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**PLAY, GAMES, AND PHILOSOPHY: A METAPHYSICAL AND AXIOLOGICAL
STUDY**

A Dissertation in

Kinesiology

by

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ABSTRACT

Much has been written about the nature and value of play and games. Indeed, philosophers and scholars from across the academy have spent considerable time and energy describing these phenomena. While most researchers believe that play and games are different, little consensus exists on whether or not they can be defined and, if so, what exactly they are. Likewise, while most writers agree that play and games have some normative value, there has been much less agreement on precisely what that value is. Therefore, this study constitutes an attempt to re-conceptualize and clarify the nature and value of play and games.

As such, this research is both metaphysical and normative in nature. The metaphysical side of this work attempts to identify central features of games and play. The normative analysis is constructed on those features. Insights for both parts of this research are gleaned primarily from the existing literature as well as reflections on personal play and game experiences.

Chapter One provides a critical summary of play and game analyses from the Classical Period, the Middle Ages and Renaissance, the Enlightenment, 20th Century American Pragmatism, and the Modern Era socio-historians and cultural scientists. From this literature I identify points of possible consensus and disagreement as well as recurring themes that deserve further attention. Chapter Two is an analysis of the contemporary dialogue on play and games. I will argue that while considerable progress has been made on the nature and value of play and games, significant questions still remain. In Chapter Three I address one of those questions. It is related to the conflation of play and games. This chapter includes examples of conflation in scholarly writing, an analysis of play and games as both attitudes and activities, and speculations on three sources or causes of conflation. Chapter Four is a metaphysical and axiological re-conceptualization of play and games. The metaphysical arguments of the first half of this chapter (play as autotelic, fragile, voluntary, and uncertain, and games as challenges or problems,

gratuitous, and conventional) lead to the normative claims that follow. Play and games so described, I suggest, provide a deeper engagement with the world than that which is afforded by ordinary or normal existence.

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Introduction

Play and games are often associated with children. In fact, we think of them as the special domain of children, or occasionally too of adults who (usually for brief periods of time) “forget themselves” and act like children. This may be part of the allure of games and play. They cause us to engage the world differently. In play and games, we often feel free from the necessity, responsibilities, and consequences that characterize our everyday lives. We are drawn to play and games because they are interesting and intriguing experiences. We often cannot help but play and participate in games. They are wonderful interludes and addicting distractions that break up our daily lives of instrumentality and utility.

In spite of our keen interest in play and games, we rarely spend time reflecting on them – at least not as much as we devote to religion, politics, ethics, social issues, and other so-called “important” matters. Even so, many of the world’s greatest thinkers throughout the ages have noticed the importance of play and games and have produced analyses about them.

These scholars, however, often come to very different conclusions about play and games. Regarding play, for example, authors have struggled to identify exactly what play is. Is it an activity? Is it an attitude? What are its characteristics? How can we identify it in our lives? While much has been written on the nature of play, and some progress has been made in answering these questions, much remains to be done.

When discussing games, authors have struggled to understand the exact nature of games and their value in our lives. How are games different from other similar activities? How do they fit into our lives? Game scholars have also had difficulty identifying the value of games. Should we take them more seriously? Should we take them less seriously? Are they worthy endeavors or just distracting and frivolous activities?

My goal in this study is to better understand the nature and value of games and play by answering some questions that the literature has left unresolved. In doing so, I will rely on a dual methodology that I employ throughout the study. First, much of my analysis comes from a critical review of the existing scholarship on these two phenomena. Many scholars throughout history have written on play and games. Although some of their insights are buried underneath their discussions of “more important” topics such as religion or politics, their arguments address important issues or themes pertaining to play and games. Many current scholars have written about these two phenomena, as well. Some of them built on earlier scholars’ ideas while others have blazed their own trails toward better understanding play and games. Throughout my analysis of the existing literature I will try to make some sense of these manifold and sometimes incompatible claims.

My second methodology is experiential. Play and games are lived phenomena. Everyone plays and participates in games to some extent, and so it could be argued that each of us has a reservoir of experiences from which we can draw for this research. Therefore, I reflect on my play and game experiences (and those of others) for insight into the nature and value of these human endeavors.

In the beginning of this study, I analyze the existing literature on play and games with an eye toward drawing out themes that help us to better understand these phenomena. I start with earlier authors and end with those that have written more recently. From this critical review, I elaborate on one of the most prominent issues within the play and game literature – namely, the conflation of play and games – that helps me develop insights on the relationship between the two phenomena. The final section is largely the theoretical culmination of my study. In a sense, it is when I put it all together by presenting modified metaphysical and axiological descriptions of play and games. These re-conceptualizations emerge from my review of the literature and from my experiential reflections.

With the aforementioned logic in mind, I progress through the first two chapters chronologically and the last two thematically. Chapter One is an analysis of the historical dialogue of play and games. From Plato and Aristotle up through the latter decades of the twentieth century, many scholars have written on play and games. Their descriptions, while unrefined in many ways compared to more recent scholarship, provide insight on important issues pertaining to the nature and value of play and games.

Chapter Two is an analysis of the contemporary discussions of play and games. Many of these authors built on the ideas of early authors, and others did not. In many cases, these authors have made distinctions between play and games as two separate phenomena. Accordingly, their arguments often deal with the identification of specific characteristics or traits of the nature and value of play and games.

In Chapters Three and Four, I present my own analyses. These are the chapters in which I put together the previous literature and my reflections on personal experiences of play and games to present new arguments. In Chapter Three I claim that the relationship between play and games has not been accurately described. In fact, I give examples of scholarship that either has not described a difference between play and games or has not been clear about the relationship between the two. I describe the metaphysical relationship between play and games in a new way that identifies them as bi-modal – as both acts and objects, both attitudes and activities.

In Chapter Four, I continue to build on these metaphysical ideas. The first part of this chapter includes a re-conceptualization of the nature of play and games. I present four characteristics that I think are central to understanding play and three characteristics for games. These traits do not create a hard and fast definition nor do they constitute Wittgensteinian signposts. Instead, they are core facets that highlight their unique characteristics while not pretending to exhaust their various features.

The second part of Chapter Four is axiological, and it builds on my metaphysical ideas. I believe that play and games provide a deeper engagement with the world than our normal, everyday experiences. I refer to characteristics that describe what a deeper engagement with the world entails and then I present five examples of ways in which play and games promote this deeper engagement. In this section I praise the value of play and games in our lives. Because they provide a deeper engagement with the world, I believe that they have a greater potential value than that for which we often give them credit. I argue that they allow us to experience the world in deeper ways than allowed by our normal engagement in our workaday lives.

Chapter 1

HISTORICAL DIALOGUE ON PLAY AND GAMES

This chapter marks the beginning of a metaphysical and axiological study of play and games. It will consider claims made by a number of authors who previously examined these phenomena and encourage us to reflect on our own experiences of them. We all play and participate in games to some extent, but we do not always consider how these experiences fit into our lives. That is, while play and games seem to be relatively common entities, it does not necessarily follow that we know them well. I hope that a better understanding of play and games as lived phenomena will help clarify the sometimes confusing experiential world that includes them.

As the first step in this study, it is important to understand what early scholars say about play and games. While dialogue on issues such as truth, justice, politics, and the good life is common among philosophers, there is also a dialogue on play and games that is less prominent but, arguably, no less important. Some of the world's most respected thinkers have written about these human projects, and what they have to say needs to be included in the current conversation.

Students of human behavior have been attracted to play and games for thousands of years, and scholars across the ages have attempted to unravel their mysteries. So as I start my study of play and games I will lean on many early authors, not simply as a perfunctory way of introducing play and game topics but rather to learn from them. While it will be clear throughout this study that I do not agree with all the arguments from the authors to which I refer, I think that each one can add to scholarly dialogue in substantive ways. The intellectual journey marked by thinkers from previous eras can, among other things, serve as a guide to the major themes in the

study of these phenomena. For instance, even though Plato lived in a different context from what we know today and even though he did not benefit from perspectives provided by contemporary science and other forms of current scholarship, his ideas pointed to important issues that are still central to understanding play and games.

The historical dialogue on play and games will include authors from the Classical Period, the Middle Ages and Renaissance, the Enlightenment, 20th Century American Pragmatism, and Modern Era socio-historians and cultural scientists. I have chosen writers in each of these five periods because they all discuss play and games in meaningful ways. They are not the only authors in their time periods who addressed these topics, but they offer a good sampling of voices in this centuries-long dialogue. Through this timeline I will be tracing ideas about the nature of play and games and how they fit into our lives. Many of the authors come to similar conclusions. Many were familiar with the arguments from previous authors I cite and thus, build on one another. Yet there will also be many differences in their thoughts. I will examine the work of each author on play and games while drawing out thematic issues in their scholarship that are relevant to understanding these two human projects.

Before digging into the early literature, I will offer a brief description of play and games to provide reference points for this research. Many things are called games and play, so it is necessary to identify, at least in general terms, the objects of inquiry.

We talk about play as experiences of amusement, diversion, recreation, or sport. In our daily usage, play is normally connected to fun or jest and is often seen in opposition to that which is serious, necessary, or instrumental. We use the term “play” as a verb to mean “participate in” (baseball, e.g.), “operate” (a video game), “perform” (a piano selection), or “manipulate” (as in, “I’m just playing around with you”).¹ We also use it as a noun to refer to diversions ranging from free play (e.g., frolic and impromptu dance) to more structured activities (sport). We use it to describe theatrical productions (a Broadway play), natural occurrences (the play of lights on the

hillside), and specific sporting instances (a passing play in football). This broad usage of play as both a verb and noun may be seen negatively as an undue expansion of the play concept. Yet it may also be grounded in similarities or Wittgensteinian family resemblances that connect one to the other, even when such connections may not be obvious.

In the sport philosophy literature, most authors revisit Huizinga's work when studying the nature of play. In fact, Huizinga is often seen as providing the base camp for treks up the mountain of play metaphysics. His magnum opus, *Homo Ludens*, is as comprehensive as it is authoritative. He writes that play is "a free activity standing quite consciously outside 'ordinary' life" that "intensely and utterly" absorbs the player. It is an activity in which "no profit can be gained." It has "its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner." And lastly, it encourages the formation of "social groupings" that are generally characterized by an element of "secrecy" through "disguise or other means." While these characteristics are not all agreed upon by every author, they form a basic understanding of play in our world and our lives.²

Games, on the other hand, are activities we relate to amusement, diversion, recreation, or sport. We often call them pastimes because they are activities in which we participate during our leisure. The term "game" in our daily lexicons can mean any activity we do not take seriously ("this is just a game to them"), a manner of being insincere ("games people play"), an activity that is an instantiation of a sport ("the championship game"), an activity that is associated with betting or wagering ("gaming tables"), or even certain animals that are hunted ("large game"). Therefore "games" seems to be the established term for any number of activities and things in our experiential landscape. Some of them are more inconsequential, light-hearted, or unnecessary than our normal activities and some are more challenging, intense, and meaningful. Regardless, the term "game" seems to imply an activity that has a means-ends structure that is different in some way from our ordinary life experiences.

In the sport philosophy literature, Bernard Suits' metaphysics of games serves as the gold standard for understanding these phenomena. On Suits' rendering, games have four fundamental characteristics. He describes game playing or participating as "the attempt to achieve a specific state of affairs [the goal – characteristic #1], using only means permitted by rules [the means – characteristic #2], where the rules prohibit use of more efficient in favor of less efficient means [the constitutive rules – characteristic #3], and where the rules are accepted just because they make possible such activity [the lusory attitude – characteristic #4]."³ Suits also provides a shorter description. Game playing, he says, "is the voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles."⁴

At the end of the chapter, we will have a better idea of the nature of games and play because we will have seen what a number of other authors have written about them. We will discover in Chapter Two that many of the themes apparent in the historical dialogue on these human projects are further developed by modern scholars and will prove useful in my own analyses in Chapters Three and Four. For now, I will begin the historical dialogue chronologically.

The Classical Period

In this section, I will analyze the writings of Plato (428-348 B.C.) and Aristotle (384-322 B.C.) on play and games. Both of these Greek philosophers are direct descendants in the academic lineage of Socrates – the father of philosophy. Both of them wrote about and immersed themselves in discussions on any number of topics from human nature and politics to education and the nature of happiness. These topics often overshadow their analyses of play and games.

