

Symposium: Philosophy of Play

Gadamer, Dewey, and the Importance of Play in Philosophical Inquiry

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1. Introduction

Over the past eighty years, studies in play have carved out a small, but increasingly significant, niche within the social sciences. Starting with Johan Huizinga's *Homo Ludens*, and culminating in titles such as Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's *Finding Flow*, Stuart Brown's *Play*, and Thomas Henricks's *Play Reconsidered* and *Play and the Human Condition*, a rich repository has been built which underscores the importance of play to social, cultural, and psychological development.¹ The general point running through these works is a philosophical recognition that play should not be separated from the trappings of everyday life, but instead should be seen as one of the more primordial aspects of human existence. We suggest that a deeper understanding of play might also provide insight into philosophical inquiry.

Hans-Georg Gadamer is frequently associated with the topic of play, especially its connection to aesthetic experience. However, in *Truth and Method*, Gadamer follows Huizinga by insisting more broadly on the significance of play to human understanding, *per se*.² For Gadamer, play

¹ Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1949 [1938]); Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Finding Flow: The Psychology of Engagement with Everyday Life* (New York: Basic Books, 1997); Stuart Brown, *Play* (New York: Penguin, 2009); Thomas Henricks, *Play Reconsidered* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2006); and Thomas Henricks, *Play and the Human Condition* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2015).

² Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd rev. ed. (New York: Continuum, 2004).

discloses the full context of any given situation by promoting a freedom of possibilities within the horizon of one's own life-world (that is, the world directly and immediately experienced). As such, his philosophical analysis of play is essential to his overall project of philosophical hermeneutics insofar as it explains how meaning is not derived from something essential within an artwork or a text, but rather is constructed from a full range of possibilities. As Monica Vilhauer puts it, Gadamer's purpose is to establish play as "an alternative to modern scientific method . . . which brings forth genuine knowledge of genuine truth and has a structure all its own—a structure which must be accounted for if we are to have an accurate understanding of what knowledge and truth really are."³

We argue that there are good reasons to expand on the limited treatment of play within philosophical studies; we suggest that one way to do so is to compare Gadamer's treatment of play with similar ideas from thinkers often associated with other philosophical schools. Although there are other candidates for such an analysis (for example, Ludwig Wittgenstein's language games), we shall limit our comparison here to the notion of "transaction," as employed by John Dewey in *Knowing and the Known*.⁴ Because Dewey introduces his conception of transaction in a volume that he intended as the culmination of an overarching philosophy of inquiry, we believe that comparing it to Gadamer's use of play can highlight in at least two ways the deep philosophical import of this concept to understanding philosophical inquiry. First, traditional accounts of philosophical inquiry (including Dewey's early work) have modeled themselves too heavily on the sciences by attempting to articulate some formal method. Gadamer's notion of play and Dewey's later characterization of transaction, however, both challenge such systematic approaches by supplanting traditional dualisms (for example, subject/object) with conceptual continuities (for example, events). Second, it is our position that an accurate portrayal of philosophical inquiry *must* include the trappings of lived experience, embodiment, and context, which are best understood in terms of play and transaction.

2. Inquiry and Hegelian *Bildung*

When it comes to the philosophy of inquiry, Gadamer and Dewey share a Hegelian influence. Taking over a line of thought from his mentor, Martin Heidegger, Gadamer offers an alternative to positivistic approaches in "self understanding, historical experience, representation, language, and truth" by

³ Monica Vilhauer, *Gadamer's Ethics of Play: Hermeneutics and the Other* (Plymouth, UK: Lexington Books, 2010).

⁴ John Dewey and Arthur Bentley, *Knowing and the Known* (New York: Beacon Press, 1949). The essays comprising *Knowing and the Known* were originally published separately between 1944 and 1949 and were the culmination of a correspondence between Dewey and Bentley which began in November of 1932.

