, 1919*; Madigan, *The Burning: The Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921*; Ellsworth, *The Ground Breaking: The Tulsa Race Massacre and an American City's Search for Justice*; Stockly, *Blood in Their Eyes: The Elaine Race Massacres of 1919*; Lancaster, ed., *The Elaine Massacre and Arkansas: A Century of Atrocity and Resistance, 1819-1919*.

31. Masur, "Why It Took a Century to Pass an Anti-Lynching Law."

32. Here are a few excellent sources that speak to the racial gulf maintained by systemic racism: Rothstein, *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated* America; Baradaran, *The Color of Money: Black Banks and the Racial Wealth Gap*; Benjamins and De Maio, eds., *Unequal Cities: Structural Racism and the Death Gap in America's Largest Cities*; Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness;* Stephenson, *Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption*; Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime, and the Making of Modern Urban America.*

33. Breaux, "On, Behind, and Ahead of the Curve," 17.

34. Hallstoos and Helmke, *Ahead of the Curve*, 24–93.

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Transformative Discovery Science

Character and Play as Key Elements

Adam J. Kleinschmit

Abstract

Play is a central element of curiosity-driven discovery science because it stimulates new ways of thinking and encourages the creative combination of ideas in novel ways. Contemporary scientific culture has evolved to focus on productivity, which often disincentivizes play. Furthermore, the external incentives that drive productivity culture can adversely impact character virtues and lead scientists to compromise their integrity. Holistically, the pressures of productivity slow down the rate of transformative scientific discoveries necessary for innovation, erode trust in our scientific institutions, and dissolve scientific autonomy. Creating greater capacity to unleash the playful spirit of scientists has the potential to strengthen science as an institution and provide tangible benefits for greater societal good.

You enter one of the world's largest professional microbial science meetings. The concourse bustles with groups of international scientists in serious conversation, every fourth person clinging to a telescoping poster tube.

As you walk around, a banner grabs your attention with an elaborate circular reproduction of *The Great Wave off Kanagawa* by Japanese artist Hiroe Nirei. Seemingly out of place, the artwork draws visitors in for a closer look and directs conference attendees to an "agar art gallery," a workshop space for getting creative with microbes. A media relations official explains that the American Society of Microbiology holds an annual art contest to promote a lighter side to its suite of intensive conferences on contemporary research.[1] The "canvas" for this art is the solid nutrient medium housed within a Petri

dish that allows for growth of differently colored and textured microbes, creating a living mosaic.

Diverse artwork made with live microbes in a Petri dish

In the workshop space, scientists dip their "paint brush," often just a flat sterile toothpick, into the living "paint" composed of pigmented bacterial cultures. The microbial masterpieces on display vary from reproductions of famous paintings to complex geometric mandalas to anthropogenic scenes. At the exit, a sign indicates that the "agar art" competition pays tribute to the Nobel Prize-winning, Scottish physician and microbiologist Sir Alexander Fleming, discoverer of the antibiotic penicillin, and his playful approach to science.

While occupying only a relatively small, colorful corner of the conference, the agar art highlights a vital yet unappreciated aspect of science—creative play. Playful exploration fosters creativity through divergent thinking. Curiosity guides a scientist into the unknown toward the discovery of fundamental truths about our world, like the discovery of penicillin or the knowledge needed for mRNA-based therapeutics and vaccines. Unfortunately, contemporary scientific culture generates a high-stress environment focused on productivity, which crowds out time for play. The productivity-induced pressure coupled with perverse external incentives too often steers scientists down a dark path. The trend of decelerated transformative scientific discoveries and immoral behavior together diminish the benefits of science for humankind.

The Rise of the Culture of Productivity

WWII Transformed Science

The Second World War (WWII) was largely driven by advances in the development of science and technology, with government funding expanding the scale of what was possible. Almost overnight, science went from a small, tight-knit community supported largely by university budgets to a massive machine kept afloat by government money. Big science generated an amazing array of outputs that transformed the war

machine (e.g., atomic bombs). The technical products developed also had a transformative effect on society, including computers, radar, jet engines, influenza vaccines, and the first clinical use of an antibiotic (i.e., penicillin), discovered a decade earlier by Fleming.

After the conclusion of WWII in 1945, Vannevar Bush, scientific advisor to both Presidents Franklin D. Roosevelt and Harry Truman, released his vision of the future for publicly-funded science. In his influential report *Science: The Endless Frontier*, he emphasized that fundamental science, driven by curiosity, is the source for novel scientific ideas and ways of thinking. The body of knowledge it generates serves as the raw material from which applied researchers develop innovations that can transform society.[2] Bush envisioned a sustained, high level of public investment in science, plus the resurrection of researcher autonomy, independent of government, to promote a creative space for scientists. Bush stated, "Scientific progress on a broad front results from the free play of free intellects, working on subjects of their own choice, in the manner dictated by their curiosity for exploration of the unknown."[3] Notice his emphasis on intrinsic motivation, driven by play and curiosity, and its role within the creative process (as with the creation of agar art).

Establishment of the National Science Foundation in 1950 brought to fruition Bush's vision of an expanded investment in science as a public good. This injection of public support for science, which was followed by more funding from other public sources, has since driven an exponential growth in scientific knowledge,[4] but this impressive output correlates with an astounding decline in *transformative* discoveries.[5] A recent analysis of biomedical literature over the past 30 years suggests that instead of branching out into new spheres, scientists are largely asking conservatively narrow questions within well-established fields.[6] Yet transformative discoveries, which challenge our understanding of established science, are important for pushing science and technology in new directions.

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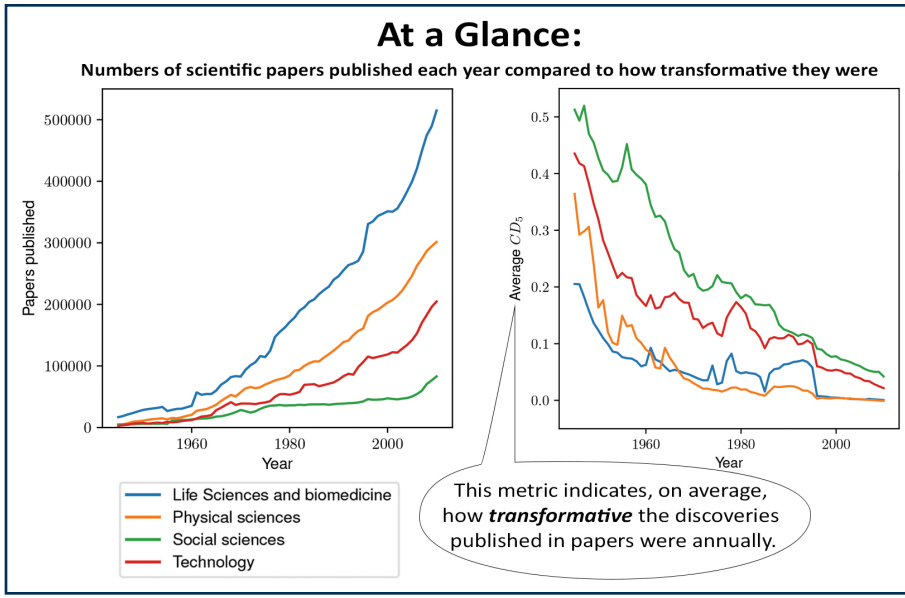
Paradoxically, the focus on narrow questions comes during an era of unprecedented tools and big data sets waiting for us to ask groundbreaking questions previously out of reach.[7] This dynamic contrasts with Bush's desired outcome for the scientific community,

suggesting that the current environment suppresses authentic scientific autonomy driven by play and curiosity.



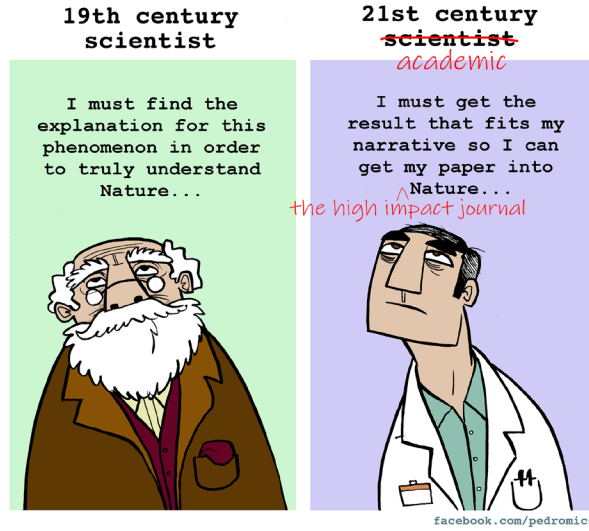
Increase in rate of growth of scientific knowledge with concurrent decrease in rate of transformative *discoveries*
Adapted from Park, Leahey, and Funk, "Decline of Disruptive Science," Figs. 13 and 2.

Productivity Culture Erodes Scientific Autonomy

To make sense of the stark drop in the rate of transformative knowledge and innovation, it is useful to examine post-WWII science. Although interest and engagement in the playful activity of "agar art" remains strong today, the predominating cultural landscape within the scientific community has shifted. Today's scientific enterprise limits playful discovery and forces scientists to produce tangible products in short timeframes.

The shift in expectations transformed the ethic of discovery, which was alive and robust during Fleming's time, into an ethic of productivity.[8] With this moral shift, society has witnessed a change in what validates a scientist's worth. Scientists once vouched for colleagues within a collaborative research group and were driven principally by intrinsic motivation and intuition. The forces that now drive scientific careers are predominantly external, focusing on an individual's productivity metrics (e.g., publications, total grant dollars, citations, patents, journal impact factors). Boosting these arbitrary individual performance metrics can become an end in itself as they dictate career advancement. The pressure wrapped up in productivity

culture greatly intensified within the past 50 years and is often summed up in the popular aphorism "publish or perish."[9]



A change in mindset over time in the realm of science
Illustration by Pedro Veliça, facebook.com/pedromics
Commentary in red by Adam J. Kleinschmit

Major changes in the funding of science and its hyper-competitive nature contribute to the shift from an ethic of discovery to an ethic of productivity.[10] Universities have a vested interest in hiring and retaining scientists who can bring in large amounts of money, independent of the quality of science. Grant review panels that decide who to fund are typically risk averse and rate the most feasible proposals as those that should receive merit-based support.[11] In this new system scientists risk not getting funded if they push the envelope too far. The status quo rewards narrow scientific questions, which leads to a steady output of publications but slows the rate of transformative discovery.[12] This culture demands that many scientists compromise their scientific interests to cater to the hottest scientific fields. In the pursuit of productivity, scientific autonomy and the ethic of discovery is suppressed. Counter-productive extrinsic rewards dominate the direction of a scientist's research program and degrade autonomy. External awards replace genuine unbridled intrinsic motivation stemming from the thirst for knowledge and discovery.