Plato and Aristotle lived in Athens at a time when some of the most prominent and organized play and games involved a handful of Olympic-like sporting festivals that marked the

Greek calendars. Further, both of these scholars incorporated physical activity into the educational training of young people that they mentored. However, their views on play and games differ in significant ways.

Plato

Much of Plato's work focuses on describing the good life. He develops a philosophy of how the state can help its citizens aspire to fine living. This places the spotlight on education. Not only teachers, he argues, but also parents and other adults must be a part of the educational process of the young citizens. The word Plato uses for education is *paideia*, a term that is etymologically similar to *paidia* – or play. These two words come from the root *pais*, referring to the activity of the child. So *paidia*, or play, is closely related to *paideia*, or education. For Plato, this is a meaningful connection.⁵ Both of these terms implicitly refer to children, but it seems as though Plato employs them in conjunction with a broader segment of the population.

Plato's writings reinforce his basic ideas about the connection between play and pedagogy. The dialectic style of communication he uses throughout his scholarship indicates a playful attitude toward education. He has faced criticism for this, as his opponents argue that in his writing he values things that are not serious. That is, the way he does philosophy is not sufficiently serious. His response to this criticism is that play is the most divine or "best part of us."⁶ Man is God's toy. When we are at play, it is pleasing to God because we are joyfully experiencing Divine creation. By enjoying God's creation, we are fulfilling our humanity – or that which God created us to do.

While we still have seemingly serious duties to take care of in the world that cannot be neglected, Plato defends the divinity of *paidia* by saying that no one is better suited to meet those demands than the person who has been educated in a playful spirit.⁷ This education starts in

childhood. Play and games are clearly a part of the good life for children because they are the ones most in need of education. He states, “A child must be happy, free from sorrow and pain as far as its childish desires permit ... From 3 to 6 years of age children should be absorbed in play, in games of their own devising.”⁸ It is obvious that Plato sees games and play as important aspects of good living for children – a claim that very few would dispute.

It even seems plausible to argue that not just children but people of all ages would do well to be “absorbed in play” and participate in “games of their own devising.” Plato has people of all ages in mind when he describes play as a valuable tool for further education. He alludes to the power of play when he proclaims, “You can discover more about a person in an hour of play than in a year of conversation,” and, “Life must be lived as play.”⁹ Although these claims must be understood in the context of Plato’s larger work, they seem to suggest that he values play highly – perhaps as highly as most anything else in the world.

Play’s value is especially evident in the context of education. Plato makes the previously-cited laudatory statements as he talks about playful behavior aiming at the ultimate goal of educated or knowledgeable citizens. Furthermore, in Plato’s philosophy play seems necessary for education. He claims that people cannot be forced to learn, but should instead be coaxed into learning through play that is, as something they enjoy, as a way of softening an experience that can be tedious. He would argue that the teacher who uses play as a tool for education toward the ultimate goal of acquiring knowledge is the one who is most likely to be successful.

We often gain knowledge through a dialectical form of play. The play of a deep conversation or the play of a mature debate – both activities in which knowledge is sought – constitutes good living for Plato. While many people engage in debates simply to win, such behavior is regarded by Plato as immature and not a part of the good life.¹⁰ He sees deep and mature dialectical conversation as a high level and respectable activity. This is so because it is

earnest or serious in nature and works toward the ends of education, even though it is still a form of play.

Plato was one of the first to identify one of the nettlesome problems in play theory – namely, the relationship between play and seriousness, the apparently contradictory attitudes of frivolity and intensity. Plato’s analysis suggests that the two may be compatible. Childlike play may tend to be more relaxed and spontaneous. Adult play may be more focused. Childlike play may be more frivolous and delightful, while much adult play may be better described as more meaningful. In this way we can reconcile Plato’s ideas of *paidia* as either child-like behavior *or* mature, serious adult activity, something that stands as a more meaningful version of the play of children. Child’s play and serious dialectical conversation can each constitute comparable forms of good living, even though they may seem like very different forms of behavior.

Plato’s arguments about the merits of *paidia* demonstrate his focus on play as extrinsically valuable. He often refers to play as useful in the service of his ultimate goal of securing knowledge. If knowledge is the ultimate goal for Plato, then one is living well when gaining knowledge, and play is simply the vehicle for doing so.

Plato seems to be absorbed in extrinsic play in his written dialogues. *The Republic* is written with wit and irony that make Plato appear playful to the reader.¹¹ Most philosophy is not so infiltrated with sardonic asides and lighthearted banter. Neo-platonists claim that he presents himself as being very playful in order to underscore his thesis – namely, that education which leads to the ultimate good of knowledge must be playful. Jaeger explains this relationship, stating that in Plato’s writings, “*paidia* helps *paideia* [play helps education].”¹²

Jaeger goes on to explain that Plato worries about playful activities becoming ends in themselves and allowing their participants to stray from the emphasis on education.¹³ Music and gymnastics are the two main components of education that are at risk of becoming their own ends. This presents a philosophical dilemma. Plato sees play as standing in the service of

education, and so he worries about young people losing their focus on education by turning their attention to the intrinsic lure of music or gymnastics – that is, music or gymnastics as play. Most other scholars see play as behavior that is an end in itself. As we will see later, they use the terms intrinsically valuable or autotelic to distinguish play from activities that are driven by utility or necessity.

Accordingly, Plato brings up an important theme in the discussion of play that will continue to be prominent in the analysis of the forthcoming authors – namely, play’s utility. He leaves no doubt about the utility of children’s play but also commends the extrinsic benefits of more sophisticated forms of play among intellectually capable adults. Play, then, can be useful for people of all ages. Anyone can learn things through play. This theme, as we will see, portrays one of the major paradoxes of play. Play’s utility may depend on its engagement as something for which utility is beside the point. From the player’s perspective play is what it is because it is autotelic or intrinsically valued, but from the third person perspective play may well be seen as exotelic, or good for something else.

Aristotle

Aristotle, in much the same manner as Plato, uses the term *paidia* when he refers to play. He uses it to define the play of children and frivolous play of those who act *like* children. Play is not very durable but is good in the here and now – during the time that it lasts. Aristotle puts it into context as that which is good only in moderation or as an instrument for relaxation. In *Nicomachean Ethics*, he explains why *paidia* is not and should not be the end in life. Happiness, he says, constitutes the good life. “Happiness does not consist in play, for it would even be absurd for our end to be play, and to work hard and undergo troubles all through one’s life for the sake of playing.”¹⁴

Aristotle notes that *paidia* is self-sufficient or intrinsically valuable but that it cannot be the ultimate goal in life because anyone is capable of it. *Paidia* requires no practical judgment or admirable quality. By this, Aristotle means that *paidia* can be a part of the lives of immature or unfulfilled humans – children and slaves. Children and slaves cannot attain the completion of character that is necessary for the good life because, for Aristotle, they are not capable of appropriately ordering their own lives. While children and slaves engage in *paidia*, they do not have the ability to make respectable moral decisions. A child or a slave does not know when to be earnest and when to be playful, often leading to *paidia* that is harmful or out of place. The person living the good life (not a child or slave) engages in types of play that are more suitable to living well – proper play. Aristotle acknowledges the inherent appeal in proper play. He proclaims, “Those who are playful in a harmonious way are called charming, as being readily flexible, for such acts seem to be motions that come from one’s character.”¹⁵

Following his discussion of *paidia* (which we might describe today as being somewhat elitist¹⁶), Aristotle describes the suitability of contemplation as an activity that expresses the good life and play. Contemplation, or *theoria*, is the active being of the intellect, and Aristotle takes it to be the pinnacle of activities that promote practical judgment and constitute good living. *Theoria* is good because it is closely connected to wisdom and because one can participate in it for long periods of time. “In contemplation,” Aristotelian scholar Joe Sachs explains, “a human being is most fully active, in that the power underlying all thinking and perceiving has emerged, but also most at rest in what is knowable.”¹⁷ If contemplation is a form of play, then play can be very powerful and an important contributor to the good life.

In *Metaphysics*, Aristotle discusses habitual and respectable behaviors in a way that will further illuminate contemplation and other activities that may be considered play. Flute playing or other activities often associated with play necessitate previous action and reason to learn or develop the requisite habits. This habit formation requires what is often a slow learning process.

Eventually, when one gains the potential for flute playing in the sense that one knows how to play the flute but is not playing it, the idea of choice or desire plays a strong role in the governance of behavior as it pertains to that activity. Deep play develops, then, as an individual desires or chooses to play the flute when certain conditions are present. Such is the addiction of play activities. Aristotle proclaims that “everything that has a potency in accordance with reason must do this whenever it desires that of which it has the potency and in the way that it has it.”¹⁸

In the flute playing example, *praxis* is the term Aristotle uses for action. It is that which is chosen and “presupposes deliberation and forethought.”¹⁹ Aristotle makes it clear that choice is the foundation of *praxis*. Choice is rooted in desire and “a rational understanding which is for the sake of something.”²⁰ He continues by stating, “There is no choice without intellect and thinking (*theoria*), or without ... character, since in action (*praxis*) there is no such thing as doing well or the opposite without thinking and character.”²¹ So Aristotle sees reason and respectable decision-making as the foundation for both *praxis* and *theoria*.

Just as contemplation is a completion of the intellect when one is contemplating, *praxis* is the complete ongoing occurrence of a motion when one who has already developed the reasonable habit of playing the flute, for example, is playing the flute. “The mark of what comes to be in complete activity,” Aristotle explains, “as a result of thinking, is that, whenever it is desired it comes about when nothing outside prevents it.”²² This is why we play. Nothing prevents us from engaging in these activities that we desire. He expands on this idea, saying that “people have the house-building power in order that they may build houses, and the contemplative power in order that they may contemplate.”²³ People have these powers of *praxis* and *theoria* that they may exercise them because they are good as ends in themselves. They do not have these powers in order that they may practice them as instruments for other things (even though we often build houses for extrinsic reasons – for example, safety and shelter). The *praxis* of house-building or flute playing is a power that humans have so that they may build houses or

play the flute. When we are playing the flute or building a house for its own sake, then Aristotle might agree that we are at play.

Praxis and *theoria* are ways that humans interact with the natural world around them. They are ways in which humans attain a deeper engagement with the world to understand it more fully. People living the good life do so because they have virtues or character traits to understand the world that have emerged as a result of their deep and habitual play experiences – what Aristotle refers to as *praxis* and *theoria*. The activities of building houses, playing the flute, and contemplating can be a part of the good life if they are intrinsically valued as play.

Aristotle's discussion of play leads us to the issue of choice or desire in play. Play seems to be a way of encountering the world that lies at our discretion – at least to some extent. We can choose to engage in particular activities that often (though not always) get us into the play mode.

Many later researchers of play allude to what at least appears to be a contrary notion of play. While they may not disagree entirely with Aristotle's claims about agency and play, they emphasize the spontaneity, unpredictability, or ambiguous causality of play. Aristotle seems to be saying something different. He does not deny that play has an element that we cannot control but he also posits our ability to choose the activities that we think will get us into the play spirit. Aristotle uses the examples of flute playing and house building, but we can think of many other activities that we deliberately choose in seeking out play. This choice drives us into deep play. When we find that a particular activity has become a desired and meaningful part of our lives, then we seem capable of taking play matters into our own hands. That is, we are able to choose that particular activity as a play-enabler when nothing outside prevents it.

Aristotle's discussion of play also leads us to the understanding that play transcends sport and games. While he acknowledges physical activities such as Olympic contests, flute playing, and recreational house building, he also draws our attention to contemplation as a form of play. Since these activities are very different, he seems to be saying that play is the larger category

because it can incorporate all of them. A large variety of doings are or can be ends in themselves (autotelic or intrinsic), making them play. A number of forthcoming authors will reinforce the importance of this theme. They also cite contemplation as a form of play. As we will see in Chapter Two, though, much of the current literature on play neglects contemplative activity and relies heavily on games as exemplars of play.

The Middle Ages and Renaissance

After the writings of Plato and Aristotle in the Classical period of history, Christian thought dominated much of the Western world. In the first sixteen centuries of the Christian era, the majority of popular Western thinkers were trained in the context of Christianity. Therefore, in the second subdivision of the historical discussion of games and play I will analyze the writings of theologians St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) and John Calvin (1509-1564).