tying them to the concept of *Bildung*, which G. W. F. Hegel thinks of as education, in the sense of self-cultivation.⁵ As Heidegger argues, a basic structure in human understanding is the fact that *Dasein* (literally, human “there-being”) is always *there* with others, its surroundings being fully disclosed. The best way to understand this notion is perhaps through a rich metaphor occurring throughout much of Heidegger’s work, namely, one of a clearing [*Lichtung*] in the woods. When one walks among the trees, seeing one’s surroundings can be extremely difficult; however, when one steps into a clearing, the sunlight is unfiltered and everything is clearly seen. For Heidegger, each *Dasein* is in effect its own clearing. That is, understanding occurs when one steps into the clearing in which one’s surroundings are disclosed, or illuminated: “To say that [*Dasein*] is ‘illuminated’ [*erleuchtet*] means that as [there-being] it is cleared [*gelichtet*] in itself, not through any other entity, but in such a way that it *is* itself the clearing.”⁶ What this means is the clearing, that is, the region [*Gegend*] where human understanding is possible, is a realm where the surrounding context is made explicit (illuminated) to the individual. Likewise, the clearing, as a wide-open space, is a place where there is room enough for free play to occur between one and one’s fellow speakers.

Although Gadamer mentions Heidegger’s clearing metaphor only once in *Truth and Method*,⁷ it is obvious that Gadamer sees it as a key step in the “historical preparation” for his own work.⁸ The upshot of the idea for him is:

[T]he universal nature of human *Bildung* [is] to constitute itself as a universal intellectual being. Whoever abandons himself to his particularity is *ungebildet* (“unformed”)—e.g., if someone gives way to blind anger without measure or sense of proportion. Hegel shows that basically such a man is lacking in the power of abstraction. He cannot turn his gaze from himself towards something universal, from which his own particular being is determined in measure and proportion.⁹

⁵ Joel C. Weinsheimer, *Gadamer’s Hermeneutics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985). See also G. W. F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), secs. 488-526.

⁶ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 2nd ed., trans. Joan Stambaugh (Ithaca, NY: State University of New York Press, 2010), p. 129.

⁷ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, part 2, chap. 3.

⁸ Cf. Richard E. Palmer, *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of the Later Writings* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007), pp. 135 and 323.

⁹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 11.

It is precisely here that we believe Gadamer's view could benefit from a comparison with Dewey, particularly with regard to the latter's emphasis on context, social intelligence, and democracy as a way of life—all of which could be encapsulated by what Dewey was calling "transaction" toward the end of his career. As James Good and James Garrison show, Dewey was also influenced by the Hegelian concept of *Bildung*, which played a role in the formation of his socio-political philosophy. In their words:

Dewey's connection to Hegel is apparent when we look specifically at Hegel's account of human cognition. Not only do the two philosophers share the view that the self is always engaged in a project, they also agree that the self ordinarily proceeds in a state of harmony with its environment (Hegel's "natural consciousness").¹⁰

Dewey's Hegelianism is imbued with organic notions from Aristotle and Charles Darwin, and he rejects the dialectic of *Geist* (understood in terms of the historically inevitable self-development of spirit) in favor of a more biological description of the dynamism of nature. On such an account, thought moves from potentiality to actuality, per Aristotle, as the objects of thought become known. On the other hand, being moves from potentiality to actuality, per Darwin, through natural selection. This reading renders the notion of *telos* (end or purpose) a type of biological end in both nature and thinking organisms. Dewey builds on Hegelian ideas insofar as he sees that

the self is at one with its environment. Precisely because it is always engaged in a project, the self inevitably encounters obstacles, which Hegel terms "negations." This occurrence renders consciousness asunder, identifying an object over and against the self (*Gegenstand*), the obstacle that disrupted its project. After analysis of the negation in the stage of understanding (*Verstand*), the self formulates solutions that alter both its project and the object, achieving a reunification of consciousness that allows the self to resume its project.¹¹

On Dewey's transactional model, then, we can come to recognize experience as not only a "machine state" of the brain, but also an "output

¹⁰ James Good and James Garrison, "Traces of Hegelian Bildung in Dewey's Philosophy," in *John Dewey and Continental Philosophy*, ed. F. Paul (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2010), p. 49.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

state” of the body, *as well as* the subsequent change produced in the environment. In Gadamerian terms, it could be said that a subject’s play is actually an *interplay* with its context. In “A Propaedeutic to the Philosophical Hermeneutics of John Dewey,” Thomas Jeannot summarizes the connection thusly:

For Dewey, primary experience occurs in the field of *transactions* between the “live creature” and environing conditions. It is not merely psychological or subjective but inclusive, encompassing both the subjects who experience and the subject matter (*die Sache*) of experience, both the “how” and the “what” of experience taken together in their mutual organic connections. Likewise, Gadamer’s famous excursus on “play” (*Spiel*) is strategically situated in *Truth and Method* to develop a phenomenological verification of essentially the same conception.¹²