A Risk-Taker Despite Productivity Pressure

The COVID-19 pandemic showed the world that scientific risk-takers who do not conform to the pressures of productivity culture sometimes prevail. Public health officials estimate that the rapid development of mRNA-based vaccines during the pandemic saved millions of lives within the first year of availability.[13] Groundbreaking discoveries made decades earlier by curiosity-driven scientists enabled the development of these vaccines within a record time of 11 months. One of these scientists, Hungarian-American biochemist Katalin Karikó, made a key contribution necessary for this technology even

though her contemporaries dismissed it at the time of discovery in the 1990s and early 2000s. Karikó and colleagues discovered how to modify synthetic mRNA so that, when introduced into a host as a therapeutic, it would not induce a harmful immune response.[14]

Karikó's story is intriguing because, as a scientist operating within the contemporary scientific ethic of productivity, her scientific interests were viewed skeptically by her peers. Scientists at the time considered her work unrealistic and impractical, as evident by the number of her rejected research proposals. Clearly, her career was doomed unless she pursued an alternative area of science that her peers deemed worthwhile and less risky. Unlike many of her contemporaries, Karikó held steady and refused to give up her research autonomy. This led to multiple academic demotions but, through the support of close colleagues, she managed to continue pursuing her scientific passion for a time as an adjunct professor before moving into industry.

Karikó embodies the virtue of integrity. Arguably, her intrinsic motivation and joy of discovery stemming from internal curiosity have outweighed her interest in external rewards. Her will to continue her research is admirable, given that academic science is a productivity-focused culture. Although productivity may appear to be a laudable objective, adapting one's research interests to appease colleagues undermines creativity and prevents paradigm-shifting discoveries.

This example begs the question of how many other scientists like Karikó were discouraged from following their intuition and consequently never made scientific discoveries that could have transformed humanity. Established scientists have noted that many prominent thinkers, such as British physicist Peter Higgs[15] and English biochemist Frederick Sanger,[16] both Nobel laureates who revolutionized their scientific fields,[17] would not have survived in today's academic system based on their low productivity metrics due to their focus on more difficult problems, which required more scientific risk.

Mural celebrating Katalin Karikó

The Culture of Productivity Provokes Immoral Behavior and Mistrust

The Need for Excellent Moral Character in Science

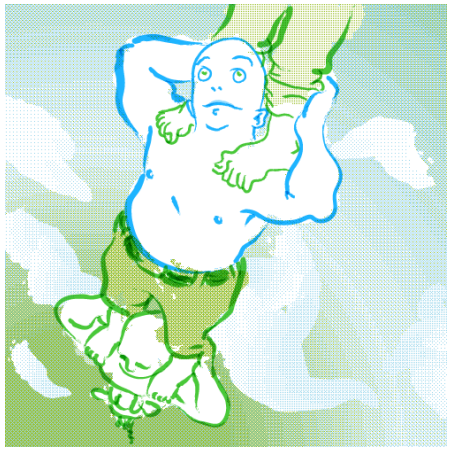
The culture created by the ethic of productivity can challenge (or interfere with the development of) a scientist's character. Intrinsic curiosity and passion motivated iconic scientists like Fleming and Karikó to discover truths about the natural world. They exhibited the foundational virtue of integrity while resisting manipulation by external forces. As the common adage goes, "Integrity is doing the right thing when no one is watching." A more detailed analysis reveals that integrity orchestrates many virtues; thus, it can be thought of as a "meta-virtue" that may direct emphasis onto a more focused character trait in a contextualized manner.[18] For example, a professional scientist of integrity may practice forthrightness in the sharing of findings and the humility necessary to admit error, while at other times demonstrating steadfastness in reporting truth and disclosing potential bias. Whether in the forefront or behind the scenes, scientists demonstrating integrity should be meticulous and transparent with honest intentions and adhere to their commitment to uncovering knowledge.

Law professor Stephen Carter defines a person with moral integrity as having invested the necessary mental energy in discerning right from wrong. When challenged, a person with moral integrity will choose virtuous actions even at personal cost, followed by taking clear ownership of those actions.[19] Collectively, one must be firm in moral principles and the commitment to uphold them even when it is not convenient or comfortable.

How do young scientists develop the character virtue of integrity? Outside of informal mentoring, formal training typically comes through responsible and ethical conduct of research (ERCR) programming. Contemporary ERCR curricula for scientists typically focus on extrinsic rules and legal requirements.[20] Such approaches frame ethics in a negative tone and present it as a hurdle to be overcome. Championing scientific virtues foundational to the spirit of science in formal ERCR curricula[21] would position scientists for thriving with integrity in a culture of discovery and push back against temptations that arise from today's productivity culture.

A person with moral integrity will choose virtuous actions even at personal cost.

The virtue of integrity is essential for maintaining trust for all stakeholders, both scientists and the lay public, and is reached when individuals adhere to accepted standards, professional values, and practices of the scientific community.[22] Integrity ensures objectivity, clarity, reproducibility, and helps prevent scientific misconduct. Scientists must be able to trust the intentions and judgment of their peers and predecessors, as science is grounded in the work produced by others.



Standing on the shoulders of giants

Physicist Sir Isaac Newton famously stated, "If I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants." In other words, the intellectual progress of today's scientists relies on embracing the knowledge generated by previous generations of great thinkers. In this context, we see Karikó's humility shine through as she dedicated an individual achievement prize[23] to her colleagues and those that came before her as part of her acceptance speech.[24] Later she stated, "These prizes are mainly important in the way that they put science in the public spotlight and emphasize its importance."[25] Today's scientific community stands on the shoulders of those who came before to make intellectual strides for the public good. Perhaps most importantly, it is notable that the foundation is only as strong as the integrity of the community. Sustained degradation of scientific integrity would inevitably lead to cuts in public support and thus a collapse of the scientific enterprise. Society would lose the many benefits that stem from scientific advances. Perverse behaviors such as scientific misconduct can also change the public perception of science. When people try to politicize bad behaviors especially in the medical sciences it provides fodder for disinformation campaigns.[26]

Immoral Behavior Damages Trust

Contemporary scientific culture encourages careerism, or advancing one's career at the cost of a deeper understanding of natural phenomena and one's integrity. Carefully crafting results by framing a study in a particular light is a survival skill that many protégés learn from their mentors. This mentoring is critical to successful publishing in high impact journals.[27]

Theoretical physicist Albert Einstein's retrospective reflection on a tamer scientific enterprise during his day reveals that productivity culture does little to nurture character virtues.[28] "[A]n academic career compels a young man [scientist] to scientific production and only strong characters can resist the temptation of superficial analysis."[29] Einstein is speaking to what has evolved into the aforementioned "publish or perish" culture, which can challenge the integrity of scientists.[30]

Pressure to focus on productivity metrics challenges a scientist's integrity by prioritizing actions directed at attaining high metrics over the core altruistic reasons (curiosity and thirst for knowledge) to dedicate oneself to science. Within an environment that challenges one's moral being, we see many outstanding scientists leave the field. Perhaps the American psychologist Barry Schwartz states it best when he says, "When you rely on incentives, you undermine virtues. Then when you discover that you actually need people who want to do the right thing, those people don't exist. . . ."[31] For those who do endure the pressure, it is challenging to keep an open, unbiased mind. With a productivity mindset, it is easy to dismiss contradictory evidence while clinging to threads of contentious data that may not be replicable. At its worst, scientists who face immense productivity pressure may be tempted to engage in blatant research misconduct such as data manipulation, fabrication, or plagiarism, which are stark breaches of both intellectual and moral integrity.

Why incentives do not work

A recent poll indicated that over 50% of scientists have changed their behavior in response to the use of productivity metrics, and over 70% of respondents are concerned that colleagues may cheat the system as quantity is rewarded over quality.[32] Reliance on productivity metrics can lead to sloppy science and questionable research practices, including cherry-picking results and use of hyperbole to sell research to prestigious high-impact journals.[33] Furthermore, contemporary scientific culture does not incentivize replication studies or reporting negative results, which erodes scientific integrity and counters the societal scientific goal of establishing truth.[34]

The ethic of productivity can lead to inefficient use of public resources, while damaging trust. Scientists acting without integrity spark fallout from their actions that reverberates through the wider collaborative scientific community[35] and society. The impact in terms of public mistrust of scientific institutions and scientific authority can come with real ramifications for public health such as vaccine hesitancy[36] and beyond. Scientific misconduct can also cause irreparable damage to the psyche and careers of scientific trainees, who represent the future of science. In the early 2000s, developmental geneticist Elizabeth Goodwin pled guilty to committing scientific misconduct after giving in to immoral practices to secure career advancement.[37] This widely publicized breach in scientific integrity made headlines after a group of six graduate students under Goodwin's mentorship turned in their research advisor for deliberate falsification of data. The students grew concerned and lost trust after noticing that portions of a grant application, put together by Goodwin, included data from experiments that had not yet been completed, along with additional evidence of blatant data fabrication.[38]

The ethic of productivity can lead to inefficient use of public resources, while damaging trust.

The implications of this story for science are concerning, but the demonstrated courage of Goodwin's graduate students to stand by their convictions and do the right thing is a virtuous silver lining. These young scientists exemplified Stephen Carter's criteria for integrity: they practiced the active moral reflection necessary to discern right from wrong in this context, acting as whistleblowers and standing up to speak publicly about the situation. The students followed through with their moral commitments at personal cost. The lab was shut down, with the students' financial support thrown into limbo, as it was tied to Goodwin's federal grants. Almost all the students, left with questionable data, were required to start over with new doctoral projects. One of the students was quoted as having lost trust in science at the time.[39] With this emotional and financial baggage, three of the students who had a combined 16 years invested toward obtaining their Ph.D.'s discontinued graduate school. Two others started over on new projects, which prolonged their doctoral studies by years, in addition to feeling the stigma of being connected to a lab with a tainted reputation.[40] As we see in this example, actions by scientists who lack integrity erode the institution of science, a core pillar of society.