Aquinas, who lived during the Middle Ages, is a Scholastic thinker and used Aristotelian ideas as a foundation for much of his thought. An Italian priest of the Dominican Order in the Catholic Church, he ministered during an era in which the church calendar left large amounts of time for festivals, celebrations, and game playing. Calvin, a figure of the Renaissance, was instrumental in the Protestant Reformation. Clergy of his era debated the merits of sports and games (were they devilish pastimes or godly pursuits?), and often weighed in on the side of labor over leisure. A French theologian who spent much of his adult life in Switzerland, Calvin's notions on play and games are based on his interpretations of Biblical scripture.

Thomas Aquinas

As a basis for understanding Aquinas' scholarly work, it is important to note two things: first, he is a theologian who has influenced the thought of the Roman Catholic Church as much as any other Christian thinker, and second, he is well known as a scholar who integrated and furthered the ideas of Aristotle and St. Augustine. Therefore he occupies a central place in the web of the history of Western thought. His ideas on play and games reflect this infusion of classical Greek and early Christian thinking. Likewise, his arguments are in line with his era's medieval views of leisure that support the right to play – even on the Sabbath.

In Aquinas' writings, he describes play and games in the form of sport. He alludes to these two phenomena as essentially indistinguishable from each other even though they have different derivations in his native Italian. So it is likely that he saw a difference between play, on one hand, and games and sport, on the other. Nevertheless, he describes them in similar ways, saying, "Play is delightful," followed by the claim that "sports are not means to ends but are sought for their own sake."²⁴ The first part of his description seems obvious. Play is often tied up with joy and happiness. The second part, however, requires a further analysis.

Aquinas devotes a section in *Summa Contra Gentes* to understanding the ends to which we act. He explains that "there are actions that do not seem to be for any end, as things done for sport, and acts of contemplation."²⁵ After citing these two examples, he says that if they seem to be done for no end then they are being done as ends in themselves. To be sure, Aquinas admits that sport and contemplation can be done as means to ends such that we may "return to work more vigorously" for example, but there is also worthwhile sport and contemplation "as when one plays solely for the amusement he finds in play."²⁶ Thus play and games, to him, can be either intrinsically or extrinsically valued by the player.

Aquinas seems to be most Aristotelian when he explains the similarities between play and contemplation or wisdom. "Notice how aptly contemplating is compared with playing," he

states.²⁷ Contemplating, or the act of gaining wisdom, is delightful and can be its own end just like playing. This idea makes explicit what Aristotle implied about play. Aquinas relates play to what Aristotle called *praxis* (action) and *theoria* (contemplation). So as Aristotle describes contemplation directly after his description of play in order to show a connection, Aquinas leaves no doubt that he thinks this is an accurate explanation.

For Aquinas, play is not the end of life. Like Aristotle, he argues that happiness is the objective to which we all should strive. Play can be a part of the good life, though. Aristotle and Aquinas both state that there are times when play is important, and there are times when it is necessary. Aristotle calls the ability to play when appropriate, “charm,” while Aquinas calls it “wittiness.” That is, the person who makes the important judgment to play when the situation calls for playfulness is charming or witty. The necessity of play comes from the obligation to not be a burden to others. Aquinas says that “it is against reason” to act “as a wet blanket.” Those who seem to be perpetually closed to play and who “never say anything ridiculous” are going against reasonable judgment in their lives.²⁸

Aquinas tries to be reasonable about all things in life. His philosophy is one of seeing parts of the world in harmony with the whole. Play is a part, and he attempts to fit it in with the whole of life. Happiness is the end goal and play can foster happiness when appropriate, but he is clear that one does not have to be focused on the end goal at all times. When a man takes a journey, he does not have to be focused on getting to his final destination with every step he takes. Instead, it is good to have pleasurable moments of play or contemplation that are their own ends even though there is an ultimate end to the journey that lies beyond the doing.

Since play has been justified as a reasonable part of life through Aquinas’ philosophy, he also seeks to fit it into his theological scheme. In, *Summa Theologica*, he analyzes play in the context of Christianity. Is there a Christian play virtue? Is play a sin? Is the excess or absence of play a sin? When thinking about play in this context, Aquinas begins by detailing a story about

the Apostle John of the New Testament, who had been accused of playfully (frivolously) interacting with the disciples. He asked his accuser to shoot a bow and arrow, and then asked if the man could do that endlessly. The man responded that after a point, the wood of the bow would break, to which John replied that it is the same with people. We cannot be rigid and serious at all times in our lives. So relaxation is necessary and “there is a kind of rest that is associated with games.”²⁹

In discussing the virtue of play, Aquinas provides three warnings that help us distinguish between good and bad play. The first is that play must not be indecent or injurious. No harm should come from our pleasant experiences. Secondly, play should not make a person’s life imbalanced. One must maintain proper portions of work and play. Thirdly, circumstances matter. One must take into account the person, time, and place to determine whether play is appropriate or not. Developing the habit of following these three guidelines about play is, for Aquinas, an important step to take, one that results in virtuous behavior.³⁰

Play is not a sin in itself for Aquinas, but excessive play is. Excessive play is simply that which is not virtuous according to the rules stated above. Excessive play is indecent, creates an imbalance, or occurs in unwarranted circumstances. On the other hand, Aquinas argues that the absence of play is also a sin. Whatever goes against reason is sinful, and since there are times when it is reasonable that one should play, it follows that there are times when it is a sin to not play.

The themes from this section of his writings are ones that speak to moderation and reason in all things, including play. Moderation is a fundamental issue surrounding the nature of play. Aquinas makes a point that play is periodic, rhythmic, and related to those things in our lives that are not play. Play is good at times but not at others. The moderation of play is important because both the absence of play and its excesses are, from his perspective, sins.

Much subsequent play literature neglected this idea of moderation. Consequently, many authors wrote about play while using a lens that was too rosy and, at the same time, ignoring its dangers. They discussed the normative value of play as among the best or most pleasing of all human experiences. In doing so, they often failed to see its potential for creating imbalances. They also failed to delineate different qualities of play – a gradation between that which is appropriate and inappropriate, compelling and lacking appeal, personal and impersonal. Aquinas opens our eyes to the possibility that play is a mixed good, and John Calvin furthers this point.

John Calvin

Calvin espouses the same theme as Aquinas, one of moderation and reason in all earthly things. He uses the word sobriety, though, to explain his notion of temperance or moderation toward the things of the world. As a champion of the Protestant Reformation, he took Martin Luther's theological ideas and made them even more radical. Calvin, a trained lawyer, formed his worldview around Biblical scripture. He preached that the Bible should be authoritative as the word of God and used that principle to guide his life.

As leader of the city of Geneva, Calvin sought the *Lex Dei* for his constituents. This included bans on dancing, card playing, and participating in dice games as part of a thick set of moral codes. Because of these socially conservative rules, Calvin is understood to be the father of the Protestant work ethic, an attitude that Puritans brought with them across the Atlantic to the New World. This strict moral code and its labor- and duty-oriented concomitants would not seem to leave much room for play and games, but Calvin does not dismiss them entirely. In fact he does not show an inherent aversion to leisure activities. He simply does not trust the ability of players to play in moderation.

Calvin discusses earthly joys and pleasures, which would include participation in play and games, without condemnation. A person can and should be involved in them as long as it is understood that they are gifts from God and as long as they are not taken to excess. Once again, “sobriety” is the term Calvin uses here to mean avoiding excess. It connotes not just the absence of drunkenness, but also “keeping in check the disorderly impulses of the spirit, and showing love towards the weak things in the world around us.”³¹ This all-important term leaves little room for either frivolous, impulsive distractions or any other kind of play that our previous authors have discussed unless, of course, such behavior is in line with God’s will.

The theme of Calvin’s theology is working at one’s calling or duty to God, and so the notion of sobriety occupies a far more central place in his scheme of things than play or games. Each person’s main duty is to serve God, but if a person plays or participates in games, then the activity should be engaged in with thanksgiving to God for providing it. As Calvin explains, God made the fragrant flowers and the delicious fruit that we may enjoy their beauty, scents, and taste. To enjoy these sensory gifts (as playful experiences) is not to sin but to partake in God’s earthly gifts. However, one must take caution not to overdo it. Calvin states that God creates all earthly gifts for our good and not for our destruction. So his earthly gifts must be used with that in mind. We smell the flowers and eat the fruit in moderation when we know that they are for our good. When we experience earthly gifts in excess it leads to destruction. Smelling the flowers for too long creates a lack of productivity for God, and eating too much fruit will make one sick and unable to work.³²

So God provides earthly gifts (including play and games) as a means of experiencing his goodness. The other and more important means to this end, of course, is work. Calvin might be speaking a bit polemically when he prioritizes work over play and games, but he does so with good reason. Humans are, with all things equal, naturally drawn to play much more easily than they are drawn to work. Accordingly, Calvin noticed that humans are very inclined to sin,

especially by playing inappropriately. His remedy for this situation is to encourage us to work in service to God. This way, our attention will not be on earthly things but on heavenly things.

He is consistent, then, to push for work over play. When working, we are focused on task completion, rewards, and consequences. Calvin sees heaven and God's mercy as rewards for work well done. When at play, on the other hand, we are engaged in the process of a task or activity itself. We can still recognize God while at play, but often we are often so deeply focused on our activity that we forget all else. Work, because it is a means to something else, better allows us to remember larger purposes. This breeds greater devotion to God. Play, because of its powerful ends-value, often breeds yet more play and takes more time away from God and God's purposes. As the old self-effacing, neo-Calvinist joke goes, "We frown upon sex because it leads to dancing."

Calvin clearly understands, then, that play is dangerous in that it can become an addiction, even for ordinarily rational people. Why would we play when we can be much more productive than that? And why would we not work knowing, as we do, that work lacks the dangerous addictive power of play? These questions highlight one of the themes of the play literature – namely, that play can draw us into delightfully dangerous and deeply meaningful experiences. Play activities have alluring powers about them that call out to us and pull us from our workaday mindsets. When we play, we find activities that we love and want to experience in moderation – or not! This can lead to our demise if we are not careful. So Calvin encourages us to keep play in appropriate bounds. Striking a healthy balance between play and work may be a difficult task because of the trappings of social pressure and the human inclinations toward sin, but Calvin and Aquinas claim that it is a balance worth striving for.

The Enlightenment

After Calvin and the Reformation came the Enlightenment – a period marked by an interest in human reason and rationality as authoritative for earthly matters. Academicians de-emphasized the explanatory power of theology and concomitantly turned toward empirical science and human reason. The Enlightenment brought about new ways of trying to understand what it means to be human. Friedrich von Schiller (1759-1805), a German poet, philosopher, historian, and playwright, studied play as a part of what he described as “the aesthetic education of man.” He lived in a time when British sports were just starting to become organized. But even if Schiller knew of these games, he did not address them in his writings. He was much more interested in the mind-body problem, human nature, poetry, theatre, and what he saw as the frivolous play of the senses.

Friedrich von Schiller

Friedrich von Schiller studied play by focusing on the beauty that man expresses (and experiences) when his formal and sensuous impulses are in balance. *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* is a text in which he describes the beauty of this balanced duality in human nature from a tempered idealistic perspective. Humans are different from animals in that they have the ability to reason and think conscientiously. This speaks to our intelligence. However, Schiller explains that human nature involves more than just an ability to reason and make logical decisions. Humans also have feelings and emotions and thus are not cognitively rigid and entirely rational. In fact, humans live best when they find themselves in the middle ground between primal animals and abstractly robotic creatures – that is, when they respond to their play impulse. Play then, as the balance of this duality, allows humans to reach their ideal as completed or whole creatures.

Schiller states that play is the perfection of humans in that it represents those times when they are most balanced. When at play, humans have equilibrium between their formal and sensuous impulses. The formal impulse controls us morally while the sensuous impulse controls us physically. These two are always acting on us to some extent but are in balance only during play.

This argument is dualistic. The sensual-formal duality is only one set of polarities that Schiller alludes to in his attempt to describe play metaphysically. He also mentions life-form, active-passive, tempering-exciting, and gentleness-energy. All of these binomial factors come into balance in play. It is only “play which makes man complete and develops simultaneously his two-fold nature.”³³ Play is the actualization of beauty as it unites gentle grace with energy, form with life, relaxation with excitement, activity with passivity, and the moral with the physical parts of a person. Both sides of these dualities “remain eternally opposed to one another” and cannot be suppressed, and play brings out the best in each side of the struggle.³⁴ A person’s two-fold nature is in harmony when he or she is at play and constitutes his or her state of wholeness, completion, or perfection.