Jeannot sets the table for considering Dewey’s and Gadamer’s shared goal of contextualizing experience, that is, reinstating the web of significance relations which surrounds every experience, even when taken severally. In Dewey’s view, any experience is always already “transactional,” whereas for Gadamer all experience is, at its core, hermeneutic. Jeannot maintains: “[I]t would be as fair to say of Dewey as of Gadamer that each seeks phenomenologically to shift the grounds of inquiry into the concrete existential phenomenon of understanding from epistemology to ontology.”¹³ Gadamer also makes it a point to note that Edmund Husserl’s appeal to the “unity of a living organism,” as found in *Husserliana VI*, is intended to be more than a mere metaphor.¹⁴ Husserl (by Gadamer’s account) seeks to show that subjectivity should not be taken as the opposite of objectivity; phenomenology is actually intended to be correlation research, and (in a very Deweyan sentiment) the “poles” of subjective and objective are always contained within the whole.

¹² Thomas Jeannot, “A Propaedeutic to the Philosophical Hermeneutics of John Dewey: *Art as Experience* and *Truth and Method*,” *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 15, no. 1 (2001), p. 2.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 250. See also Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, trans. David Carr (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1970).

3. Gadamer's Notion of Play

In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer follows Huizinga by pointing to a kind of seriousness in play, albeit one in which the player lightly holds the meaning of that with which he is playing.¹⁵ For Gadamer (and Huizinga), play is where old ideas are discarded and new ideas are “tried on.” This activity is the very process in which the world is socially structured and one affirms the sacred order of the universe itself. Jean Grondin points to the centrality of the sequence of play-festival-ritual in understanding how Gadamer believes that play structures the world.¹⁶

As the first part of that sequence, play is the most basic and unstructured. According to Gadamer, play is simply a to-and-fro movement.¹⁷ This becomes evident in our use of it in language, as Gadamer points out, when we say, “The play of light, the play of the waves, the play of gears or parts of machinery, the interplay of limbs, the play of forces, the play of gnats, even a play on words.”¹⁸ This may initially lead us to think of play as an interactional event, wherein there is a tension among the elements in play, as if they are opposed to one another. However, Gadamer shows otherwise: “yet in playing, all of those purposive relations that determine active and caring existence have not simply disappeared, but are curiously suspended Play fulfils its purpose only if the player loses himself in play.”¹⁹ As Huizinga puts it, play happens as a “free activity standing quite consciously outside ‘ordinary’ life as being ‘not serious,’ but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly.”²⁰ Such a statement points out that play, as an interpretive experience, remains open-ended to subsequent adjustments in interpretation. It is this openness that allows us to explore new possibilities. This gives us further insight into play as *transaction*, rather than *inter-action*. By characterizing play as a to-and-fro motion, it is likewise indicated that play takes place not between, but among, its players. This is why the structure of play cannot be pinned down—one cannot precisely point out where play happens. Play is a transactional experience, oriented toward the future but focused on the

¹⁵ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 103.

¹⁶ Gadamer himself does not fully flesh out this sequence until his 1974 lecture “The Relevance of the Beautiful,” although its theoretical foundation can be found in *Truth and Method*; see Hans-Georg Gadamer, “The Relevance of the Beautiful,” in Hans-Georg Gadamer, *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1987); and Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 126.

¹⁷ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 104.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 102-3.

²⁰ Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, p. 13.

present. Play cannot be found within any structure or any method, only within the transactions between organisms and their environment.

This lack of structure arises from the fact that there can be no end in mind when one is playing. The to-and-fro motion of play indicates that the end is the same as the beginning. As Gadamer points out, the purpose of play is play itself.²¹ It may be more accurate to say, rather, that to-and-fro play moves in a circular manner: "In any case what is intended is to-and-fro movement that is not tied to any goal that would bring it to an end. . . . [R]ather, it renews itself in constant repetition."²² Having no firm end in sight is also one of the most important requirements for the sort of transactional event that Dewey and Bentley describe in *Knowing and the Known*. It could be said that although play begins with no structure, a structure does eventually emerge. For example, if there are two people passing a Frisbee, one player does not throw the Frisbee in the opposite direction of the other player. To do so is to be a "spoilsport"; in not taking the play seriously, they would fail to engage properly in play. However, if they were to be asked in what framework of rules they play Frisbee, they would likely deny that there are rules of any form, yet, a structure develops. Without structure there would be no interplay. Furthermore, as they continue to play Frisbee, the players may try to do tricks, each one attempting to outdo the other. Yet even in this competitive spirit, one cannot put rules to the game without losing something.