Play as an Essential Element in Science

Play Builds Capacity for Curiosity-Driven Science

When the "publish or perish" pressure dial is turned down, scientists have more room for tinkering and play. Play naturally encourages scientists to follow the data wherever it leads, combined with providing opportunities for novel ways of thinking that may foster major breakthroughs. Alexander Fleming, whose playful spirit inspired "agar art,"[41] offers us a useful model of discovery science with integrity through play.

Fleming described his approach to science as "I play with microbes. There are, of course, many rules to this play . . . but when you have acquired knowledge and experience it is very pleasant to break the rules and to be able to find something nobody has thought of."[42] Fleming fully embraced harnessing play to drive his own engagement in science. While tinkering in the forefront of his research field, Fleming used play as a method for serendipitously uncovering interesting things that he could not conceivably predict. Fleming's attitude toward scientific discovery was to play without regard to rules, disciplinary boundaries, and ingrained conventional practices.

The ability to think and act in a playful manner can stimulate new ways of thinking or the ability to creatively combine ideas in novel ways.[43] Play is a way of thinking or a behavior that is characterized by taking place in a protected context, when the subject is in a relaxed state that is intrinsically enjoyable. Play allows for the subject to be open to combining thoughts or behaviors in novel ways and may not appear to have an immediate practical goal.[44] An individual participating in play is more likely to behave or think in a spontaneous and flexible way.[45] In this sense, play may be harnessed as a tool to foster creativity, such as the way Karikó navigated toward using modified mRNA to get past the immune system. Furthermore, the novel patterns of thought stemming from play can transfer to other activities outside of play, often not fully realized until later.

We see a mixing of play and experimental investigation with Fleming at the lab bench. In Fleming's playful campaign to procure microbial isolates for his "agar art," he actively observed old Petri dishes for unexpected outcomes. Fleming coupled this behavior with the mentality of actively foraging for the unexpected, knowing that "chance favours the prepared mind," as famously stated by Louis Pasteur, one of the founding fathers of microbiology.[46] This dictum came to realization and Fleming went on to transform modern

medicine after observing that a contaminating colony of mold appeared to inhibit a bacterium he was culturing in the lab. Rather than discard the contaminated plate, he went on to investigate the bactericidal phenomenon, and later described the antimicrobial properties of the extracted "mold juice," naming it penicillin.[47] Penicillin's therapeutic use includes treatment for a variety of bacterial pathogenic infections. One conservative assessment estimates that penicillin has saved more than 10 million lives and paved the way for the discovery of additional antibiotics that have transformed contemporary medicine.[48] Although likely not the first person to observe *Penicillium* inhibiting bacterial growth, his tinkering and curious playful infatuation with microbes led Fleming to fully realize the potential of the antimicrobial compound produced by the *Penicillium* fungus. American zoologist George Bartholomew notably stated, "Creativity often appears to be some complex function of play… related to the exuberant behavior of young animals. The most profoundly creative humans of course never lose this exuberant creativity," an apt description of the relationship between play and creativity that we see in Fleming's work.[49]

Portrait of Alexander Fleming at work/play in his lab

One of Fleming's colleagues reflected at length on Fleming's strategic practice of holding onto old bacterial cultures at his workspace for extended periods of time. Fleming carefully inspected each one for any "unexpected or interesting phenomenon" that might lead to a whimsical investigation in some unexpected direction.[50] In a 1944 portrait by artist Ethel Leontine Gabain, we see Fleming infusing play into his work as he collects a hodgepodge of microbes with a multitude of pigments to function as his expansive artistic palette, arguably a catalyst for discovery.[51] This playful behavior at the lab bench increased the likelihood of stumbling across something meaningful.

Play in science can also present itself in a more subtle way than Fleming's activities. Play researcher and psychiatrist Stuart Brown likens the laboratory work of many scientists to play. Brown came to this conclusion through interactions with French-American Nobel laureate and neuroscientist Roger Guillemin and his colleagues. "When Roger took me through his

laboratory he was like a kid as he described his experiments. Here was the biggest, most expensive sandbox he had ever played with, all set up to let him discover wonderful new things."[52] We see this same type of childlike pleasure and excitement in Karikó's reflection on emigrating from Hungary to the United States to pursue a scientific career: "I was not homesick. My home was in the laboratory and as long as I was there, I was happy. . . . [From experimental discoveries] you feel this happiness, the feeling that I understand a piece of nature."[53] Karikó's words capture a glimpse of the joy she experiences through scientific inquiry, akin to children's excitement playing in a playground with so many possibilities at hand.

Play is the beginning of knowledge[54]

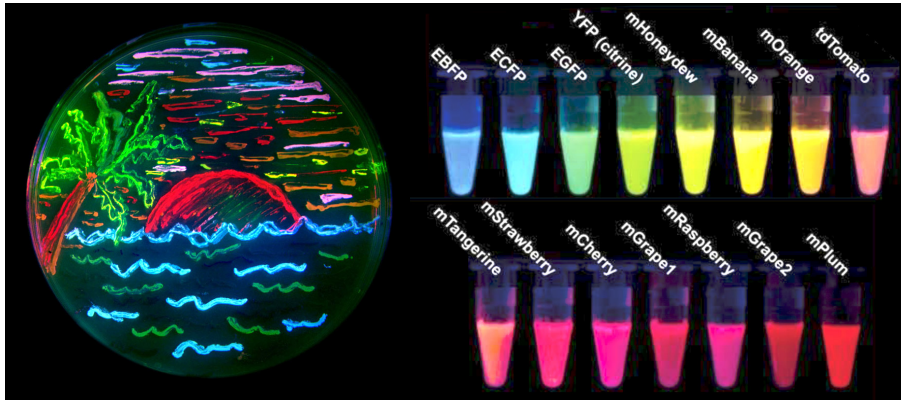
Fascinated by nature, Karikó found the scientific laboratory to be like a playground from a very young age.[55] If play builds capacity in people to pursue curiosity-driven science, how can society help cultivate a playful approach toward science like we see in Fleming and Karikó? We should harness the natural process of play to teach tomorrow's scientists!

Katalin Karikó with statue commemorating another playful, Hungarian-American scientist, Albert Szent-Györgyi[57]

Any parent can tell you that kids are born curious creatures with an innate drive to explore, tinker, and play with anything in reach. The inquisitive nature that is markedly pronounced in kids is also shared by professional scientists. American astrophysicist and renowned science communicator Neil deGrasse Tyson has spoken extensively on this point, even exclaiming that "Kids are born scientists . . . an adult scientist is a kid who never grew up."[56] As Tyson notes, many scientists are grown-up kids that have never lost their innate inquisitive nature and continue to chase the joy of discovery through curiosity-driven work.

Nobel laureate and American biochemist Roger Tsien notably concocted homemade chemistry sets out of milk jugs and soda cans as a child to playfully experiment with colorful chemical reactions in his backyard.[58] As a professional scientist, Tsien continued his infatuation with colorful compounds and molecules in the laboratory space. Reflecting on Tsien's

approach to uncovering groundbreaking ideas associated with fluorescent proteins, a former colleague of his noted that "Roger, in his brilliant ingenuity, figured it should be possible to play with it."[59] These colorful tools would go on to allow scientists to detect proteins in space and time through microscopic imaging and other applications. These tools have transformed our understanding of fundamental cellular and molecular biology, as well as supplied the tools to create vibrant glowing "agar art" using bacteria engineered to produce differently colored fluorescent proteins.



An "agar art" beach scene created in the lab of Roger Tsien with genetically engineered bacteria that express fluorescent proteins, derived from Tsien's Nobel Prize-winning work on creating fluorescent molecules

Taking a cue from the young Tsien tinkering with household refuse to explore chemistry, Tyson encourages parents to support children in the exploration of their environment. Free exploratory play fosters learning through the natural curiosity of kids, especially during developmental years.[60] The power of play has been more formally captured in science education through a variety of distinct but parallel efforts. For example, semi-formal science-learning environments, such as interactive science museums and extracurricular science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) programming, harness play to teach kids about scientific concepts. In fact, the Iowa Children's Museum is so keenly focused on this mission that it has dubbed its floor staff "Playologists."[61] Makerspaces, also known as "curiosity spaces," are another type of children's venue for hands-on tinkering, inventing, building, and experimenting that promote play.

Extracurricular STEM programming often focuses on hands-on play and inquiry-based experimentation to foster creativity and learning. In some realms, STEM has even expanded to STEAM, with the "A" for "Arts," to incorporate the creative artistic process. An arts-based curriculum focuses

on intrinsic rewards arising from play, exploration, risk-taking, problem solving, persevering through failure, and other attributes associated with the creative process.[62]

More formal learning environments, such as schools that implement the Montessori education philosophy, have also adapted play as a tool for learning science and beyond. Montessori schools use playful learning in the form of guided play to encourage hands-on independent learning and provide kids with the choice of what they would like to learn, which involves intrinsic motivation. In fact, educator Maria Montessori, who developed this educational approach, is often credited with the famous quote, "Play is the work of the child."[63] Such environments harness play to tap into the intrinsic motivation of kids to explore and foster divergent thinking. This is in stark contrast to traditional didactic classroom instruction, which is guided by external motivational elements and promotes thinking that conforms to that of the instructor.[64]

Learning through free play

To encourage students to engage in science for the right reasons and appreciating, as Tyson suggests, that trained scientists are kids who never grew up, we should enthusiastically promote structured play in science education (K-18) and in professional curiosity-based science venues. Collectively, we see that play is not only a key element for engaging in scientific education but that it is also harnessed by mature scientists to allow curiosity-driven science to progress efficiently.