Schiller’s dualistic exposition on the nature of play and its beauty hints at two themes frequently found in the literature. The first is play’s fragility. When Schiller talks about the continuous struggle among the dualities, it is easy to see how play is fragile. The formal and sensuous impulses tug at a person for control. Too much formal or moral impulse leaves a person at the mercy of reason only. A person then becomes too wooden, rigid, and robotic through a dominant rational impulsion. Too much material or sensuous impulse leaves a person at the mercy of nature only. A person then becomes too determined, subdued, and constrained by natural laws and physical forces. Given the uncertainties inherent in these forces, gaining and maintaining balance is no easy feat.

The other dualities express the fragility of play, as well. It is difficult, for example, to find and maintain a balance between relaxation and excitation. One produces boredom and the other creates chaos. So this middle ground of play requires a tenuous balancing act between the elements of our two-part nature.

Closely related to fragility is the uncertainty that Schiller sees in play. Although he seems to think he has nailed down the essence of play, he is agnostic when it comes to speculating on strategies for invoking play. That is, he tells us that reason and experience are tools we use to identify play when it is present. Yet these tools cannot explain to us how play is possible or how it happens. He seems to believe that there is no formula that would unlock the causative element in play. If there were some, we would be able to play whenever we wanted to. It is clear to Schiller that this is not possible. He might argue that play may never be fully under our control. As we will see in the forthcoming analyses, many authors question this understanding by explaining play as “freely chosen,” or something that we can cause in some measure.

20th Century American Pragmatism

Philosophers continued to study of play and games as masses of emigrants travelled to the United States after the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution. In fact, some of the greatest American scholars have written about these two human projects. Around the turn of the twentieth century, for example, American pragmatists wrote about play and games, and did so in less dualistic and less idealistic ways than Schiller. William James (1842-1910) wrote about two modes of play – those of children and adults. He alluded to reason or rationality in his assessment of what we might call play. Charles Sander Peirce (1839-1914), likewise, spoke of play as being related to rationality. He described play as “musement” to make his case. Both of

these scholars lived at a time when modern American sports took root and became popular modes of play and games.

William James

James refers to play as an instinct or impulse.³⁵ It is something that is part of human nature. He claims that a boy chasing after another boy that provoked him is just as instinctive as a cat chasing a ball of yarn.³⁶ It is something that is an inexplicable part of who we are. Adult play is also part of human nature for James, and it has to do with aesthetics. He claims that adults have a play instinct that draws people to ceremonies, festivals, parties, and games. It is our individual nature to be excited by concerted action of this sort. We cannot help but be drawn in to communion with others by drinking beer, masquerading, and worshipping religiously.

James explains that play and games for children and adults are parts of who we are. We do not, strictly speaking, choose to play and participate in games. Instead, they are necessary parts of our lives. As a philosopher and psychologist, James argues, in effect, that we have no choice but to play and participate in games throughout our lives. The play instinct does not wane as we age (even though he would probably say that it changes). We are drawn to play as children, and this attraction continues through adulthood.

Since it is human nature for people of all ages to play, James makes a case for accepting these phenomena as worthwhile endeavors. While he would not say that we should always play, the reverse is also true. Perpetually avoiding play goes against human nature – a harmful flaw for James because his worldview encouraged living in the moment. He promoted being aware, interested, and responsive to what is going on around us. One of his most famous essays dealt with what he called the “sentiment of rationality” – a phrase that describes the human ability to live in the moment, an ability that is realized in captivating play experiences.

Schiller's idea of the state in which man is complete shares characteristics with James' "sentiment of rationality." What Schiller calls "play" – an impulse that is the foundation of aesthetics or beauty, parallels what James calls "sufficiency" or "fluency" as his foundation of rationality. The "sentiment of rationality" that James speaks of is "this feeling of the sufficiency of the present moment, of its absoluteness, – this absence of all need to explain it, account for it, or justify it." He continues by noting, "as soon ... as we are enabled from any cause whatever to think with perfect fluency, the thing we think of seems to us ... rational."³⁷

While James' "sentiment of rationality" bears a striking resemblance to Schiller's conception of the play impulse, it is unclear if James had play in mind as he developed this notion.³⁸ Even though these two philosophers come out of different philosophical camps, their ideas are strikingly similar. James' "sentiment of rationality" identifies a complete or whole existence of the individual at a particular moment in much the same way that the balance of formal and sensuous impulses completes humanity for Schiller.

James' notion, like Schiller's, expresses the fragility of play, for if we are to attempt a full awareness of each moment (often a difficult state to reach), our fluency may ebb and flow quickly. The sentiment also speaks to the intrinsic qualities of play. James' encouragement to be in the moment is a push to engage in the present activity for what it is and not for what it may later bring.

James also alludes to the uncertainty of play in much the same way as Schiller. They both indicate that we have only a marginal ability to manipulate or cause play. In fact, James falls in line with a number of other scholars in his era who acknowledge play's uncertainty by identifying it as an impulse. James and other scholars of his ilk called play an impulse because they were not able to explain the processes that brought it into existence. In other words, philosophers and scientists who claimed that play is the product of an instinct, explain very little. The play instinct and play are just there.

Despite an inability to unlock causative elements, James' "sentiment of rationality" still helps us better understand the nature of play. While theoretically portraying the intrinsic nature of the sentiment, James explains our encounters with the feelings of fluency and sufficiency. He describes practical methods that "(teach) us to pass fluently" throughout the cultural world.³⁹ For him, learning to exhibit this fluency should guide us to a deeper engagement with the world because its characteristics are clear thinking and present awareness.

We often experience fluency, James argues, through customs. Customs are man-made phenomena that allow us to more easily navigate through the social world and see both the antecedent conditions and future consequences of things in ways that promote fluency. As such, we communicate order in the way things are. Games and play, then, seem to parallel customs and fluency. James explains that customs are practical ways to help us establish fluency or being in the moment. Games, it might be said, have historically done the same thing for play. That is, games are customs that societies have created as ways for us to more easily get into the play spirit – to generate an experience of fluency. Our games are conducive to play and are ways in which we can make sense of the world. I will flesh out this idea more fully in Chapter Four.

Charles Sander Peirce

Peirce discusses play as a foundation for what he calls the "Neglected Argument for the Reality of God." He presents a discussion of play as a tool to prove God's existence. He makes many arguments for the existence of a Supreme Being in this essay, but the idea of play is at the fore. He claims that the "neglected argument" for God's reality involves a playful daydream-like experience of contemplating God. That is, through the play of free thought that occurs during a walk in the park, we can come to simple and reasonable conclusions that God exists. In the midst

of this theological discussion, he makes some very interesting claims about the nature of play and its role in our lives.

Peirce proclaims that play “involves no purpose save that of casting aside all serious purpose.”⁴⁰ In this sense, play is autotelic. It has its own purpose that is more important than any extrinsic value it may have. Play is emancipating and personal, as Peirce urges a play seeker to “push off into the lake of thought, and leave the breath of heaven to swell your sail,” and, “with your eyes open, awake to what is about or within you, and open conversation with yourself.”⁴¹ That is, play frees us from the duties and cares of our ordinary, instrumentally-oriented lives. He also claims that we do not need anyone else to be able to play – it can but does not have to be an individual experience. Play is temporary and periodic to Peirce, as he argues that it only takes up “five to six percent of one’s waking time.”⁴² Furthermore, as a scientist, Peirce understands that play changes the balance of our energy levels claiming that play “is refreshing enough more than to repay the expenditure.”⁴³ Apparently play both exhausts and refills its participants depending on the situation. Although all of these attributes describe the nature of play, he most centrally identifies it as, “a lively exercise of one’s powers ... (that) has no rules, except (the) law of liberty.”⁴⁴

These quotations serve as cornerstones of Peirce’s view on play. Based on these claims, Peirce concludes that play is autotelic, emancipating, personal, temporary, and grounded in liberty or without rules. This last attribute is one that none of the aforementioned authors noted. Play, in his view, is a free-flowing and natural activity without constraints. He speaks of play as an experience of deep, liberating, and fruitful contemplation. In this sense he sounds like Plato, Aristotle, and Aquinas. These authors see deep contemplation, or the mature act of letting one’s mind wander through logic and reasoning, as play. To Peirce, this type of experience is commendable, and he notes that it is different from scholastic inquiry because it is free from the structure of rules that can potentially stifle more serious and goal-focused intellectual activity.

This however, puts Peirce at odds with a number of other play scholars. His antipathy to rules would seem to preclude games and other structured events as objects of play. While Peirce may not have meant his claim to be this radical, it brings up a metaphysical question about play.⁴⁵ If play has no rules or at least is not rule-bound, then it seems as though it would exclude games. The games to which our previous authors have alluded when describing play – for example, debate, wrestling, cards, gambling or dice activities, and sports – are all rule-governed activities. Peirce, however, focuses on the freedom of play as part of its charm and allure as opposed to a strict code of rules that might be evident in play that takes the form of games.

Since play is free from rules, it is a liberating distraction. Peirce often refers to it as “musement.”⁴⁶ It is delightfully distracting, somewhat frivolous, and easily accessible behavior that is available to everyone – rich or poor, man or woman, smart or witless, young or old. He implies that everyone plays because it requires so little from us. We do not need to have a surplus of energy or any prerequisite abilities or intelligence in order to play. All we have to do is “push off into the lake of thought.” Yet thinking, contemplation, or intellectual activities seem to constitute only one kind of play. Peirce, then, appears to have a relatively narrow conception of play activities. He does not allude to any of the physical activities, organized play, or community-oriented play to which so many of the other authors referred. In fact, his idea of “musement” seems to depict play as a kind of active daydream that one can entertain while in a chair or out for a walk. Even though it seems clear that this kind of behavior could qualify as play, it is not as clear why he would want to narrow the scope of play activities so severely.

Peirce is a little-known participant in the historical dialogue on play and games. His invocation of play as free from rules is an idea that has been neglected by subsequent authors. Indeed, the next two play scholars to which I refer have opposing views. Huizinga and Caillois both describe play not only as compatible with rule-governed activity, but as requiring it. Peirce seems to be saying that play is doing anything one wants to do or letting one’s mind wander in

any way that it wants to wander – a view that may well describe some forms of play. After all, we value play in part, it would seem, because it relieves us of everyday rules and responsibilities. Even so, Peirce’s libertarian view of play seems to be unduly restrictive. For example, it eliminates play that is rule-bound and aims at a goal where the pursuit of that goal is intrinsically satisfying to the participant. This type of activity, of course, includes games and sports. After all, reaching the goal of rule-bound activities can be very satisfying intrinsically. However, we still have a contradiction among these three authors. Is Peirce wrong in saying that play has no rules? Are Huizinga and Caillois wrong in saying that play must have rules? Or is it possible that both of them are right, albeit for different reasons?

The Modern Era

James and Peirce wrote about play in a world that was becoming increasingly globalized. Their philosophy, including that of play and games, reflected this awareness. However, they rarely alluded to the organized games and play with which we are familiar today. Our next authors wrote decades later. Their scholarship is more intelligible by modern standards because they experienced many of the games and sports that we continue to participate in today. This subdivision of the historical discussion includes thinkers that are socio-historians and cultural scientists. Johan Huizinga (1872-1945), Roger Caillois (1913-1978), and Josef Pieper (1904-1997) make up the first group and M.J. Ellis (1936-), Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1934-), and Clifford Geertz (1926-2006) comprise the second.

Socio-historians

Huizinga, a Dutchman, and Caillois, a Frenchman, are not philosophers. Their analyses, however, have philosophical elements in them because they make metaphysical claims about play and games. They are, in fact, doing cultural and historical research more than philosophy when they discuss play and its role in society. Nevertheless, their books continue to be critically analyzed by philosophers because of their originality and novelty. Pieper, a German, is much more philosophical in his work on play and games, but the main crux of his arguments are theological. I have grouped him with Huizinga and Caillois because they are similar. Each of them writes from intra- or post-war Europe and argues for the significance of play in relationship to the development of culture.