So as to elucidate Gadamer's notion of the structuring of play we will shift the venue of our game of Frisbee from an isolated field to a stadium full of spectators. For Gadamer, play realizes its ideal when it becomes presentation, that is to say, when the players are fully immersed in their roles for the audience. Gadamer calls this the shift from "play" to "the play." In this way, the audience, too, is brought into the realm of the play-world. Performance art is a prime example of such structured, yet still immersive, playing.

When rules are applied to "the play," however, it ceases to become play and instead becomes recreation. What is recreation? The word itself literally means to re-create. What it is attempting to recreate is the spirit of play found within that primal game. (This takes place, for example, when playing catch with a Frisbee is transformed into a sport like Ultimate Frisbee.) There is an attempt to return to the familiar (that is, Frisbee in and of itself) through the mediation of a structured form (Ultimate Frisbee). There is, however, a difficulty in translation. For Frisbee, the structure is such that it naturally emerges through the interplay. Ultimate Frisbee attempts to re-create this structure antecedent to any play taking place. But how could a static system of rules (that is, method) ever duplicate the dynamic, organic understanding that occurs in play? Gadamer suggests that it would be difficult insofar as play is a

²¹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 103.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 104.

process that one recognizes but cannot make an object of knowledge. In other words, play marks “the boundary of the objectifiable.”²³ In play there is truth without any method, for method always covers over some aspect of truth. Thus, recreation is not the best means of duplicating the play phenomenon because it begins from an objective set of rules and therefore delimits the players as “subjects.” Any play that emerges within recreation happens in spite of, not because of, these initial conditions.

This leads to festival, the next step in the sequence mentioned above. As Grondin explains, Gadamer elevates the meaning of festival to paradigmatic usage in his account of experience, which

always wishes to be executed in this manner, i.e. to be “gone along with” The reason is that a festival is characterized by a certain temporality into which we are enticed. It occurs at a given time and all who participate in the festival are elevated to a festive state and, in the best case, are transformed into a festive mood.²⁴

Festival lends a rhythmic, temporal quality to our own lives, as well, insofar as a festival stands as a consummatory experience for the flow of experiences surrounding it—for example, celebrating the changing of the seasons, historic moments of the past, or major life changes. As Grondin translates Gadamer’s own words, “The festival is a commonality and is the representation of commonality itself in its consummated form.”²⁵ Festival, in comparison with recreation, is more readily capable of lending the temporal experience of getting swept up in play, of what Gadamer calls “going along with.”

As such, Gadamer argues that human beings, far from being in total control of the play enveloping them, are actually themselves played by the ritual structures of the past. As Grondin puts it:

Human understanding, acting, feeling, and loving . . . have less to do with planning, control and being consciously aware, and much more to do with a subcutaneous fitting into the rituality of life, in forms of tradition, in an event that encompasses us and that we can grasp only stutteringly.²⁶

²³ Jean Grondin, “Play, Festival, and Ritual in Gadamer: On the Theme of the Immemorial in his Later Works,” in *Language and Linguisticality in Gadamer’s Hermeneutics*, ed. L. K. Schmidt (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2001), p. 45.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

²⁵ Grondin, “Play, Festival, and Ritual in Gadamer,” p. 46. Cf. Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Die Aktualität des Schönen,” in Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 8 (Tübingen: JCB Mohr, 1986), p. 130.

²⁶ Grondin, “Play, Festival, and Ritual in Gadamer,” p. 57.