Curiosity-Driven Science Spurs Innovation

Stories of Fleming's and Karikó's scientific bench work call up the image of a scientist driven by intrinsic curiosity to play and tinker with their work. Often referred to as curiosity-driven science, but also known by many other monikers (e.g., blue skies, basic, fundamental), this is science under conditions that allow scientists to play and tinker, following wherever the science leads—and often the science leads to discoveries that no one could have predicted. These unanticipated discoveries often radically change the way we think about both established and new frontiers within science. It can be difficult to strategically plan discovery, but it is possible to prepare

one's mind to identify rough gems through play that can be polished to yield transformative discoveries. Frequently, the impacts of these fundamental breakthroughs are not fully recognized at the time of discovery, and the societal impact takes decades to come to fruition.[65]

In contrast, applied (also known as translational) research is entrepreneurial in nature, driven by an agenda or a more defined goal. There is a circular relationship between fundamental and applied research, as the latter relies on continuous output from the former to fuel innovations that have direct societal and economic ramifications.[66] Play primes fundamental scientists for creating novel ideas or ways of thinking. As discoveries from creative thinking move into society's knowledge base, innovators can tap into and use them. Innovators refine or transform this knowledge in such a way that it is practical and can be used directly by society.[67]

In Fleming's case, curiosity-driven play led to the discovery of penicillin and the idea that penicillin had the potential to be clinically relevant. Yet it was not until almost a decade later that the importance of Fleming's discovery was fully appreciated by applied scientists who innovatively solved technical challenges to allow for penicillin to directly benefit humanity.[68] This coupled generation and application of creative knowledge became a prototype for future government funding of both fundamental and applied research.[69]

Similarly, Karikó's passionate laboratory play established the knowledge necessary for the development of mRNA-based therapeutics and vaccines, although it was not well received by her contemporaries. Like most fundamental knowledge, Karikó's contributions took over half a decade (after years of skepticism) for its potential to be acknowledged by applied researchers.[70]

The effectiveness of harnessing play to fuel transformative science, coupled with subsequent innovation, has been well documented in the reflections of influential scientists and the tangible products that have arisen from application of their work. In another example of scientific play, British geneticist Sir Adrian Bird commented on his revolutionary breakthrough in understanding epigenetics, a new frontier of research at the time. "I knew I wanted to do something interesting, but I was just playing around more than anything else."[71] Innovations arising from Bird's seminal contributions include genetic testing for Rett Syndrome, an autism spectrum disorder, as well as successful pre-clinical gene therapy as a treatment for the disorder.

In a similar vein, Nobel laureate and American physicist Richard Feynman had an acclaimed playful approach to science that arguably led to some of his most transformative work in quantum mechanics: "Why did I enjoy it [physics]? I used to play with it. I used to do whatever I felt like doing—it didn't have to do with whether it was important for the development of nuclear physics, but whether it was interesting and amusing for me to play with."[72] A subset of Feynman's influential work spurred innovations in nanotechnology and quantum computing, which has yielded the computational power necessary to advance diverse economy-driving fields, from finance to security.

Considering how transformative discovery science fuels innovation, what can be done to invigorate playful fundamental science?

Scientific knowledge is a public good that has historically transformed the fabric of society and continues to influence our quality of life through technology and guiding public policy. Public investment in fundamental science induces a trickle-up effect, encouraging innovation and additional private research,[73] though it may not be immediately realized. Additional examples of this phenomenon include Google and the Internet itself, both of which were originally publicly funded ideas.[74] Each of these examples (i.e., penicillin, mRNA-based COVID vaccines, Internet, Google) was made possible by fundamental science coupled with innovation to transform society.

Considering how transformative discovery science fuels innovation, what can be done to invigorate playful fundamental science? South African geneticist and Nobel laureate Sydney Brenner has championed the idea of dedicating a small slice of all scientific funding to risky projects that encourage play and have the potential to yield big rewards.[75] Extended grant award periods that would provide more breathing room is a complementary approach to stimulate more creative play in science, as longer award durations have been demonstrated to lead to higher-impact scientific work.[76] Alternatively, instead of supporting a subset of scientific work to take on more risk or providing longer production periods, perhaps scientists across the board would benefit from space formally designated for them to explore risky ideas through play.[77] Many technology corporations (e.g., 3M, Google, Adobe) have created a culture supportive of autonomy with

protected time and space for play, and have reported capitalizing on these efforts.[78]

Rethinking Productivity and Science

A culture of discovery that embraces the creative process and relies less on arbitrary metrics, being instead based on judgement of peers who are not swayed by the demands of productivity culture, imperfect though they still may be, would grow both intellectual and moral integrity in place of behaviors that erode the integrity of science.

Free play is the cornerstone for generating knowledge, including that which flows out of curiosity-driven scientific research teams. Within this creative experience it is important for play to take place in a protected environment that allows the scientist to tinker and explore without negative consequences. Structural institutions that dictate how scientific inquiry is funded and which projects are supported should re-invest in promoting play.

Transformative curiosity-driven science is rare, as recent scientific findings do less to push science and technology in new directions. Instead, the focus on "safe" research questions fills in small holes in society's body of scientific knowledge through incremental advances. It does not make sense to have all of society's scientists collectively participating in relatively conservative research. Rather, there is value in promoting scientists who chip away at the line demarcating the realm of the unknown. Perhaps play can set the stage for paving new ways of thinking and innovating. Scientific policy coupled with scientific virtue training that cultivates space for more play has the potential to allow scientists to reconnect with their passion for discovering truth, stay true to their ideals, and allow for transformative discovery science to blossom.

Perhaps play can set the stage for paving new ways of thinking and innovating.

Adam J. Kleinschmit is a Professor of Biology at the University of Dubuque. He teaches a variety of undergraduate courses within Cellular and Molecular Biology. His academic passions include engaging undergraduates in independent research as well as contributing to the transformation of undergraduate biology education through curricular innovations, development of course-based research experiences

(CUREs), and education research. When not tinkering in the laboratory he enjoys playing with family and curling up with a good book late in the evening.

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p. 81: The declining trend of transformative discoveries since WWII. Adapted from Park, Leahey, and Funk, "The Decline of Disruptive Science and Technology," Extended Datat Fig. 13 and Fig. 2, https://arxiv.org/abs/2106.11184; CC BY 4.0, https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/, adapted for comparison with explanatory note

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Notes

1. Madhusoodmanan, "Petri Palettes."
2. Botstein, "More Basic Biology Research."

3. Bush, *Science: The Endless Frontier*, 10.
4. Bornmann and Mutz, "Growth Rates."
5. Park, Leahey, and Funk, "Papers and Patents."
6. Rzhetsky et al., "Choosing Experiments."
7. Martynoga, *Molecular Tinkering*, 186.
8. Turner and Chubin, "Changing Temptations."
9. Edwards and Roy, "Academic Research."
10. Another science aphorism tightly coupled with "publish or perish" culture is "funding or famine" (see Quake, "Guest Column") as obtaining funding is critical to support research and allow for generation of publications. Short-term grants directly pay the salaries of the scientists and their personnel, which places the risk on the scientists who propose the research projects. Scientists are also expected to pay the institution to rent lab space. These "indirect costs" may run as high as 50% of each grant secured by a scientist. See Stephan, "How Economics Shapes Science." The hyper competition has further been fueled by a dramatic influx of young scientists into the pipeline with funding levels flatlining.
11. Grinnell, "Discovery in the Lab."
12. Professional scientists within this system spend a majority of time in an iterative cycle of writing and administering grants to stay afloat, which also takes scientists away from their creative element.
13. Stuart, "In Gratitude."
14. Karikó et al., "Suppression of RNA Recognition."
15. Aitkenhead, "Peter Higgs."
16. Brenner, "Frederick Sanger (1918–2013)."
17. In the 1960's Higgs developed a theory about the existence of a subatomic particle that had been the most sought-after particle in physics until it was confirmed to exist in 2012 through experiments using the Large Hadron Collider particle accelerator. Sanger won two Nobel prizes in Chemistry for pioneering techniques to sequence proteins and DNA, respectively. Sanger often talked of his scientific work as "messing around in a lab." See Brenner, "Frederick Sanger (1918–2013)."
18. Ward and Bryant, "On Regulating Civility."
19. Carter, *Integrity*, 7.
20. Pennock and O'Rourke, "Scientific Virtue-Based Approach."
21. Pennock, "Beyond Research Ethics."
22. Kretser et al., "Scientific Integrity Principles"; Turner, "Science and Integrity."
23. Having come into the public spotlight in 2020, Karikó has won (often jointly with her colleague Drew Weissman) hundreds of awards including the Lasker-DeBakey Clinical Medical Research Award (regarded as America's Nobel) and *Time* magazine's Hero of the Year 2021.
24. *Honoring mRNA Pioneers*, 1:50-2:34.
25. Maurer, "Katalin Karikó."
26. Boyle, "Americans Distrust Science?"
27. Callier, "Getting Harder to Publish."
28. During Einstein's active years, careerism was alive and frequent publishing

influenced career trajectory, but was not at the contemporary level of "publish or perish." Interestingly, Einstein's metrics alone do not paint a picture of one of the greatest scientists of the last century. See Gringras and Khelfaoui, "Why the H-Index is a Bogus Measure." The difficulty of measuring contemporary scientists' impact is further illustrated in that Einstein won the Nobel Prize for discovering the law of the photoelectric effect, but not for his work on the theory of relativity or Brownian motion. See Venema, "Publish or Perish."

29. Clark, *Einstein*.

30. Karikó has also publicly commented on careerism. "You must have a goal as a scientist. It shouldn't be to get a certain tenured position, or other titles, but to really research and understand a detailed mechanism in a field of science. This is something that a lot of people get wrong. If you publish papers—more is better—it can help you get a promotion, more grants, a larger team. However, if another scientist scoops you by publishing something similar like what you were working on, you feel devastated. If your goal is purely scientific, you will not be upset, instead rather happy that there is more data and maybe you will even get validation for your theory. But when I talk to other scientists, the reality is, that most are upset if somebody publishes anything before them." See Maurer, "Katalin Karikó."

31. Zetter, "TED: Barry Schwartz."

32. Abbott et al., "Do Metrics Matter?"

33. Smaldino and McElreath, "Natural Selection."

34. Ioannidis, "Published Research Findings."

35. French Neuroscientist Sylvain Lesné, the first author on one of the most cited Alzheimer's studies over the past 15 years, has been accused of doctoring data in this and over 20 other bodies of work. See Piller, "Potential Fabrication." Scientists within the same field have stated their inability to replicate Lesné's findings and have been skeptical of his work for years. See Grimes, "What an Alzheimer's Controversy Reveals." This exemplifies a poor public investment of millions of dollars, as many of Lesné's colleagues in the Alzheimer's research community choose to ignore his work while others rely on trust, despite the fact that his work is likely flawed, and base the foundation of their research off of his, leading to a secondary waste of resources.