Johan Huizinga

Huizinga describes what he calls the “play element in culture.”⁴⁷ In fact, he rarely uses the term games throughout his text even though he refers to many activities that today we would call games. In *Homo Ludens*, he argues that play is a universal cultural phenomenon. Play is, at its root, a part of our existence as living creatures, but it is embodied and carried out within the institutions of culture. The most essential characteristic of play is its element of fun, but Huizinga quickly asserts that play does not exclude seriousness. This relationship is variable because play can range from serious engagement to light-hearted diversion. Huizinga writes about these features as he tries to place play within other categories such as truth or goodness to no avail. He therefore gives play its own category and describes its characteristics as we see it in culture.

Huizinga distinguishes “higher forms of play” from “primitive play.”⁴⁸ Primitive play, he explains, has an “irreducible”⁴⁹ or pure quality that makes it difficult to analyze and interpret. Thus, he simply argues that infants and young animals engage in primitive play. Higher forms of

play, on the other hand, have many more observable features, and so he claims that “we shall have to speak of contests and races, of performances and exhibitions, of dancing and music, pageants, masquerades and tournaments.”⁵⁰ Huizinga lists the characteristics of these higher forms of play as activity that is freely chosen, not ordinary, undertaken for no profit, and those that transpire within a separate space and time, are rule-governed, have their own order, and may require secrecy or disguise in certain settings. By identifying play as a rule-governed behavior, his description stands in direct opposition to that of Peirce.

Huizinga’s specification of rules is, for him, a central characteristic of the play-concept. “All play has its rules,” he asserts, and “the rules of games are absolutely binding and allow no doubt.”⁵¹ The rules of play create a necessary order in the play world. Through the orderliness of the rules of play comes a temporary perfection in an otherwise imperfect world. Play finds orderliness through its limited space and time. All play takes place within a playground that is a temporary refuge. Play begins and then progresses into an ending time, and can be repeated if necessary.

Huizinga explains that the limited space and time of play produces a secluded world that one shares with other players. The players disguise themselves in this mysterious world that they share only with each other during the time they are at play. This play world is separate from the ordinary or real world. It offers an “interlude”⁵² from our daily labors, a respite that becomes a valued part of our lives. As such, play contributes nothing material or profitable but does enable satisfaction and good living. For Huizinga, play is intrinsically satisfying because it provides a counterpoint to our normally appetitive existence. It is also, he states, freely chosen since it is never a task, necessity, or duty. It is done in one’s free time.

One of the new traits that Huizinga puts forward as a theme in the discussion of play is the issue of its reality, or its existence in a separate time and space. To Huizinga, and many other

authors who subsequently described play in a similar way, play has its own time and space that is different from real time and real space. Play exists, in a sense, in its own world.

Many games clearly show this separate time and space. The lines of a tennis court or the boarded wall around an ice rink demarcate the area in which play takes place. Likewise, the allotted time for a game and shot clock requirements in basketball or the completion of seven innings in softball mark off play time from the flow of time in which ordinary projects take place. Huizinga, however, wants to go further than this. He describes play's separate time and space as secretive, mysterious, and often sacred – that time during which the players have a special, exclusive connection with the world and one another. This reveals more of a phenomenological separation of time and space as opposed to tangible or discrete demarcations. As we will see, Caillois took issue with this claim that play transpires in a secretive *and* mysterious play world.

In spite of this point of contention, Huizinga and Caillois provided similar analyses of play. In establishing essential characteristics of play, they tried to define the phenomena as no author had before. Their writings are still popular in part because they were the first to produce comprehensive, insightful, and scientifically-informed analyses of play. Although we have seen that they were not the first to study play, they are much more explicit about defining play than the previous authors. Yet their definitions differ and both raise questions about the ability to define a broad and ambiguous topic like play. Huizinga has been accused of having too broad a definition. What good is it to define play, his critics ask, when his definition can include virtually any activity in which we have ever engaged?⁵³ However, along with being accused of excessive inclusivity, his characterization of play has, at the same time, been accused of being excessively exclusive. Caillois, among others, has accused him on both counts.

Roger Caillois

Huizinga and Caillois are not in complete agreement on the nature of play, but both present a comprehensive understanding of the concept. Caillois reinforces Huizinga's characteristics that play is freely chosen and separate in space and time; he expands on Huizinga's idea of uncertainty in play; and he reconfigures Huizinga's notions of play being rule-governed, secret (make-believe), and without material gain or profit. To Caillois, Huizinga's definition is too broad in that it inaccurately includes mystery *and* secrecy (in fact, Caillois states that play exposes what is mysterious *or* secretive), and it is too narrow in that he excludes games of chance. In this sense, we might say that Caillois has amended his predecessor's claims.

Caillois also recognizes his parallels with Huizinga on the definition of play and realizes that the latter saw play as "the spirit that rules certain kinds of games."⁵⁴ After this acknowledgment of the scope of Huizinga's work and after altering Huizinga's definition of play, Caillois identifies categories of play and games. He describes four categories of games as those involving contests, chance, simulation, and vertigo. All play and games fit into at least one of these categories, and some are hybrids. Wrestling is a contest; roulette is based on chance; theatrical performances require simulation; and rollercoasters provide vertigo. Likewise, Poker crosses categories as both a contest and a project that is grounded in chance events; a talent show is contest and simulation; and professional bull riding is contest and offers experiences of vertigo.

Caillois characterizes his four categories by making a distinction between *paidia* and *ludus*. *Paidia*, a Greek word used by Plato and Aristotle meaning "child" or "child-like behavior," describes the simple or immature type of play or game in each of Caillois' categories; while *ludus*, a Latin word for "game" denotes the complex, mature, or progressive type of play or game in the categories.⁵⁵ These terms help us understand that there are different levels of contest, chance, simulation, and vertigo activities. They mirror Huizinga's reference to lower and higher forms of play. Caillois uses *paidia* "as a word covering the spontaneous manifestations of the

play instinct,” and *ludus* “for the specific element in play the impact and cultural creativity of which seems most impressive.”⁵⁶ This distinction is helpful in signifying the difference between mature and impressive play or games and frivolous or immature play or games.

Paidia and *ludus* are a part of Caillois’ novel categorization of play and games. He provides a matrix with two rows (*paidia* and *ludus*) and four columns (contest, chance, simulation, and vertigo) that describe the form (the rows) and variety (the columns) of play and games. By means of this matrix, Caillois provides analytic distinctions among different forms of recreation in an original way. These subsets seem to be most useful, however, if we follow Caillois’ lead and think of them as descriptors and tendencies rather than exclusive categories. This is so because we do not experience play and games in analytical categories. That is, the categories do not dictate our experiences. Instead, our experiences dictate the categories. When we give authority to categories, then we stray from our experiences.

Accordingly, Caillois uses examples of games in categories only when needed so that he does not fall into the trap of excessively tidy metaphysical groupings that do not accurately depict our experiences. Seen this way, his categories do not seem to be authoritative or exclusive, but rather expressive of the experiential landscape. Caillois’ great care in that regard has allowed us to focus on our variable experiences and on the activities themselves, as opposed to the categories he provided. Wrestling, for example, is not an activity that we find intelligible because it is in the category of contests, but we can describe wrestling as a contest because it has certain features or characteristics.

Caillois’ categorization of play and games does not reveal the relationship or distinctions between them. In fact, he may regard games and play as the same thing, as he seems to use the terms synonymously. Determining the relationship of play and games has been a problem since Plato’s work. Many scholars inexplicably move between “play,” “games,” and even “sport” in their writings without arguing for identity or, alternately, noting important differences. Caillois

and Huizinga are among those who have confounded play and games without ever alluding to any metaphysical distinctions or similarities between them. Caillois is especially culpable as his work displays imprecise views of the difference between the two, if there is one. Is he defining play? Is he defining games? If they are different, what is their relationship?

Josef Pieper

Josef Pieper, a contemporary of Huizinga and Caillois, did not distinguish between play and games either because he rarely used either term. While he was more interested in play than games, he avoided the problem of conflation by focusing on what he referred to as “leisure.” He defines leisure as “the attitude of mind ... of those who are open to everything.”⁵⁷ The opposite of leisure, so defined, is work. Pieper defines work as toil, social functionality, or activity for the sake of simply being active. Work is taking over the hearts and time of people all over the world from Pieper’s viewpoint, and he explains that this is antithetical to humanity. He combines theological and philosophical thought as he makes his arguments.

By invoking quotations from Plato, Aristotle, and Aquinas, Pieper leans on some of the most respected academic thinkers in history. He uses more than philosophy, though, and expresses the importance of taking a cross-disciplinary approach in arriving at more sophisticated answers. In his work he explains the importance of the liberal arts toward leisure. Anyone who opens up to many different disciplines, he argues, will be able to more freely experience leisure. Yet Pieper hinges his case for leisure on one discipline – theology. His central argument is as follows: “culture depends for its very existence on leisure, and leisure, in its turn, is not possible unless it has a durable and consequently living link with the [church community], with divine worship.”⁵⁸

For my project, Pieper's understanding of the nature of leisure is paramount. When he says that "leisure is only possible when a man is at one with himself,"⁵⁹ his words sound similar to those of many of our previous authors. Schiller stated that play is the perfection or completion of humanity and James, in his essay, "Sentiment of Rationality," expressed an awareness of the fluency of the moment that makes humans whole. Pieper uses the term "leisure" to describe a phenomenon similar to what Schiller calls play and James calls the "sentiment of rationality." While we may use these terms differently in our modern lexicons, these authors are all talking about related qualitative phenomena – those that attempt to characterize human existence at its best. All of them seem to have identified play as the domain in which these qualities come to the fore.

Pieper makes further connections to our previous authors by arguing that contemplation is play and not work. He cites Aquinas in doing so, and sounds very Aristotelian in lauding contemplative activity. Furthermore, his ideas parallel Peirce's notions of play. Contemplation, for Pieper, is the fusion of discursive thought and simple intuition of the truth. Traditionally, discursive thought has been regarded as difficult, scrupulous work. On this line of thinking, the discursive thought of philosophy is what makes contemplation legitimate, because we value that which requires devotion and focus. In other words, we value those who do what is difficult because they are the ones who are willing to take it on (philosophers being the ones willing to take on arduous discursive thought). However, Pieper reiterates one of Aquinas' ideas when he says that we often conflate the difficulty in an activity with the good in it. Loving one's enemy, as Christ urges for example, is good at all times and it is often difficult. Yet the sentiment in this teaching seems to point beyond praise for difficulty. Christ encourages his followers to change their hearts so that loving their enemies is not difficult, which, in turn, produces even more good. In the same way, contemplation that is difficult is good, but contemplation that goes beyond difficulty because of the fluency and oneness of its participants is even better.

In essence, Pieper argues that leisure (or play, to us) is free – liberating and freely chosen. It is liberating because it releases us from the shackles of a proletarian-like workmanship. Some people are tied to work because of their own destitution, others because of a coercive and totalitarian state, and still others from inner impoverishment. Leisure or play, then, broadens the scope of life for a proletarian. Instead of being chained to work, leisure allows one to experience the freedom of liberal arts – doing something for its own sake. Once this has been experienced, one can then freely choose among the liberal arts in one's spare time. We can freely choose the intrinsically valuable pursuits in which we will engage when we have been liberated from a purely work-oriented existence.

In his analysis, Pieper points toward the discussion of *via negativa* in defining play. Many authors have realized that, in trying to understand what play is it is also helpful to understand what play is not. Some have concluded that play has an inherent opposite – work, seriousness, or necessity. Their detractors say that is not true because some play can be very work-like, serious, or even necessary. Others have simply juxtaposed play and work. Pieper is in this latter group. He explains that play, or a free, leisure time attitude, is a work-disabler in that it gets us out of the mindset that our value lays only in work. We can find value in work, but we should also find great value in play.

Cultural Scientists

As we have seen, philosophers have studied play and games since the earliest written history. Clearly, they see merit in studying these topics. In the twentieth century, many scientists began to study play and games, as well. While our previous three authors may or may not be classified as philosophers, these next three are clearly not philosophers. Ellis, an American psychologist, explains scientific processes that determine why people play; Csikszentmihalyi, a

Hungarian-born scholar, promotes a psychology of play in a term he calls “flow;” and Geertz, an American anthropologist, offers his assessments of the play he observed of the native Balinese. These authors’ findings do not represent the attitudes of all scientists towards play, but they are excellent examples of how the scientific community studies play. Furthermore, the writings of these three are among the more well-known scientific forays into play.

