Summary report for Canadian Ethics Bowl Tug of Logic 2023 / Michael Picard

With Research and Innovation funding, the game Tug of Logic was played by dozens of Canadian high school students alongside the national championships of the Canadian Ethics Bowl, which took place April 28-29, 2023, at the Canadian Museum of Human Rights in Winnipeg, Manitoba. This event, which gave the new game--now a web app--national exposure, followed upon its invited appearance at the 2019 Canadian Ethics Bowl Championships in its former form as a board-game. An invitation to bring the Tug of Logic web app back in 2024 has already been extended. A short video of the April 2023 Tug of Logic game has been prepared and can be found at https://youtu.be/qrXCOg1Y8Ds.

The game Tug of Logic was invented to overcome limitations of the form of public participatory philosophy known as Cafe Philosophy. As a web app the game structures multi-stage revisable voting (e.g. via player phones) along the lines of logical argument, enabling conversational inquiry. Built by Douglas College Computer Science students for purposes of civil discourse, the game has an obvious role in critical thinking classrooms, a staple offering of the Philosophy & Humanities Department. It is increasingly being integrated into my PHIL 1101 sections.

Tug of Logic works as virtual infrastructure for social reasoning. Bouts of dialogue (logical scrimmage) are facilitated by a game referee (instructor or advanced student). Opposing sides on controversial issues seek a sufficient vote rate on each necessary premises, a process that highlights and refines both common ground and points of dissensus. Players formulate individual premises which may be revised on the fly but must win enough (revisable) votes to advance. Nominal winners are those who, recognizing the strength of the argument constructed by opponents, switch over.

The 2023 Ethics Bowl event highlighted certain shortcomings of the app, including limited functionality on mobile devices. At the time, the app exist on a temporary host. Since then, Tug of Logic has garnered a major CEIT Innovative Technology award, under which the app has been installed in a permanent home on a virtual Douglas College server, and also rendered mobile friendly. Ongoing work to improve functionality and performance during live facilitated dialogue continues, as well as to explore the research, pedagogical and civil potential of the app.