36. Former British physician-scientist Andrew Wakefield (now discredited and disbarred) falsified data to make an invalid connection between autism and the measles, mumps, rubella vaccine in a prestigious medical journal. Wakefield's self-delusional and retracted work continues to be the basis of misinformation campaigns and has been cited as potentially the most damaging medical hoax of the past century. See Flaherty, "Vaccine-Autism Connection."

37. Couzin-Frankel, "Scientist Turned in By Grad Students."

38. Couzin, "Truth and Consequences."

39. Zimmer, "Research Misconduct."

40. Couzin, "Truth and Consequences."

41. Dunn, "Painting with Penicillin."

42. Maurois, *Sir Alexander Fleming*, 211.

43. Bateson and Martin, *Play, Playfulness, Creativity and Innovation*, 4, 5, and

chap. 5.

44. When play is combined with a particular positive mood state (i.e., playfulness), the resulting construct can be described as playful play. See Bateson and Martin, 2. Throughout this article, "playful play" is denoted simply as "play."

45. Bateson and Martin, 8–9, 43–45, 57.

46. Maurois, *Sir Alexander Fleming*, 204.

47. Fleming, "Antibacterial Action of Cultures."

48. Kardos and Demain, "Penicillin."

49. Bartholomew, "Scientific Innovation and Creativity."

50. Maurois, *Sir Alexander Fleming*, 109.

51. Root-Bernstein and Root-Bernstein, *Sparks of Genius*, 248.

52. Brown, *Play*, 63.

53. *Katalin Karikó*, 1:08-1:44.

54. Quote widely attributed to American anthropologist George Dorsey

55. Nair, "QnAs."

56. *How to Raise Smarter Children*.

57. Colleagues described Nobel prize-winner Albert Szent-Györgyi as having an intuitive, playful approach to scientific questions. See National Library of Medicine, "Albert Szent-Gyorgi". Fittingly, he was also concerned that those exploring the fringes of science received less support for their research. See Szent-Györgyi, "Dionysians and Apollonians."

58. Wang and Aamodt, "Play, Stress, and the Learning Brain."

59. Chang, "Roger Y. Tsien."

60. Van Schijndel et al., "Preschoolers"; Cook, Goodman, and Schulz, "Where Science Starts."

61. Vogler, "Fun with Science."

62. Perignat and Katz-Buonincontro, "STEAM in Practice and Research."

63. Armitage, "Play."

64. Rogoff et al., "Organization of Informal Learning."

65. Botstein, "More Basic Biology Research"; Cadogan, *Curiosity-Driven "Blue Sky" Research*.

66. Henard and McFadyen, "Complementary Roles."

67. Bateson and Martin, *Play, Playfulness, Creativity and Innovation*, 3.

68. Howard Florey, Ernst Chain, and colleagues adapted Fleming's idea and worked to identify a more potent strain of *Penicillium*, streamlined the extraction process, and worked out how to scale up and test the substance on human subjects. See Bernard, "How a Miracle Drug Changed the Fight."

69. Kardos and Demain, "Penicillin."

70. Garde and Saltzman, "Story of mRNA."

71. Gitschier, "On the Track of DNA Methylation."

72. Feynman and Sackett, "Surely You're Joking," 157.

73. Sussex et al., "Quantifying the Economic Impact."

74. Hart, "Brief History"; Hart, "On the Origins of Google."

75. Dzeng, "How Academia and Publishing are Destroying Scientific Innovation." Most public and private funding agencies supporting science do not tolerate risk as

they prioritize funding proposals that aim for incremental advances. Might it be wise to think about these pots of money as an investment portfolio supporting societal scientific advancement? Any financial planner worth their salt would red flag an undiversified portfolio fixed exclusively with conservative investment instruments. Calculated ventures to support high risk/high reward science would be a good investment for society and could avoid stifling the creative nature of play.

76. Azoulay, Graff Zivin, and Manso, "Incentives and Creativity."

77. This includes space to branch out and learn about other scientific fields or tools outside of one's narrow scientific specialty to stimulate creative thinking to encourage polymath versus specialist behavior. See Root-Bernstein, "Life Stages."

78. These private sector efforts nurture and encourage people to pursue passion projects that rely on intrinsic motivation even if considered high risk/high reward. Google founders Larry Page and Sergey Brin have explained this approach to stakeholders by stating, "This [20% rule] empowers them [employees] to be more creative and innovative. Many of our significant advances have happened in this manner." See Page and Brin, "2004 Founders' IPO Letter." Google has emphasized the creative impact and magnitude of the return stemming from its cooperate investment in creating a safe play for play.

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Turning Poison into Medicine

Play and Decolonizing Our Future

Naaman Wood

There is a quotation attributed to the first Duke of Wellington,[1] and it goes like this: "The Battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton." His assertion suggests that sites as innocuous as playgrounds are important for us to take seriously because they are sites of formation. Formation implies that what we do in our daily lives helps us become the kinds of people we will be in moments of decision. Pastor and theologian Sam Wells says, "one cannot understand Waterloo without understanding Eton. In fact, what went on at Eton was more important than what went on at Waterloo."[2] The playground is more important than the battlefield because once the moment of crisis is upon us, the battle is, in effect, already won or lost. The time for preparation is over, and we have no choice but simply to be who we are. The task, then, is to become the kind of person who will make good choices in those moments of crisis.

Sir Arthur Wellesley, First Duke of Wellington

In my experience, jazz musicians also value becoming certain kinds of people. One evening at the Village Vanguard, trumpeter Wynton Marsalis played a solo rendition of the ballad, "I Don't Stand a Ghost of a Chance with You." Journalist David Hajdu recounts,

> When he reached the climax, Marsalis played the final phrase, the title statement . . . "I don't stand . . . a ghost . . . of . . . a . . . chance . . ." The room was silent until, and at the most dramatic point, someone's cell

> phone went off. . . . People started giggling and picking up their drinks. The moment—the whole performance—unraveled.[3]

Marsalis then made a choice that surprised the audience. He quoted the cell phone's ringtone, note for note, and improvised on it. The audience that had disengaged now drew all their attention back to the music. He returned to the final phrase of the ballad, and when he played the last two notes of the melody, "'with . . . you . . .'[, t]he ovation was tremendous."[4]

Wynton Marsalis

What makes Marsalis' response unique is his ability, as another jazz great, Herbie Hancock, once said, "to turn poison into medicine."[5] Whether it is the playground or practice room, I think we should take our preparation and virtue formation seriously because it can help us become the kinds of people who possess the desire and skill to turn poison into medicine. The work in *Character and…Play* can help us in the task of becoming that kind of people, but a little ground clearing is in order regarding the relationship between play and the essays in this volume. The authors, as a group, implicitly asked the question, "What is play (or playfulness) for?", and they applied their answers to music, science, games, race. The authors are implying that play (or playfulness) can help us become different kinds of people, a people capable of virtues like self-reflection (Bryant), hospitality (Eby), imagination (Halstoos), and curiosity (Kleinschmit). I want to take their work one step further. In becoming different kinds of people, these virtues that emerge from play can help us make a different, better world than the one we currently live in.

I begin by asking the question, "What world do we live in?"[6] I have become convinced that we live in a social world of profound injustice and violence, and the term *colonialism* is the most helpful way to frame our current circumstances.[7] I then turn to the question, "Can these essays help us make a different, better world?"[8] The authors in this volume have helped me see more clearly that the answer to that question is "Yes." Self-reflection, hospitality, imagination, and curiosity can help us live more fully into that different, better world, which I take to be a decolonial world.

What World Do We Live In?

We should take our preparation and virtue formation seriously because it can help us become the kinds of people who possess the desire and skill to turn poison into medicine.

Instead of rehearsing the history of violent acts that European settlers enacted upon Indigenous peoples, I want to explore how that colonial reality gave to us some vices that define our social reality today. I will assume the historicity of three overarching acts of violence internal to colonialism: the genocide of Indigenous peoples, the theft of their land, and the enslavement of Indigenous peoples from Africa. These acts were the express intent of our European ancestors. Their intent transformed Indigenous lands into the New World and did so through ownership and objectification. Several key figures in the colonial process produced at least three identities and three corresponding vices: the merchant gave us the vice of utility; the soldier, a desire for safety; and the missionary, the practice of relentless evaluation. Those vices are still with us today, and they constitute, in part, the legacy of colonialism we carry with us.

The realities of genocide, land theft, enslavement are not unintended consequences of settler activities; to the contrary, European Empires and the church intended that colonialism encompass those acts. As Indigenous legal scholar Steven T. Newcomb (Shawnee/Lenape) argues in his book *Pagans in the Promised Land*, the Church and Empire collaborated together as a means not only of accomplishing the task of colonization but also of creating the legal and religious legitimacy for their violence. The Church named and sanctioned the Imperial desire to exploit, enslave, and commit genocide.

Such sanction appeared as early as 1452, when Pope Nicolas V issued a papal bull entitled *Dum Diversas*. Addressed to King Alfonso V of Portugal, Pope Nicolas authorized Portugal "to invade, search out, capture, vanquish, and subdue all Saracens [Muslims] and pagans." Furthermore, Nicolas authorized Alfonso to take possession of "all movable and immovable goods whatsoever held and possessed by them and to reduce their persons to perpetual slavery."[9] When European Empires entered new lands, they did precisely as the pope said.[10]

Pope Nicolas V and King Alfonso V of Portugal

These edicts provided what is often referred to today as the Doctrine of Discovery, whereby the Church legitimated the founding violence that enabled European colonizers to establish dominance over Indigenous peoples and lands.[11] Later, the Church rejected the legitimacy of these edicts, but by that time the damage had been done.[12]

Additionally, settlers transformed Indigenous lands into a New World, marked by ownership and objectification. For the Indigenous peoples, the land, plants, and animals were all relatives, all living within a harmonious web of interdependent relationality.[13] Settlers reconfigured the world from relationality between subjects to ownership of objects. To Indigenous peoples, owning land made as much sense as owning one's grandmother. Settlers transformed relatives, like land, plants, and animals, into objects. They owned land, livestock, and agriculture first, then people. Because Indigenous people were considered savages and the enslaved Africans considered only good for slavery, white settlers transformed them into objects, too. White settlers created a world in which they were the only true subjects. Everyone else were now objects to be owned or controlled.

