Editorial

Introduction to the First Issue

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Welcome to the first issue of the Journal of the Philosophy of Games. In this journal we will explore philosophical questions raised by games and how they interface with phenomena like art, communication, social interaction, and technology.

It is remarkable that it has taken so long to get a philosophical journal dedicated to the general phenomenon of games and gaming. Games are known to have existed throughout recorded history, and have probably been with us for much longer. They have a striking presence in culture, whether it is in the form of board games, sport, gambling or modern online role-playing games.

Games raise issues of great importance to philosophy. In addition to the intrinsic interest they have as distinctive cultural forms, they exhibit structures that may shed light on the many phenomena that are game-like. A wide range of activities — such as language, trade, law, war or religious practices — exhibit features that make them very similar to games. Games extract, refine, and invert central features of action and reasoning, and offer especially clear cases of phenomena such as rationality, autonomy, representation and rule-governed action.

The emerging appreciation of the centrality of games and play is no doubt rooted in social and cultural changes that took place during the last century. Technology-driven economic transformations led to lack scarcity and to increased leisure time, which in turn led to a blossoming of settings and activities we value for their own sake, rather than just for their instrumental value.

An important range of philosophical issues have emerged from the manifold of possibilities for games and play that are created by computational information technologies. Online gaming communities, social media, telepresence, simulation, and virtual
worlds have found roles for play that go far beyond the traditional confinements of the card table or the game courts.

While this journal is an early effort to create a dedicated forum for philosophical questions about games, it does of course not emerge from a vacuum. Relevant discussions have been conducted in several disciplines.

As we start out, our most direct source will likely be the field of game studies. Game studies has sustained an impressive effort over the last two decades to develop theories that serve to identify experiential, structural, narrative, and ludological aspects of games. We aim to contribute to this scholarship by addressing its philosophical and theoretical aspects, as well the methodological issues it gives rise to.

An extensive body of philosophical discussion on games is found in the philosophy of sport. While not all sport may be regarded as games, many its philosophical questions are highly relevant to us. The nature of rules, the role of the umpire, or the value of achievement are examples of issues that clearly carry over to e.g. board games or multiplayer computer games. We would like to explore how such issues can pursued for games and play in general, and to enter into a dialogue wherever it is fruitful.

Another intersecting discipline is the philosophy of technology. Computer games make use of computational resources to shape game play around technologically mediated input and output modalities. Hence, we find overlapping discussions in how technology affects conceptions of space and time, the world-body relationship, personal identity, the reality status of virtual worlds, or how value is created, upheld and transformed by technologies — to mention just a few themes.

Finally, we have seen important work done on games within philosophical aesthetics. Games rely on facilitating aesthetic experiences for their users and their spectators. Many games are similar to traditional works of art in that they are representational, but serve this function by utilizing forms of meaning that arise from interactive game play. These functions connect the philosophical study of games to old and emerging themes in aesthetics, such as the ontology of interactive works, the phenomenology of interaction, or the nature of authorship.

In this journal we will pick up themes in these existing efforts and also seek to discover new ones. We aspire to establish a shared horizon of problems and fundamental concepts that emerge from taking games seriously as games. We will engage thinking about games that straddles philosophical traditions within “analytic” and “continental” philosophy. Hence, we will conduct discussions based in discourses such as diverse as theoretical game studies, critical theory, structuralism, phenomenology, post humanism or formal approaches.
It is clear that we are faced with a considerable task, but it is one we believe is of great importance to pursue. A philosophical understanding of games will not only contribute to the philosophy of action, epistemology, ethics, aesthetics, and metaphysics, but also give us some of the conceptual tools we need to gain an understanding of the roles games have in the human life form. It is time to get started.