4. Dewey's Account of Transaction

Like Gadamer, Dewey became increasingly frustrated over the course of his career with the dualistic tendencies in philosophical treatments of inquiry. He spent much of his life trying to overcome the subject-object dichotomy on which post-Cartesian epistemology traded.²⁷ His work in *Knowing and the Known* seeks to “fix a set of leading words capable of firm use in the discussion of ‘knowings’ and ‘existings’ in that specialized region of research called the theory of knowledge.”²⁸ This is the central motivation behind much of Dewey's philosophy of inquiry. As he defines it:

Inquiry is the controlled or directed transformation of an *indeterminate situation* into one that is so determinate in its constituent distinctions and relations as to convert the elements of the original situation into a unified whole.²⁹

Dewey's notion of “situation,” which he had used since his earliest work, becomes, in *Knowing and the Known*, tied more deeply to “events” and “occurrences.” As Dewey and Bentley explain:

When an event is of the type that is readily observable in transition within the ordinary spans of human discrimination . . . we shall call it *occurrence* Thus, any one of the three words Situation, Occurrence and Object may, if focusing of attention shifts, spread over the range of the others. All being equally held as *Event*.³⁰

The similarities here between Deweyan “situations” and Heideggerian/Gadamerian “clearings” are more than superficial. All three thinkers were suspicious of Cartesian accounts of substance and turned instead

²⁷ The collected Dewey-Bentley correspondence, published separately from *Knowing and the Known*, is a worthwhile study as a proving-ground for a terminology they hoped would clarify key concepts in John Dewey's *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* (New York: Henry Holt, 1938). Though many terms used by Dewey were dropped for the publication of *Knowing and the Known*, one holdover was “inquiry,” indicating how much of the theoretical structure of their collaboration is owed to Dewey's view. Cf. *John Dewey and Arthur F. Bentley: A Philosophical Correspondence, 1932–1951*, ed. S. Ratner and J. Altman (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1964).

²⁸ Dewey and Bentley, *Knowing and the Known*, p. xi.

²⁹ John Dewey, *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry, Later Works*, vol. 12 (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984), p. 108 (emphasis added).

³⁰ Dewey and Bentley, *Knowing and the Known*, p. 70.

to “events” as the centerpieces of their ontologies. This also links up with the abandonment, in *Knowing and the Known*, of the separate terms “experience” and “knowledge” in favor of a single term—“knowing-known”—to cover both, as well as the choice to drop “individual” in favor of “organism.” Under this more precise terminology, Dewey and Bentley hope to make clear how human beings themselves were also events, in transaction with the events of their environment. As Dewey puts it elsewhere, “starting from the events that constitute life, living is a transaction which when it is analytically examined is found to be a continuous series of transactions carried on between organic structures and processes and environing conditions.”³¹

Dewey and Bentley begin their account of transaction in *Knowing and the Known* by comparing it with two general frameworks used to explain the world in the history of Western philosophy. The most ancient is the self-actional type of explanation, which Dewey and Bentley characterize as “where things are viewed as acting under their own power.”³² This is most apparent, perhaps, in early systemizations of physics, such as Aristotle’s, where the nature of the thing determines how it acts. By contrast, the explanatory framework handed down by the scientific revolution is one of interaction. Simply put, interaction is “where thing is balanced against thing in causal interconnectedness.”³³ Dewey and Bentley cite Newtonian physics as the chief example of the reductive approach that such a framework precipitates. The primary premise of interaction seems reasonable enough. If one knows all of the input variables, then the conclusion must follow, and it seems no mistake that such a notion was developed during a period of history when great strides in mathematics were being made. However, such a framework presupposes a fixed and unalterable contextual structure in which these entities interact, a context that is often “omitted from the process itself.”³⁴ Interaction models detach a subject matter from where it is situated; that is to say, they are inherently reductive, which is the greatest weakness of interactional thinking.

Properly understood, Dewey’s notion of transaction recognizes the tendrils of meaning that spread out toward the past and the future as gathered at one point—the present—and brought into focus to show some specific meaning. In this way, Dewey seeks in his philosophy to incorporate further the organism into the environment. An organism, after all, does not live without the necessities of life, food, air, and water, so it makes sense that in

³¹ John Dewey, *Unmodern Philosophy and Modern Philosophy* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2012), p. 235.

³² Dewey and Bentley, *Knowing and the Known*, p. 101.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

studying an organism, one must also study the organism's relation to these things.³⁵

Consequently, a transactional way of viewing the world relies upon the continuity between knowings and knowns. Dewey and Bentley take knowings and knowns to share an intimate relationship, where a known is a "firm name" into which knowings inquire, thereby modifying those names to fit better what becomes known. This stresses the event of knowing over the "object" as known. As a result, knowledge requires an openness to future possibilities, while remaining firmly grounded in the present of what we take to be fact—and this is precisely what Gadamer sees as the defining feature of play.