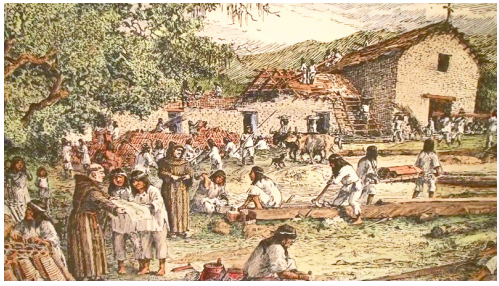
The merchant gave us the vice of utility; the soldier, a desire for safety; and the missionary, the practice of relentless evaluation.

Using ownership and objectification, the forces of Empire, Christianity, and Capitalism developed three identities—soldier, missionary, and merchant—and corresponding vices. As theologian Willie James Jennings argues, these three colonial figures "created or recreated much of life in the New World—which is our world."[14]

One of the key figures in objectification was the merchant. For the merchant, persons "serve two purposes: they are nodes or sites for exchange (e.g., producers and/or consumers), or they are tools to be employed by others."[15] Through the merchant, we live today in a capitalist way of relating to others, a way that sees others in terms of their usefulness or utility to us.

Second, the soldier secured safety for the merchant and the missionary, for Capitalism and Christianity. For the sake of safety, the soldier remains vigilant against a world of threats, especially the threat of Indigenous and enslaved peoples, their cultures, and their ways of life. Jennings notes, "The way of the soldier denies love of the other and the way of the merchant disciplines that love, binding it only to the other's utility."[16]

Third, the missionary viewed Indigenous peoples as both "demonic" and "culturally deficient."[17] As a result, missionaries "entered the worlds of [I]ndigenous peoples in an unrelenting evaluative mode, as eternal teachers with eternal students."[18] Taken together, the merchant, soldier, and missionary gave us utility, safety, and evaluation, respectively.



Indigenous Americans working a Spanish Mission

Those vices are part of our contemporary social existence, negatively impacting minority communities. While a full accounting of these vices is outside of the scope of this essay, I offer three representative examples.

First, the recent anxiety over ChatGPT in educational settings reveals how utility is with us today.[19] Some educators worry that students will use OpenAI to cheat on writing. I think that anxiety arises out of the confused purposes of education. In our aspirations, education helps students become better people. However, education in the United States is caught within the vice of economic utility. One of the main reasons people pursue higher education is that it often results in higher wages and economic mobility. Utility, in many cases, motivates students to consider technologies like ChatGPT as viable ways to receive higher grades and, in the long term, make more money.

In addition, our desire for safety manifests in realities like mass incarceration, which have created harmful, disproportionate outcomes for communities of color. Much of the political rhetoric around law and order focuses on safety. The claim is, often, that tough-on-crime policies will produce safer communities by keeping criminals in jail. However, these policies have historically criminalized communities of color at disproportional rates.

Modern mass incarceration is said to have begun with the Johnson administration's War on Crime, which focused surveillance on communities of color.[20] During the 1970s, the Nixon administration rebranded Johnson's policy into a War on Drugs. Richard Nixon's domestic policy advisor, John Ehrlichman, claims that the policy explicitly targeted people of color. "We knew we couldn't make it illegal," he said, "to be either against the [Vietnam W]ar or [B]lacks, but by getting the public to associate the hippies with marijuana and [B]lacks with heroin and then criminalizing them both heavily, we could disrupt those communities. . . . Did we know we were lying about the drugs? Of course we did."[21]

In the 1980s, the Reagan administration introduced sentencing disparities between crack and powder cocaine,[22] which punished Black crack cocaine users far more severely than powder cocaine users, who were often white. The Clinton administration also developed harsher minimum sentences for non-violent drug offenses, again disproportionately imprisoning Black and brown Americans.[23]

When the Johnson administration began its War on Crime, the US had around 50,000 prisoners. In 2020, we had 1.2 million prisoners.[24] The majority of those prisoners are Black and Latinx.[25] These policies have, in effect, criminalized Black and brown peoples, to encourage feelings of safety for white settlers.

Regarding the third vice of evaluation, social media is perhaps one of the most discussed areas of self-evaluation. Studies note how social media can negatively impact body image issues and lead to depression, anxiety, and self-harm.[26] While research does not establish that social media directly causes these negative impacts, there are significant (but small) correlations between the rise of mental health issues and social media.

One explanation for these correlations lies in the way self-evaluation commonly takes place. Social media often presents images of perfect lives and bodies. Such images misrepresent the difficulties many of us face. Although we might know that the images others post do not fully represent reality, it can be difficult not to feel inadequate, less than, or disgusted with ourselves. Such comparisons are fundamentally evaluative and can be unrelenting, unceasing, merciless, and seemingly impossible to stop. While the content is vastly different, the structure of this experience is not unlike the ways colonial missionaries saw Indigenous peoples as lacking and perpetually inferior. Social media encourages us to internalize a sense of lack and inferiority.

I am convinced that genocide, land theft, and enslavement are the foundations upon which our world is built. Today, our world is a world of ownership and objectification, and we are, largely speaking, a people who live inside the realities of utility, safety, and unceasing evaluation. Colonialism and its legacies are the poison that we must try to turn into medicine. I think the essays in this volume can help us in that task.

Genocide, land theft, and enslavement are the foundations upon which our world is built.

Can These Essays Help Us Make a Different, Better World?

These essays can help us attend more deeply to our self-reflection, hospitality, imaginations, and curiosity, and, as a result, do so to help us co-create a better, different, and decolonial world.

Self-Reflection

Mary Bryant's wonderful essay reflects on the role games can play in human flourishing, grappling with the gains and losses of gameplay. Like nearly all forms of cultural expression, games can sometimes assist us in leading better lives. As social activities, games provide the opportunity to "practice being good sports and to deepen our friendships."[27] Evidence also shows that board games can help combat dementia, depression, heart problems, and keep up our cognitive awareness. Play also improves creative thinking, problem-solving, motivation, and has been "linked to learning to be less aggressive and developing life skills and risk management."[28]

Games can, however, cause us harm. Games can trigger dopamine releases that can lead to compulsive or addictive relationships with gameplay. "An estimated 1.96% of the world's population," Bryant tells us, "suffers from video game addiction," which the World Health Organization describes as "gaming disorder."[29] Which is to say, games, like all formational practices, are not technologies of certainty. They do not automatically make us people of helpful or harmful character. To my mind, it is probably best to say that play exists in a dense web of culture, gender, economics, and race, and all those factors interact in complex ways to form us into complex peoples.

For me as a reader, part of what makes her essay powerful is her self-reflective framing of play, particularly around cultural formation. Bryant comes from a Danish immigrant community, a sect known as the Pious or

Sad Danes, who believed that activities like gameplay and dancing were not activities faithful Christians should do. Even though she knows, intellectually, that one can be a good Christian and play games, she sometimes gets "a nagging feeling" that she should not. She guesses that such negative bodily responses "must run in the family," because her mother "still hesitates to sit down to play a game rather than do something 'useful.'"[30] What is true for Bryant and her mother is true for many of us.

Our cultures, especially our white Christian cultures, have (mal)formed us so deeply that we internalize harmful messages about ourselves and the world, and we do so not necessarily intellectually, but at a bodily level. Trauma therapist Resmaa Menakem writes that much of our orientation to the world takes place at the deep, precognitive sites of our bodies, our reactions, and our over-reactions. In analyzing the ways police officers kill unarmed Black men, he notices how a police officer's body will react out of fear, as though it is in danger, and immediately respond with lethal force.[31] In some instances, such reflective bodily responses can help protect us. However, as the widespread killing of unarmed Black men and women demonstrates, white settlers' bodies have been (mal)formed to value their own safety at the expense of others.

White settlers, as a group, need to undergo a decolonization of our embodied responses of moving through the world.

Bryant and Menakem convince me that when we think about decolonization, part of decolonizing means that white settlers, as a group, need to undergo a decolonization of our embodied responses of moving through the world, which can be and often are calibrated toward harm. To reflect on our bodily formation is to resist the vice of the soldier, to resist that our safety is more precious than the safety of others.

Additionally, Bryant's self-reflection with language acquisition also demonstrates how a decolonial future must be for us a multi-lingual future. Using Duolingo, Bryant kept up an impressive 411-day streak, with lots of gems to boot. Her accomplishments did not necessarily produce long-term responses of joy or pride. Through attending to her bodily reactions, she noticed that her play was "joyless, fruitless" and also "monotonous, pointless." This led her to quit Duolingo and take up a more traditional-type program through her library. "My study has now gone from gameplay to work," she says, "but it is fun work."[32]

Part of what I take from Bryant is that the work of decolonialism is an active embrace of a world with many languages. One of the key biblical passages that presents God's good future as a multi-lingual future is John's vision from Revelation 7, in which peoples bring the fullness of their cultural formation into the presence of God. If white settlers are to live as though the vision of Revelation 7 can break into our current moment, then it would be deeply beneficial for white settlers to learn at least one language other than English. To learn another people's language is to position ourselves away from the vice of the missionary. Instead of being eternal teachers, we can take up the posture of a learner of another culture and people. And as Bryant's experience shows, this work of learning can be for us the work of joy.

The masses coming together in Revelation 7

Hospitality

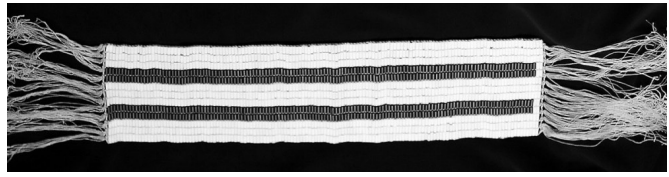
Kristen Eby's thoughtful reflections on hospitality show how complex such acts can be, primarily as she focuses on how hosts and guests co-create hospitality together. She defines hospitality in a distinctly Christian sense, as a biblical call to "welcome and serve those in need," whether the need is for food, shelter, or beauty.[33] In the case of musical performances, hospitality demands that both host and guest, both performer and audience, engage in certain kinds of work. Most often, the performer offers the gift of art, and the audience offers the gift of attention. Hence, hospitality is an act of co-creation between guests and hosts. As any performer knows, the enthusiastic attention (or lack thereof) that an audience brings to a performance can dramatically impact the performer, and in those acts, the audience's gifts can make or break the act of hospitality.[34] To be a good guest to a performer means, in effect, being a host to the host. The roles of host and guest flow in and out of each other and are not unidirectional.