M.J. Ellis

Ellis tries to answer the question of why people play and does so from a scientific viewpoint. As he studies play he is not doing original scientific research so much as amassing and integrating the research that has already been done. Indeed, I have chosen him to represent much of the scientific world’s viewpoint on play because he alludes to so many existing theories of play.

Ellis divides past play theories into three groups: classical, recent, and modern. Classical theories of play have to do with energy expenditure and instincts. The works of James and Peirce would probably fit into this category. People play to release “surplus energy,” and to reduce “the effects of previous stressful and/or aversive activities.”⁶⁰ These theories speak to the biological inclination toward homeostasis. If we have excess energy or stress, then we play to get rid of it and return to more comfortable biological states. Instinctive theories, on the other hand, explain that people play to prepare for adulthood, develop the race or species, or simply do what is natural and beneficial for them to do. These theories describe biological adaptations – play serves the purposes of preparation for adulthood, development of the species, or survival.

Recent theories of play can be grouped into three pairs. The first pair includes those theories in which play is determined by the nature of the players’ work. People play for task generalization and task compensation. The former explains that those who do well at their work

tasks and enjoy them will find similar behaviors in their leisure time. The latter represents a view that those who do not do well or do not enjoy their work will find different leisure activities to satisfy their unmet needs from work.

The second pair is catharsis and psychoanalysis. Cathartic theories suggest that people play to release emotional energy that may or may not be damaging. Psychoanalytic theories come from the Freudian camp and indicate that people play to seek pleasure and for the gratification it brings to us. The last pair is individual and culture. In these theories, people play for its cognitive dynamics (individual) or its ability to convey learned, and desirable social behavior (culture).⁶¹

Modern theories of play are much more refined than classical or recent theories. Ellis notes the nuances of these later theories that sprung up shortly after World War II. They focus on arousal and an interest in seeking stimuli. According to these ideas, people play to cope with under-arousing boredom and over-arousing anxiety. Those players who seek stimuli are rewarded for it in their development while non-players fear stimuli and show less development and survivability. Since play stimuli present challenges that are not critical, players learn to overcome them in situations that are non-threatening. Non-players have a higher failure rate against critical stimuli because of their lack of practice with play stimuli.⁶²

After his analysis, Ellis creatively integrates each of these classical, recent, and modern theories into his personal definition of, and rationale for, play. In doing so, he points out obvious flaws or weaknesses in each aforementioned theory as a stand-alone reason for why people play. Therefore his conclusion is a mixture of these theories that he believes best describe play when molded together. He argues that people play, most fundamentally, as a way to seek arousal, learn or become conditioned into social behavior, and grow in their individual cognitive or brain dynamics.⁶³

Through the connection of each of these three forces, Ellis sees play as a very complex behavior. The fact that scientists have come to varied conclusions about the physiological, psychological, and sociological reasons for play reinforces play's complexity and underlines the fact that play is not fully understood at this point. Therefore Ellis shows some agnosticism about play. That is, after laying out all of his physiological, psychological, and sociological explanations of why people play, he ends by speculating that pure play – behavior that is driven only by intrinsic motivations – is probably only theoretically possible. Essentially, Ellis argues that pure play does not exist in practice; we can only talk about it.

It is unclear why he made this claim. He may have felt overwhelmed by the task of trying to integrate the mass of play theories into a comprehensive whole, and he may have realized that play is too complex an activity to study conclusively. His psychology background also may have left him skeptical about the possibilities of pure, untainted intrinsic motivations that seem indicative of the play spirit. Regardless, his conclusions are an attempt to make sense of the existing scientific literature on play. His work and ideas on play probably would have been aided by philosophy. To augment his analysis of tangible and measurable qualities of play, a philosopher may have helped him describe the value of conceiving normative claims about play.

At the same time, Ellis raises an issue on which philosophers would do well to focus. Play and games are considered by many to be biologically and developmentally tethered. They are a part of human nature and looking at the science that helps to explain our constraints and freedoms may help to unlock doors for a better understanding of play and games. Even though philosophers might argue that Ellis' work still leaves questions about play unanswered, it does help explain some of the potential functions of play – functions that range from the sub-cellular level to that of culture and individual meaning. Understanding what play does in our bodies, minds, and cultures, may lead to an expansion of our abilities to talk about its nature and value.

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi

Csikszentmihalyi describes play and games as they relate to what he calls the “flow principle.” His idea of flow seems akin to Ellis’ play theories in the sense that it is an adaptation to stimuli. “Flow” is the result of optimally arousing experiences in which the individual’s skill matches the level of the external challenge presented. “Flow” can be experienced when a kindergarten student has the appropriate skills for the low-level challenges faced in t-ball. It can also be experienced when a grand champion chess master participates in the high-level challenge of a chess world championship. “Flow” would not be experienced, though, if an elite level performer in an activity experienced challenges that are too easy or if a beginner faced challenges that are too difficult.

Csikszentmihalyi’s “flow” is a phenomenon that is identical in some ways to what others have called play. “Flow” is an attitude, or a state of consciousness in which one’s skills and external challenges have to be well-matched. In “flow,” one’s focus is such that self-consciousness disappears, sense of time is distorted, and the activity is done for its own sake. This last characteristic, autotelicity or intrinsic value, is especially popular among later play theorists. It is clear that his ideas parallel their sentiments in speaking of an attitude or state of being that is attached to participation in particular activities.

Csikszentmihalyi lists a number of “flow” activities. These activities are the ones he sees as being conducive to “flow.” He seems to be speaking normatively here, as he says that these activities are “designed to make optimal experience easier to achieve.”⁶⁴ This means that there is a distinction between “flow” as a state of mind and “flow” activities, but nevertheless, they are also closely related. “Flow” activities require the learning of skills, they make control possible, they provide feedback, and they have rules and goals. These characteristics prove that “flow” activities are in a separate category from the “flow” state. If the “flow” state is an attitude (play), “flow” activities are cultural conventions (play activities or games). Even though

Csikszentmihalyi often speaks of the two synonymously, he seems to be aware of a difference between the activity in which we participate and the attitude we undertake when participating.

As we participate in flow activities while in the flow state, we develop a sense of discovery and creativity that transforms us into more complex creatures. That is, games and play give us a new reality by allowing (and sometimes encouraging) us to grow and change in more complex and liberating ways. We experience greater freedom when our skills increase because we are more capable of meeting challenges of greater quality. Our interest and proficiency in “flow” activities, then, tell us a great deal about who we are both as individuals and as members of a culture.

Indeed, Csikszentmihalyi makes a strong connection between games and culture. Games and culture are ways in which we create order and experience enjoyment in the world. Games and culture also set fairly arbitrary goals and rules as they attempt to get us to act in ways that are without doubt or distraction. While cultures and games are not identical, they share many characteristics. In the author’s view, cultures that are able to enhance the “flow” of its citizens in certain regards are believed to have created “great games”⁶⁵ (great in the successful, not moral sense). Thus, games and cultures have much in common in the ways they try to establish human behaviors.

Csikszentmihalyi opens our eyes to the question of the locus of play. Where is play? Is it inside of us? Is it external? His explanation of internal and external factors adds another theme to the greater play and game discussion. He concludes that a part of play is within us – each person has the ability to be relatively open or closed to play stimuli, each person may be hard-wired towards different kinds of play, and each person may acquire skills differently. Yet he also explains that a part of play is external. The environment’s challenge must be adequately stimulating for play to be possible. Csikszentmihalyi believes that play is cultivated on the cusp of this internal-external relationship. The skills of the individual must match the challenge that is

encountered in order for play to occur. Societies build games in order to create external factors that will attract those individuals who are open to play.

Clifford Geertz

As a cultural anthropologist, Clifford Geertz studied play and games through the lens of culture specifically. He spent time among the native Balinese in order to interpret their culture, and found cockfighting – their most ardent pastime – to be one of the best examples of Balinese culture. Cockfighting does not just reflect or symbolize their culture; it is a major part of who they are. As Geertz describes Balinese cockfighting, he alludes to certain facets of play.

Geertz notes a difference between shallow and deep play and games. Shallow play and games are still valid examples of these respective phenomena, but do not have the rich meaning structure behind them that deep play and games do. Lower level cockfights are examples of shallow play and games because the owners and fans have less money and interest vested in them. There may still be betting and enthusiasm for the fight, but its meaning rarely goes beyond the here and now. Deep play and games, on the contrary, have a complex meaning structure that create a great amount of build up to the main event and also provide memories that last far beyond it.

Geertz borrows the term “deep play” from Bentham, who states that deep play is that in which the stakes are so high that the “possible disutility far outweighs the possible utility.”⁶⁶ Cockfighting is deep play, then, when great amounts of money are waged on the outcome. Bentham would say that this is irrational behavior and should be banned by law. In his paternalistic view, no one should ever be able to waste time like this and face the possibility of losing so much money. Yet Geertz goes against this line of thinking and seems to understand the allure of deep play cockfighting. He believes in the cultural power of cockfighting. It is a

presentation of so many ideas that the Balinese have – about power, manhood, struggle, destiny, and much more. However, if a man's cock wins the fight, very little truly changes in society except a few units of currency exchanging hands and a few injuries to the birds.

Cockfighting participants and gamblers believe that there is a great deal of immaterial gain or loss through deep play cockfighting – esteem, honor, and dignity – but Geertz argues that these do not really change at all. He believes in only a pseudo-status change. It is only, as he says, “momentarily affirmed or insulted.”⁶⁷ However, this does not take away from the depth of cockfighting. Even if no status ever actually changes through cockfighting, there is still a perceived momentary status change that matters for that particular time. No one likes to lose and everyone likes to win in part because of this momentary perceived status change.

The money gambled on cockfighting directly affects the perceived momentary status change. The natural connection is between how much money one wins or loses and one's status, but Geertz discounts the apparent strength of that relationship. He says that over the years, the money exchanged and, consequently, the status gained or lost even out. However, it is also true that the money, especially great amounts of it, matter a great deal to one's pride, passion, and masculinity when the fight is on. Gambling, therefore, plays a major part in sustaining the cockfighting subculture.

While Huizinga ruled out games of chance or betting games as instances of play, Geertz describes how betting on cockfighting actually enriches play's autotelic potential. Money is not the reason for increased interest in cockfighting – as there is a certain natural allure toward fighting games and games of chance – but it is a means for creating more interesting or deeper play activity. For Geertz, this meaningfulness is the magnetism of deep play and games. As humans, we all seek meaning as an ultimate end in our lives. The play and games in which we seek meaning become major parts of our identities. For the Balinese, cockfighting with large and

irrational sums of money is deep play not because of the amounts of money one can win or lose but because the money enriches the fundamental activity.

Geertz explains that winners and losers face changes in a behind-the-scenes status ladder that simply mirrors the real status ladder. This is probably the case – very few of us ever drastically change our material status through play and games, at least not in ways that we can measure. Yet the perceived status change seems to have real implications and is probably more durable than Geertz thinks. Our memories of wins and losses in play and games stick with us for a long time because they are so meaningful. Although our status usually only changes in perceived ways, that perception is real and matters to us. While I probably will not gain anything materially from a win or loss over another person, that win or loss is there between us and is a part of our relationship to some extent. To a certain degree, then, play and games do affect status.

In some play we gain or lose little, in some play we gain or lose a great deal, and some play is in between. While a commonly-held belief is that money ruins the play spirit (as evidenced in the petty problems of professional athletes and their employers), Geertz explains that deep play can have high financial stakes and vast cultural power. In Balinese cockfighting, play seems to be more rich and meaningful when a great deal of money is on the line than when the stakes are low. The players have more vested in play when money is on the line. Such is the nature of games of chance – we can involve the possibility of monetary loss or gain in order to increase the richness, meaning, and depth of what is otherwise more shallow play.

Yet when we speak of gambling as play, what are we to make of addicts? Can we preclude them from play? Geertz explains that addicts are easy to spot because they are the only ones who put a lot of money on low-level or unimportant cockfights. For them, neither cockfighting nor gambling is play. Instead, it is compulsive and destructive behavior in efforts to increase one's wealth. Those who gamble on cockfighting as play are those for whom the

institution of cockfighting is important. For these players, more money is placed on more meaningful fights (much like gambling on American football hits its zenith at the Super Bowl).