To stop at knowings and knowns, however, is to fall into the same pitfalls that are put forward by self-action and interaction. To do so is to take the knower as a fixed, external part of the process, leaving us to search in vain for "clear and distinct" ideas and rendering knowledge abstract and vacuous. Dewey counters this by putting forward the conceptual sequence of fact, event, and designation. A fact is some aspect of the cosmos that can be known. Dewey emphasizes that facts, as real, are independent of the knower. The cosmos is thus wholly knowable, as all facts are knowable, but there is no underlying substratum to reality. Rather, facts become apparent through events. Events are stressed as "the extensional and the durational" activity in which we observe a fact.³⁶ The observation of these events results in designation, or "naming as taking place in 'fact.'"³⁷ Knowledge is thus emphasized as concrete and experienced, as opposed to abstract and intellectual. When understood in this way, the similarities are striking between Dewey's sequence of fact-event-designation and Gadamer's sequence of play-festival-ritual.

The resulting picture is one where there is no outmoded reliance upon metaphysics in which meaning is put forward as a pre-epistemic entity. Nor is meaning epistemically centered, becoming vacuous, systematic, and abstract. Rather, the transactional model centers on knowledge as ontological. Dewey himself likens inquiry to embodied, organic processes in which an organism shapes and is shaped by its environment:

Hunger is a state of organic imbalance constituting need, not, however, in a mentalistic sense, but as a condition of active uneasiness which manifests itself in search for foodstuffs This biological aspect of activity when it is analyzed as a prototype will be found to furnish all the conditions and processes that describe search or inquiry in

³⁵ Ibid., p. 120.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 59.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 70.

its most thoroughly ideational or intellectual aspect . . . [I]n order to accomplish the function of re-adaptation, which will effect re-integration of living activity (the office for which they are called into play in the case of inquiry), they have finally to take effect through overt activities which modify environing activities. Discourse is use of qualities which we can ourselves generate—such as sounds and marks on paper—when we require them—to serve as intermediary agencies for bringing into existence a unified life-activity.³⁸

Simply put, when inquiry and the acquisition of knowledge are understood transactionally, there is no need to posit some sort of primordial principle of intelligibility; the structures of meaning emerge through the activity itself. In Dewey's terminology, organism and environment metabolize each other and produce growth. In Gadamerian terminology, play is an event that "raises into being" the players, the play things, and especially the play-world in an ongoing fashion.

Growth, as an outcome of transactional inquiry, eradicates the supposed ontological distinction between abstract "Reason," on the one hand, and immediate experience, on the other. According to Dewey, inquiry (and *ipso facto*, the growth that arises out of it) always already takes place in the *having* of an experience. Like Gadamer's view of play, Dewey's view of growth also had *ontological* implications. For instance, Dewey and Bentley see the cosmos "as system or field of factual inquiry," humans "as organisms," and humans' behavior "as organic-environmental events."³⁹

5. Conclusion

Gadamer claims that it is the play-world that becomes "true" for those wrapped up in play. Play is thus not interpreted by contrasting it with our world. It does not subsist in any other reality; it is fully its own. In this way, Gadamer believes that the play-world represents truth. To understand play's meaning is the same as understanding the everyday world, which is pushed into the background when we are in play but does not suddenly reappear to "transform things back to how they were" when play has concluded.⁴⁰ Rather, it is play that makes *this* world more intelligible. The things of the world that are usually hidden are made known to us (or brought into presence) only through the structure of play.

³⁸ Dewey, *Unmodern Philosophy and Modern Philosophy*, p. 224.

³⁹ Dewey and Bentley, *Knowing and the Known*, p. 84.

⁴⁰ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 112.

When one inquires transactionally, one begins in the spirit of play, understanding that the meanings within the event are tentative.⁴¹ Furthermore, since these meanings are not fixed, one cannot predetermine the output for any given input, and as such, one must seek to bring out the emergent structure of the situation. Through this process, the inquirer, or knowing organism, grows in understanding of the relation between the knower and the event. This new understanding, in turn, becomes the basis of further inquiry. Thus, play, understood transactionally, appears to be basic to thinking philosophically—and free play is the cradle of inquiry. If we should hope to live in a world where more people live philosophically, then everyone (children and adults) must be afforded greater opportunities to play.

⁴¹ Dewey and Bentley, *Knowing and the Known*, p. 113.