To take these reflections and put them in political terms, Eby's account of hospitality helps us see more clearly how God in Christ takes up the role of guest, whose example white settlers would do well to inhabit. In the incarnation, the Creator of all things, the One whom we might think of as the Host of hosts, is first a guest. Jesus was a guest in Mary's womb. The

one who creates and sustains all things was, in fact, co-created by her body and sustained by the nourishment of her breast, without which the Creator would have died. And while the biblical witness does not give any accounts, Mary most certainly reared and taught Jesus, the Word, how to speak and how to participate in Jewish culture and ways of life. In these ways, the Most High God inhabited the virtues of relationality and vulnerability and took on the role of learner. What is true of Jesus can most certainly be true of us.

This is particularly important to remember when white Christian settlers are engaged in social justice work. We might think that a mission trip or a ministry is an act of hospitality, in which the white settler Christians are hosts. However, like Jesus' situation, the opposite is often the case. The communities we supposedly serve often host white settlers at great cost to themselves, performing all kinds of labor, perhaps without us knowing or understanding. In those situations, we would do well to follow the example of Jesus, who entered into a relationship, who became vulnerable, and who took the posture of a learner. Such postures can help white settlers resist the vices of the missionary as teacher and not learner; the soldier, obsessed with safety and not vulnerability; and the merchant, interested in utility and not relationship.

Furthermore, in reframing ourselves as guests within our own acts of service, white settlers can also reframe our social, cultural, and political identity, as a guest people in need of a host. In colonial times, settlers travelled across oceans with the intent to exploit Indigenous lands; however, in many places, Indigenous peoples made treaties with settlers in good faith efforts at sharing life on the land. The Two-Row Wampum is often cited as the first treaty (early 1600s) made between Indigenous peoples and European settlers—in this case, between the Mohawk and the Dutch.[35] Within the oral tradition of the treaty, the Two-Row Wampum established a relationship of equals, using a metaphor of brothers and their attendant responsibilities based on their experience on the land. Because the Mohawk "had lived in the Mohawk River Valley region for thousands of years," they possessed "the knowledge, resources, and infrastructure the newcomers needed to survive and succeed in the area."[36] Hence, their responsibility was one of an elder brother who helped their younger brother thrive on this new land.[37]



Two-Row Wampum belt

The relationality of a partnership of equals with certain responsibilities of labor suggests a linkage between Indigenous hosts and their settler guests. While the language of brotherhood is not precisely the language of hospitality, the relationships between elder and younger brothers set up expectations akin to some of the work that hosts and guests perform for each other. It is certainly not the case that settlers had nothing to offer and the Mohawk had everything. However, the treaty established a relationship in which the settlers were the equivalent of guests on the land the Mohawk had lived in harmony with for thousands of years.

Christian settlers have the opportunity to return to the spirit of the treaty, a spirit in which we can co-create a familial relationship, a hospitable way of treating each other and the land.

Since the time of the treaty, the vast majority of settlers have forgotten that we are guests, forgotten that we are younger brothers to our Indigenous elder brothers. As a result, we have behaved (and continue to behave) in ways unbecoming of family members and the hospitality we should have been giving to each other. White Christian settlers have the opportunity to return to the spirit of the treaty, a spirit in which we can co-create a familial relationship, a hospitable way of treating each other and the land. We can resist the temptations of utilizing our Indigenous family members, like a merchant might, or teaching Indigenous peoples, like a missionary might.

Imagination

Brian Hallstoos' remarkable essay describes how playfulness, and lack thereof, took place in the life of Solomon "Sol" Butler. The first Black graduate of Dubuque College, Butler pressed the school toward greater racial inclusion in the wake of World War I. Butler, and other students from oppressed communities, recognized that the creation of "meaningful social bonds" was and is one of the key factors in overturning racial injustices.[38] This was particularly important for white students, who likely held unconscious or conscious racial stereotypes. White hearts and minds needed transformation, and Butler likely played a key role in that change. He not only represented Black folks as capable of virtue, wit, and hard work, but he also displayed the qualities of playfulness, delight, and joy in social situations.

Dubuque College was not, however, free from racial injustice. Hallstoos notes Butler was not immune from an annual hazing ritual, where freshman students abducted and, often, mistreated seniors. A photo from Butler's senior year hazing shows him in chains, sitting next to a white student.[39] Butler's hazers might have claimed the hazing was all in good fun. Nevertheless, his hazing took place in the Jim Crow era, during a period of racial massacres and riots across the US, like the Red Summer in Butler's future home of Chicago. It is difficult to imagine that Butler did not feel the weight of that violence in his own abduction.

"Circulation Books Open to All"

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3 DEAD, 50 HURT IN RACE RIOT ON CHICAGO BATHING BEACH

Clash Begins When Colored Boy Invades White District—Police Shoot Into Mob—Women Join in Fighting—Troops Are Withdrawn From Washington Streets.

Special to The World.

CHICAGO, July 27.—Race rioting that started on a bathing beach at 29th Street spread over the section bordering the Black Belt to-night with deadly results. Two negroes and one white man are reported dead, but not identified. One white man

Driven from Beach.

The fighting were driven from the beach and carried their quarrel to Cottage Grove Avenue. Here one negro broke out. Chief of Police Alcock ordered every

Chicago race riot of 1919

In the midst of that injustice, I take from Hallstoos that what Butler was doing when he and other students created "meaningful social bonds"[40] with white students in a Jim Crow era is this: they were helping white settlers imagine a different future. The task of imagining a different future is a monumental task. Certainly, that future must include massive systemic changes to institutions like government, education, economics, prisons, and the like. Systemic change is essential.

Part and parcel of systemic change is also individual, personal, spiritual change. For generations in this country, white settlers have been formed in such a way that it is difficult for us to imagine a future that is life-giving for everyone. This is why the phrase "It's easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism" has purchase for so many of us.[41] We need imaginations like that of the prophet Isaiah. He imagined a future where all forms of violence had come to an end, where, for example, wolves lay down with lambs.[42] We need an alternative formation that helps us imagine unthinkable futures, like a world without the violence inherent in realities like Capitalism or Colonialism.

In that context, one example of Butler's shared joy reminds us that our present joy can be a sign of a better future awaiting us. In one telling passage, Hallstoos comments on one particular photograph of Butler, who dressed up like a professor and mocked the "affectations of a pompous scholar or dandy."[43] The photo captures interplay between Butler and the photographer, an interaction of sheer joy. Hallstoos writes, "We see in their frenetic energy one source of their joy: the indulgence in a playful spirit. It is this spirit that Sol helped spark."[44] Whether we understand play as a

moment of pretending or merely idle fun, it can function as a formational practice that leads to one of the most important social bonds: joy. Playing at shared joy can be for us part of the preparation such that when times for joy arrive, we can be the kind of people who participate graciously in the joy of others and our own.

Clearly, the shared joy between the photographer and Butler did not end racism. We still live, by and large, in the racialized and colonized world Butler and the photographer lived inside of. However, witnessing joy like we see in this photo or, better yet, practicing joy with others across lines of division—whether sexual, racial, or in regard to gender, ability, age, or class—can remind us that a better future can break into our present reality, if only we co-create it with others. The relationality of shared joy can help us resist the temptation of the merchant, who views others only in terms of utility.

Curiosity

In an analysis of the scientific community since 1950, Adam Kleinschmit traces the evolution and impact of the value of productivity over and against curiosity. Kleinschmit describes a pivotal moment before World War II, when scientific exploration had a different character. At that time, scientists existed with modest support from university budgets. As a result, the community valued curiosity, accepted failure as part of the process, and made groundbreaking discoveries. However, during the war, government support pulled scientific research into the orbit of violence, developing war-time technologies like computers, radar, jet engines, and vaccines. Over time, the massive amount of public funding transformed science from a culture of curiosity to a culture of productivity.

The effect on scientific discoveries has been monumental. Since World War II, the rate of transformative, groundbreaking scientific discoveries has declined precipitously, despite exponential progress in more established fields of science. Kleinschmit argues that the current competitive funding mechanisms create incentives for scientists to ask conservative and narrow questions, ones that make the outcome of their findings more predictable and less prone to failure. As a result, scientists are unwilling to risk their funding on pursuing "transformative discoveries" that might push "science and technology in new directions," precisely because failure would endanger future funding and, ultimately, their viability as scientists.[45]

In contrast to a culture of productivity, Kleinschmit demonstrates how the curiosity-driven science of Hungarian-American biochemist Katalin Karikó

saved numerous lives. Karikó's curiosity led her to study synthetic mRNA; however, her peers considered her work unrealistic and impractical, as evident by the high number of her rejected research proposals. Those rejected proposals led to multiple academic demotions and eventually to her leaving academia altogether. However, her discoveries on these matters were foundational to the mRNA-based vaccines developed during the COVID-19 pandemic. Had she not been curious about mRNA and not been willing to fail and be demoted along the way, many more of us would have died. If curiosity and failure are, indeed, integral to new discoveries, I want to suggest that they are essential to bringing decolonial futures into being.

Curiosity can help white settlers cope with the reality that, on our path to a just future, we will make mistakes, and when we fail, we must have the capacity to begin again. Maori filmmaker Taika Waititi describes the colonial context in which curiosity might function. *The Hollywood Reporter* invited Waititi to make a keynote address at a Diversity and Inclusion event. In a comical tone, he bemoaned these types of events, because white settlers tend to invite oppressed people to recount and offer solutions to colonialism, sexism, and racism. Waititi opines, "[Stop] making us come and tell you about the problem and how to fix it. You fucking broke it. You fix it."[46] As the audience laughed, the filmmaker elaborated on his point.