Conclusion

This historical dialogue has given us a number of different arguments that focus on both the nature and the value of play and games. Throughout the dialogue, I identified major themes or issues that have grown as a result of each particular analysis. I will address many of these themes in the following chapters.

I will pursue some themes of play and games together. I will argue that these two phenomena, as parts of what we might call leisure time or recreational activities, are meaningful, different from our normal experiences, and valuable. Many of the early authors alluded to these ideas and many recent authors made similar claims. I build on these ideas most specifically at the end of Chapter Four.

My continuing analysis will include some themes on play and games separately that arose from the historical dialogue. In the realm of play, I will further pursue the internal/external issue. Is play freely chosen and something that we have control over, or is it out of our control and determined by our environment. With games, I will pursue the theme of rules. Some of the early authors alluded to rules as being a part of games. More recent authors made that relationship much more formal and rigid. In my analysis, I will carry this argument forward in an attempt to describe the relationship between rules and games.

I will also continue my analysis of games and play with an eye toward understanding the relationship between the two phenomena. Many of the early authors describe play and games in similar ways, neglecting any potential distinctions between them. Some recent authors have written about play and games separately, but they have not been explicit about the relationship

that exists between them. In Chapter Three, my arguments are an attempt to more clearly determine that relationship.

These central themes in the historical dialogue on play and games help my project in three ways. The first is that they make progress. By analyzing these issues, we come to understand play and games better. For example, this dialogue focuses on autotelicity as an important aspect of play. Likewise, we understand that play and games are valuable from this discussion. Secondly, these themes provide a foundation on which current philosophers can build. A new genre of academic, the sports philosopher, emerged in the latter half of the twentieth century. This group studies play and games as much more isolated phenomena than previous authors, and they do so by building upon the arguments that have been made by earlier authors. Thirdly, these themes raise questions about play and games that still need attention. I attempt to answer questions about the perceived identity and, on the other hand, potential distinctions between play and games. As I move forward, it will be clear that the recent authors I analyze in the following answer many of the questions from early authors, but they also leave much work to be done.

¹ The first three of these examples come from Suits' essay, "Words on Play." I added the fourth example to broaden the examples.

² Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), p. 13.

³ Bernard Suits, *The Grasshopper: Games, Life and Utopia* (Boston: David R. Godine, Publisher, 1990), p. 41.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Plato, *The Republic*, translated by Richard W. Sterling and William C. Scott (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1985).

⁶ Plato's *Laws* 3: sec. 803c.

⁷ Werner Jaeger, *Paideia: the Ideals of Greek Culture: Volume III: The Conflict of Cultural Ideals in the Age of Plato*, translated by Gilbert Highet (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 253.

⁸ Plato, *Laws*, 7.794a.

⁹ Ibid. 7.803d.

¹⁰ This possibly has to do with Plato's view towards sophists. Socrates hated sophists because they argued not for truth but for money. A good sophist would argue any side of a debate.

¹¹ Rosemary Desjardins, "Why Dialogues? Plato's Serious Play," in *Platonic Writings, Platonic Readings*, ed. by Charles L. Griswold, Jr. (New York: Routledge, 1988), pp. 110-125.

¹² Werner Jaeger, *Paideia: the Ideals of Greek Culture: Volume II: In Search of the Divine Centre*, translated by Gilbert Highet (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 317.

¹³ Werner Jaeger, *Paideia: the Ideals of Greek Culture: Volume III*, p. 249.

¹⁴ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1176b28-30.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 1128a9-12.

¹⁶ Any discussion today of slaves being compared intellectually and socially to children takes an air of elitism. Since Aristotle's time, we have abolished slavery and it is no longer politically correct to talk of adults who are incapable of ordering their own lives. Nevertheless, Aristotle wrote in a different time and place – one in which such talk was acceptable in academic and upper class circles.

¹⁷ Sachs translation of *Nicomachean Ethics*, p. 203.

¹⁸ Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1048a4-6.

¹⁹ Sachs translation of *Nicomachean Ethics*, note on p. 103.

²⁰ See *Nicomachean Ethics* 1139a34-38.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1049a5-9.

²³ *Ibid.* 1050a12-14.

²⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *St. Thomas Aquinas: Philosophical Texts*, selected and translated by Thomas Gilby (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp. 1-2.

²⁵ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentes*, 3.2.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Aquinas, *St. Thomas Aquinas*, p. 1.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 340.

²⁹ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Secunda Secundae Partis, Question 168, Article 2.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Albert-Marie Schmidt, *Men of Wisdom: John Calvin and the Calvinist Tradition*, translated by Ronald Wallace (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960), p. 66.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 136.

³³ Friedrich von Schiller, *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*, translated by Reginald Snell, (New York: Dover Publications, 2004), p. 251.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 258.

³⁵ It is important to note that James' understanding of instincts or impulses is different from Schiller's. Therefore, in this sense, they may be speaking of play as a different type of phenomenon.

³⁶ William James, *Principles of Psychology*, (online edition developed by Christopher D. Green of York University) at <http://psychclassics.yorku.ca/James/Principles.htm>.

³⁷ William James, "The Sentiment of Rationality," in *The Will to Believe: and other essays in popular philosophy*, (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1956), p. 64.

³⁸ In "William James and the Open Universe," *The Philosophy of William James*, ed. by Walter Robert Corti (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1976), Van Meter Ames writes about how James views play as aesthetics much like traditional authors such as Schiller.

³⁹ James, "The Sentiment of Rationality," p. 77.

⁴⁰ Charles Sander Peirce, "The Neglected Argument for the Reality of God," in *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings, Volume 2 (1893-1913)*, ed. by the Peirce Edition Project, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: The Indiana University Press, 1998), p. 436.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 437.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 436.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ It is likely that Peirce did not make this claim as a universal statement about play. Instead, he is probably describing the type of play he claims can lead to an argument for the existence of God – namely, what he calls "musement."

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 9.

- ⁵³ Bernard Suits is the most notable in this line of criticism.
- ⁵⁴ Roger Caillois, *Man, Play, and Games*, translated by Meyer Barash (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), p. 4.
- ⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 13.
- ⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 27-28, 33.
- ⁵⁷ Josef Pieper, *Leisure, The Basis of Culture*, translated by Alexander Dru (New York: Pantheon Books, 1964), p. 28.
- ⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. xix.
- ⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 27.
- ⁶⁰ M.J. Ellis, *Why People Play*, p. 23.
- ⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 49-77.
- ⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 80-110.
- ⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 118.
- ⁶⁴ Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1990), p. 72.
- ⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 81.
- ⁶⁶ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1973), p. 433.
- ⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

Chapter 2

CONTEMPORARY DISCUSSIONS OF PLAY AND GAMES

The historical discussion on play and games brought up a number of themes and issues central to understanding the nature of the two phenomena. Many of these issues continue to be topics of discussion today. In this chapter I will analyze the works of contemporary philosophers with an eye toward drawing out themes and issues surrounding recent analyses of play and games. Contemporary authors have come to consensus on some points of contention raised by previous scholars but others remain unresolved. For example, most authors agree with Aristotle and Aquinas when they say that play is of intrinsic interest to the player. Many of the philosophers that I will discuss in the following describe this facet of play as its autotelicity. They suggest that when we are at play, we are experiencing the activity for its own sake. While there may be extrinsic benefits as well, a player finds reward in doing the activity for its own sake.

Many authors also agree with Schiller, James, Peirce, and Pieper when they argue that play is aesthetically-pleasing and that humans engaged in play are somehow perfect or complete. While their sentiments sound idealistic, they point to the joy and fullness of play. They argue, and many of the authors reviewed in this chapter agree, that play is what we are doing when we are somehow at our best or most human. We interrupt our regular lives that are dominated by necessities with play. Our play times are wonderful interludes that are cut short by the mundane – for example, by hunger, thirst, or the need to go to the bathroom. These delightful respites can also be interrupted by a need to save face, get back to work, or follow certain requirements of etiquette. When we play, we are not focused on those everyday needs and distractions. Free from these mundane issues, we experience the world at *our* best. It is also at this point that we

experience the world at *its* best. During play, the world is interesting, seductive, attractive, and engaging.

Many authors agree with James, Peirce, Ellis, and Csikszentmihalyi when they say that tendencies to play are a part of who we are. They argue that play is tethered to our human nature, that we are not fully human without the ability to play. They argue that we are play-capable and play-prone creatures. While Csikszentmihalyi explains that some of us may be genetically predisposed or socialized toward differing levels of play-openness, we all have the capacity and tendency to play.

Aside from these points of apparent consensus, play and game theorists also have differing views on many issues. One of these areas places a focus on relationships between play and the good life. While most authors agree that play is *a part of* the good life, they do not agree on which part of the good life play fulfills. Some authors claim that play is good because it is useful. Plato explains that play has value because it is educational. Calvin states that play is good insofar as it leads to God. Yet others describe play as being good in itself. Aristotle and Aquinas speak of play's intrinsic value as its primary contribution to the good life.

Another issue on which philosophers have not reached consensus deals with the possibility of material gain through games and play. Huizinga and Caillois disagree on this issue. Huizinga claims that play is activity that involves no profit or material gain. That is, if money or material goods are on the line, the activity is no longer play. Caillois rejects that idea and says that there can be profit or material gain/loss in play and games, but that the total profit or loss is negligible in the end. Geertz would support Caillois' side of the dispute when he describes the deep and meaningful play of cockfighting, and its concomitant gambling, in Bali. More money at stake, to a certain level, breeds more interest and excitement. Calvin would probably be on Caillois' side, as well. The French theologian was hesitant to fully promote play and games

because they so often led otherwise rational people into evil temptation. Play can include financial gain, he might say, and that is why it is so dangerous.

A third point on which there is a lack of consensus has to do with the relationship between play and games. Only a few of the early authors even attempted to describe the relationship between them. This apparent oversight may be due, at least in part, to translation issues – some languages do not have separate words for play and games. But that is not the only problem. From the historical dialogue, it seems as though many authors have one phenomenon – play – in mind rather than two – play and games. I used the term “play” to describe their ideas more often than the term “games” because they did the same. Perhaps they were interested only in play, and they used games to exemplify autotelic activities, not to indicate that they were co-extensive with play. Huizinga, for example, may have been interested in play and not the variety of activities (games among them) that induce play experiences. Yet many of the authors’ descriptions of play rely heavily on games. When these authors discuss many different leisure or recreational experiences, they use the terms “play” and “games” interchangeably to refer to what may have been, to their way of thinking, a single phenomenon.

Much recent research has moved in the direction of more clearly distinguishing the two. Many recent scholars who have written on play and games have made worthwhile and helpful claims about these experiences, demonstrating progress in the study of these fundamental experiences. However, even with these advances in place, we are still only part way down the road of understanding. More progress will be required.

Theories of Definitional Analysis

Before I begin my foray into recent works on the nature of play and games, I need to set the stage for understanding the definitional theories used by this group of authors. Unlike the

historical dialogue on play and games which spanned many centuries, included many cultures, and used many different terms to describe what seemed to be similar phenomena, the contemporary dialogue on the nature of play and games is operating in a smaller world. For example, many of the articles I will discuss have been published in the *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* – the chief publication in the philosophy of sport. Therefore, most of the authors have written in English (or at least have personally translated their works into English). In that sense, anyone who reads this contemporary body of work can have a better understanding of the specific context of the author (language, era, and geography) than in the diverse historical dialogue. Furthermore, each author uses the English terms “play” and “games,” giving the reader at least a standardized lexicon to aid in understanding the material.

Despite this contextual uniformity, fundamental theoretical differences among these contemporary authors have hindered the attempt to accurately explain the nature of play and games. The authors I will analyze have differing theories of definitional analysis. The theories they use can be roughly divided into three categories. The first group includes what I will call the “skeptics.” This group includes some strange bedfellows. Some are radical anti-foundationalists or nominalists. Others are relativists who doubt the power and objectivity of reflection to get at any kind of truth. Still others are more pragmatically suspicious of simple dichotomies or other hard and fast demarcations – like some of the deconstructionists who worry that rigid truths can become vehicles for empowering favored groups.