House on fire

The problem of colonialism is akin to an individual (i.e., white colonizers) breaking into someone's home (i.e., Indigenous peoples), stealing all their belongings, setting the house on fire, and burning it to the ground. As white settlers grapple with the fact that our ancestors performed thievery and destruction, diversity and inclusion events communicate an absurd reality. It is as if the white colonizers come to the Indigenous people and say, "Okay we need to have a little talk about this. . . . Now, you're going to rebuild your house. . . . [W]hat can we give you to help rebuild your house that we burned down?" In a mocking tone, Waititi says, "You build the fucking house. You burned it down. I'll come back and hopefully you get it right."[47]

As more laughter unfolds, Waititi makes an astounding turn. "And if you don't get it right," he says in a somber tone, "then we'll try again. . . . It's a long journey, so we'll stumble. We should stumble together."[48]

Drawing from both Waititi and Kleinschmit, I think curiosity can help sustain white settlers as we engage in the task of rebuilding the house we burned down and, when we get it wrong, when we make mistakes, we can, in good faith, begin again. Because colonialism is such a powerful and long historical process, we, as a people, will not rebuild the house overnight, perhaps not even in our lifetimes. Rebuilding the house is multi-generational work, and mistakes are inevitable. White settlers can often feel paralyzed by mistakes and feelings of failure. However, we can choose to approach those feelings and mistakes with curiosity, in the same way Katalin Karikó approached her mRNA research.

Curiosity is not the solution in and of itself, but it can help us resist internalizing those feelings of being a failure and develop the capacity, over time, to rebuild again and again. We will not get it right the first time. But, as Karikó and Waititi illustrate, curiosity and an acceptance of failure will, in all likelihood, lead to the discoveries of what will work. Along the way, we will stumble, but stumbling is not something white settlers do on their own. It is a reality performed in community. Curiosity and stumbling together can help us resist the vice of the missionary, who only teaches and never learns, and the vice of the merchant, who only uses and never enters into relationality.

Conclusion

Empire and its legacies of utility, evaluation, and safety are a colonial poison that we must work toward turning into medicine. I believe we can do good decolonial work with the tools the authors addressed in each of their essays: self-reflection, hospitality, imagination, and curiosity. Because many of our crises flow from the injustice of colonialism, decolonial work is essential for all of us, whether we are settlers, immigrants, or are Native to this land. And that work takes place on the level of everyday, mundane, ordinary locations and activities, like playground, practice rooms, games, scientific experiments, musical performances, or going to university. Everyday life is where we practice the skills and dispositions that can help us become the kind of people who can turn the poison of colonialism into medicine.

Everyday life is part of the point of the Duke of Wellington's phrase, although the legacy of Eton represents one final temptation we must resist. When the Duke's phrase caught on, it was likely less about playgrounds and more

about the training that the elite school Eton College provided to the wealthy families. But it was not merely the generation who fought at Waterloo. Eton has educated prime ministers, actors, authors, and royalty, Princes William and Harry included.[49] Its headmaster was once said to be the "tutor to England's establishment."[50]

Everyday life is where we practice the skills and dispositions that can help us become the kind of people who can turn the poison of colonialism into medicine.

In 2019, however, a political movement developed to do away with all schools like Eton, a movement called "Abolish Eton." While the movement failed, it did provoke reactions from alumni. One alumnus equivocated about his experience at Eton, saying that he would not send his children there because the school is "far too expensive and sheltering." However, he described his time there as "some of the best years of my life, and I wouldn't be the person I was without it, so it's tough to say I wouldn't go there again. It's a poisoned chalice. . . ."[51]

There is more than a hint of determinism in his statement, and it is a determinism that, I think, any decolonial journey needs to resist. The past is certainly the past, and we cannot change it. However, we are neither prisoners of our history nor are we determined by it. This is part of the logic of the resurrection. Our colonial past does not define our future any more than death did for Jesus. Like death, Empire does not have the final word.

Naaman Wood is Instructor of Communication at Saint Paul College in St. Paul, MN. After earning an MA and a PhD from Regent University, Wood received a MTS and ThM from Duke Divinity School. His interdisciplinary scholarship has been published in the journals Symbolic Interaction*,* Jazz Perspectives*, and the books* Prophetic Critique and Popular Media: Theoretical Foundations and Practical Applications*,* More than "Precious Memories": Critical Essays on the Rhetoric of Southern Gospel*, and several chapters for the* Critical Companion to Popular Directors *series at Lexington Books. He has forthcoming monograph in that series titled* A Critical Companion to Sofia Coppola*, which he coauthored with musicologist Christopher Booth. He won the* Journal of Christian Teaching Practice*'s 2018 Quentin J. Schultze and Paul A. Soukup Faith-learning Integration Award for Outstanding Christian Scholarship in Communication Studies for his essay, "Analogy as a Strategy for Faith-learning Integration." He also coedited* Words and Witnesses: Communication

Studies in Christian Thought from Athanasius to Desmond Tutu *and* Humility and Hospitality: Changing the Christian Conversation on Civility.

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Notes

1. The phrase is likely an apocryphal statement, attributed to the first Duke of Wellington. See, for example, *Time,* "Duke Didn't Say It" and Eton College Collections, "Eton, the First Duke of Wellington and the Battle of Waterloo."
2. Wells, *Improvisation*, 74.
3. Hajdu, "Wynton's Blues."
4. Hajdu.
5. Hancock, "Playing Wrong Notes."
6. This question is inspired by biblical scholar N.T. Wright's worldview questions, particularly his question "What time is it?" See Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 443, 467–72.
7. An important theological insight from Saint Augustine of Hippo, helps frame the theological importance of Colonialism. When Augustine turned his gaze on the Empire of his day, the Roman Empire, he understood that the conditions of injustice were laid at the foundation of Rome's history. Rome began when Romulus murdered his brother Remus. Romulus's fratricide is Rome's original sin. That foundational violence animated, for Augustine, the entire history of Rome, such that nothing existed outside of that originating act. In fact, Augustine claimed that "Rome never was a republic," because its founding violence made that society nothing less than a thief. Augustine, *City of God*, 2.21. See also Warner and Scott, "Sin City," 860. As

Christians, it is vital that we talk about our current moment in ways that follow what Augustine says about Rome. Everything we experience on this land is grounded in the three forms of foundational violence—genocide, land theft, and enslavement—which established the society we live in today. What is true of Rome is true of the United States, Canada, and many other settler colonial states, like Australia, New Zealand, Israel, Taiwan. And that truth has to be dealt with if we want a different, better future.

8. This question is in the spirit of the communication theory known as Coordinated Management of Meaning. Communication scholar W. Barnett Pearce describes humans as curious participants in a social world that we co-create with others. Because we make our social world with others, we have the option to make our world a different, better world than the one we currently inhabit. See Pearce, *Making Social Worlds*, xi.

9. Newcomb, *Pagans in the Promised Land*, 84.

10. Several other papal bulls affirmed, expanded, and refined *Dum Divertas* In 1455, Pope Nicolas issued *Romanus Pontifex* as an affirmation of *Dum Diversas*. It also extended and specified King Alfonso's dominion. In 1493, Pope Alexander VI wrote *Inter Caetera*, describing how Empires would negotiate with each other over lands they encountered through colonization. According to theologian Damian Costello, European Empires were not "dependent on the Church for its legitimacy;" nevertheless, Church and Empire "constructed a type of divine sanction for a campaign won by military force." Costello, "Revisiting the *Requerimiento*," 194–96.

11. Between 1823 and 1832, Justice John Marshall's U.S. Supreme Court issued three decisions that used the Doctrine of Discovery as justification to dispossess Indigenous peoples of land. As recently as 2005, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg echoed Marshall's language, refusing to recognize the Oneida Indian Nation's claims to land in New York State. In this sense, the Doctrine of Discovery is part of the story white settler colonial governments still use to justify their theft of Indigenous land. The story of legitimacy allays, in part, settler anxieties about our current status of illegal presence, ownership, and violence. For a more detailed analysis of Ginsberg's decisions effecting Indigenous peoples, see Goldberg, "Finding the Way."

12. Chappell, "Vatican Repudiates 'Doctrine of Discovery.'"

13. Little Bear, "Jagged Worldviews Colliding," 79.

14. Jennings, "Disfigurations of Christian Identity," 68.

15. Jennings, 71.

16. Jennings, 72.

17. Jennings, 73, 79.

18. Jennings, 79.

19. Ceres, "ChatGPT Is Coming."

20. Flamm, "From Harlem to Ferguson."

21. Baum, "Legalize It All." Some have argued that this is an oversimplification. See, for example, Lopez, "Nixon's War on Drugs."

22. Morrison, "50-Year War on Drugs."

23. Biale, Hinton, and Ross, "Discriminatory Purpose," 129–31; Lopez, "Controversial 1994 Crime Law."

24. Carson, “Prisoners in 2020,” 1–3.
25. “Blacks, Hispanics.”
26. For reviews of the literature on social media and mental health, see, for example: Keles, McCrae, and Grealish, “Systematic Review”; Odgers and Jensen, “Adolescent Mental Health”; Meier and Reinecke, “Computer-Mediated Communication.” For popular pieces on the connections between mental health and social media, see for example: Greenspan, “Social Media Can Harm Kids”; The Learning Network, “What Students Are Saying About How Social Media Affects Their Body Image.”
27. Bryant, “Gameplay and Human Flourishing,” 18.
28. Bryant, 26.
29. Bryant, 25.
30. Bryant, 16.
31. Menakem, *My Grandmother’s Hands*.
32. Bryant, “Gameplay and Human Flourishing,” 28, 15, 29.
33. Eby, “Performance, Play, and Hospitality," 44.
34. Eby, 51.
35. Hill and Coleman, “Two Row Wampum,” 1.
36. Hill and Coleman, 12.
37. Hill and Coleman, 12.
38. Hallstoos, “Defusing Racism,” 59.
39. Hallstoos, 69
40. Hallstoos, 59.
41. Fisher, *Capitalist Realism*, 1. In the opening of his book, Fisher uses the phrase initially to describe apocalyptic cinema of the early 2000s. The phrase also describes our collective and individual settler identities and imaginations.
42. Isaiah 11:6 (New Revised Standard Version)
43. Hallstoos, “Defusing Racism,” 61, 62.
44. Hallstoos, 62.
45. Kleinschmit, “Transformative Discovery Science,” 80, 95.
46. Waititi, “Hollywood’s Issues.”
47. Waititi.
48. Waititi.
49. Hancock, “Most Successful Men.”
50. “Headmasters.”
51. Lott-Lavigna, “We Asked Etonians.”

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