The second category of researchers can be called the “optimists.” Some of these are analytical thinkers who search for neat and tidy descriptions of reality. Others are realists who believe in the human capacity to access the truth or the way things are in the world, even if such assessment is incomplete and truth-seeking projects are ongoing. Still others believe that hard and fast definitions, although somewhat clouded by underlying personal biases, are still helpful in describing reality – like some of the pragmatists who worry that extreme post-modern and anti-

absolutist viewpoints hinder our ability to believe in anything. If “skeptics” can be said to have low expectations about metaphysical endeavors, “optimists” can be said to have high expectations about them. Some of the authors reviewed in this section fall into one or the other of these two camps. But there are others.

Thus, a third category of philosophers have moderate expectations and exhibit a modest degree of skepticism. They can be thought of as the “meliorists.” Some of these are inclusive thinkers who see value in multiple ways of describing reality. Others are cautious realists or hopeful relativists. Still others see value in connecting formal and objective claims with descriptive and contextual insights in working toward metaphysical understandings.

I have chosen to highlight these three camps related to definitional projects for two reasons. The first is that, when put together, they present something of a continuum of epistemological commitments made by philosophers who attempted to understand play and games. Those who search for family resemblances (the skeptics) lie toward one extreme; those who claim to identify necessary and sufficient conditions (the optimists) are found on the other side of the continuum; and those who look for central purposes or limited commonalities, or search for a rough consensus on the nature of play and games (the meliorists) are somewhere in the middle. In short, the continuum that includes the three positions I have outlined, highlights the diverse epistemological commitments that stand behind various claims made about play and games. The second reason is that these three theories are prominent in the contemporary dialogue on play and games. In fact, in the sport philosophy literature on play and games it is often difficult to separate epistemological and metaphysical arguments. Fights over different descriptions of games, for instance, are often surrogates for battles over different epistemologies.

The Search for Family Resemblances (Skeptics)

Wittgenstein is the progenitor of this idea and, in fact, used games as an example when promoting his notion of family resemblances. He opposes any stipulation of differences, but rather endorses a procedure of looking and seeing. This looking and seeing, he believes, will generate a picture of entities with overlapping characteristics, entities that are more or less like one another. Games, in other words, have no set of necessary and sufficient conditions. Rather, they are messy. His model provides evidence for why it is important to uncover signposts that help to describe the nature of things. While we may not be able to come up with an exhaustive list of characteristics to fully and clearly describe play or games, for example, we can uncover characteristics that help us understand them. In the landscape of things that populate this world, there may not be perfectly clear lines distinguishing play and games from other phenomena such as work, dance, recreation, or other activities. Instead, this group will search for signposts that depict relationships between instances of play or games. These signposts or indications of similarity do not dictate whether or not an experience is purely play or truly a game. On the contrary, they act as descriptors to help us understand the more or less distinctive and shared or overlapping characteristics of the things that we encounter.

The Identification of Necessary and Sufficient Conditions (Optimists)

Identifying necessary and sufficient conditions is a different, and in some ways opposite, theory of definitional analysis in contrast to searching for family resemblances. Adherents to this theory seek neat, clear, and logically tight descriptions of what they are trying to define. When defining play and games, these optimists will search for features of these phenomena that must be present in each respective case of these activities. These are stipulations or characterizations that must hold for an entity to be play or a game. When these necessary conditions are combined,

they are sufficient in the sense that they fully distinguish the phenomenon in question from other realities. Thus, while one or two conditions, for example, may be required for something to be play or a game, these conditions may or may not also be sufficient. That is, they may not fully distinguish play and game experiences from their kin or other more distant realities. At this point, one or more additional characteristics would be necessary to make the definition of play or games sufficient. On this line of thought a phenomenon is fully defined once its necessary and sufficient conditions have been discovered and accurately portrayed.

The Description of Central Purposes and Underlying Principles (Meliorists)

A third epistemological position for defining such phenomena as games and play lies between the skepticism inherent in a search for family resemblances on the one hand, and the optimism required in searching for necessary and sufficient conditions on the other. One source for this theory is found in the philosophy of law and is referred to in the sport philosophy literature as broad internalism.⁶⁸ It is a theory that finds a middle ground between conventionalism – a skeptical theory to the effect that the prevailing spirit or attitude defines the boundaries of phenomena – and formalism – an optimistic viewpoint that elevates essential internal conditions as authoritative. Broad internalists might say that they have found a moderate position between these two more extreme epistemological theories. In this sense, they seek to characterize play and games in terms of their central purposes. When we understand the purposes of play and games, we can then look for other characteristics – for example, for things that are central to those purposes and other things that are more peripheral.

In the following analysis, some authors will fall clearly within one of these three theoretical camps. The epistemological commitments of other authors will not be as clear. Regardless, my intention is not to classify each author as residing in one of the three categories,

but to explain that variations in their viewpoints are tethered to their epistemologies. The focus in this section will be on the merits of various metaphysical claims about play and games, not on the strengths or weaknesses of different epistemologies from which they emerged. This assumes, of course, that different epistemological commitments can generate useful insights – even though some will be portrayed as family resemblances, others as central purposes, and still others as necessary conditions.

Play Theories

In this section, I will review analyses by Schmitz, Esposito, Hyland, Suits, Meier, and Kretchmar. Their books and articles are among the numerous studies sport philosophers have done on play metaphysics. These authors are a part of this study for two reasons. First, they are representative of the three epistemologies noted above. Some are skeptics, others are optimists, and still others are meliorists. Secondly, they are frequently cited in the literature. That is, subsequent philosophers have taken their work seriously whether to further support for their claims or move in a different direction.

Kenneth L. Schmitz

Schmitz explains that he is not attempting to determine the essence or substance of play, but is trying to pick out a fluid and dynamic metaphor to explain it. He describes play as present in varying degrees as if it resides on a continuum. He is seeking, then, “to determine [play’s] appropriate forms,” and also “to clarify the spirit of play.”⁶⁹ Schmitz claims that play has four appropriate forms: frolic, make-believe, sporting skills, and games. In clarifying the spirit of

play, he identifies two central characteristics. It requires a suspension of the ordinary world and creates a distinct order.

Schmitz begins by outlining his four varieties of play to determine its breadth. Frolic, the first and least complex, is spontaneous and simple. It is often associated with children and animals. (We refer to it informally as “horsing around.”⁷⁰). Make-believe, the second form, is also most common among children, but we see it in adults through parades, costumes, and other aesthetic presentations. The last two forms, sporting skills and games, are the more formal varieties in his mind and he argues that they are contests.⁷¹ The formal nature of these varieties of play comes from their rules. Sporting skills, the less formal of the two, calls for the attempt to master a skill that may have only a loose connections to rules. These can be sporting behaviors in recreational or non-competitive settings that require adherence to rules of skill or nature. They offer only little in terms of inter-personal competitive or contested game rules, but Schmitz claims that they are struggles against natural forces such as wind or water. In games, however, which Schmitz refers to as “completely formal,” rules determine the prescribed and proscribed behaviors and are absolutely binding.⁷²

These varieties of play are similar to Caillois’ categories. Both identify relationships among various activities in order to better understand how we play. In doing so, both also potentially cloud the relationship between play and games. Even though Schmitz describes play activities or forms of play behavior, we will see in the following that he also describes play as an attitude. This raises important questions. Is play an attitude, a way of approaching the world? Or is it an activity, something in the world that has particular qualities? Or is it both?

Despite identifying four forms of play activities, Schmitz explains the play attitude by describing two ontological qualities: it involves a suspension of the ordinary world and presents a distinctive order. As a suspension of the ordinary world, play is something that we choose freely and it is fragile or easily interrupted. Play “may be said to transcend the natural world and the

world of everyday concern” because it has “its own non-natural objectives and formalities.”⁷³

Schmitz characterizes this ability of play to lift us from our normal, everyday routine into a separate world that has different goals, customs, and significance. He claims that we often exhibit a great deal of exhilaration when at play because we are in a transcendent world that we have chosen and that often has great meaning in our lives.

Play as a distinctive order, the second ontological quality, means that the time and space of play are different from normal time and space. This quality of play is similar to Huizinga’s characteristic of play’s separate time and space. However, there is one key difference. Huizinga explains play as having a secret, mysterious, or even sacred time and space whereas Schmitz talks about tangible boundaries and pre-existing real-time parameters. Huizinga’s explanation speaks to a time and space that is not always explicitly clear to the players, but they understand it nonetheless. As Huizinga states, “play begins, and then at a certain moment it is ‘over.’ It plays itself to an end. While it is in progress all is movement, change, alternation, succession, association, separation.”⁷⁴ About space, Huizinga is even more explicit. He says that “all play moves and has its being within a playground marked off beforehand either materially or ideally, deliberately or as a matter of course.”⁷⁵ Time and space can be fluid, dynamic, and open to change. They involve visions of the play world that can be abstract, relative, imaginative, and different from the concrete world.

Schmitz sees the time and space of play less as phenomenological realities and more as structured conventional phenomena. He explains the absolute boundaries of baseball and chess, and the rigid beginning and endpoints of hockey or baseball by saying that “play-space is not at all relative in most games and to the extent to which arbitrary rules are invented to that extent the space becomes more determinate and more absolute.” He also explains that “play has its own internal boundaries set by the objectives and rules of the game.”⁷⁶

It seems as if Schmitz is pointing to types of activity (the temporal-spatial constraints of games) whereas Huizinga is pointing to the “walled-off” attitude (play experienced as separate from normal life). Through their differences we can see a bit more of the breadth of play and the conflation of play and games. Some play may be more rigid and structured with absolute boundaries and a fixed time – as when one is playing a game governed by white boundary lines and a clock. This is what Schmitz refers to as a formalized play form. Huizinga seems to be describing a broader understanding of play activities that includes those games that have only a tacit understanding among players of space and time, even if it has not been made explicit and public. Schmitz might argue that these less rigid activities are not games or formalized play forms but are examples of activities in his categories of frolic or make-believe.

Schmitz clarifies his position on how these more or less rigid play forms are related to the play attitude. The play spirit is a way in which we carry out particular behaviors, and play forms are the varieties of play that are carried out in this attitude. As noted, they include frolic, make-believe, sporting skills, and games. This distinction is certainly helpful but it leaves some metaphysical issues about play unanswered. Does the author’s two-part definition of play describe the play spirit or play forms? Schmitz’s characterization of play as separate from the ordinary world seems to be meant for the play spirit. Indeed, the reason that play is separate from the ordinary world is because we have a different mindset, attitude, or intentionality than we do during our normal, everyday lives. Yet when Schmitz describes play as a distinctive order with rigid and structured constraints with regards to time and space, it seems that he is actually talking about play forms (most notably, games – his most formalized play forms). But why would he emphasize those particular forms? After all, it is conceivable that we could be in the play spirit while participating in any number of activities, many of which are not games. So of Schmitz’s two conditions for play, it seems as if the first describes the play spirit and the second depicts a major feature of play forms (or a privileged subset of play forms that he calls games).

Joseph L. Esposito

Although his title, “Play and Possibility,” implies that play is the object of his inquiry, Esposito actually writes about game-playing – a hybrid phenomenon that connotes neither pure play nor pure games. He is looking for that which draws players toward games. The attraction to games comes from the “possibility” that the player experiences while at play. In short, game-playing is attractive because it encourages phenomenological possibilities. “To the player,” he states, “the game, if properly constructed, presents not so much a challenge – in the usual sense of the word – as an opportunity to experience possibility.”⁷⁷ He also explains that “games ... are contrived situations, the purpose of which is to heighten and bring into focus the interplay between ‘possibility’ and actuality.”⁷⁸ Esposito, like Schmitz, sees a strong relationship between play and games. Yet while Schmitz distinguished the play spirit from play forms (of which games is a prominent subset), it is not clear what relationship Esposito sees between play and games.

Based on the previously cited quotations by Esposito about play and games, two issues emerge. The first is the relationship between them. Is there a difference between the two and are they always experienced together? The second issue is where “possibility” fits into the relationship. Does play, games, or game-playing generate this “possibility” that is so attractive according to Esposito? Answers to these questions would seem central to any understanding of “possibility” and its role in game-playing.

When Esposito mentions game-playing, it is unclear what that phrase entails. Is play proper something that necessarily accompanies participation in a game? That is, whenever we are participating in a game activity, are we also playing? Conversely, is play something that requires games? That is, whenever we are at play, are we also always in a game? Does Esposito want to argue for some less intimate relationship—where games are conducive to play, on one hand, or where play redeems games, on the other? Or is game-playing the term Esposito uses to

mean nothing more than participating in a game? That is, playing means nothing more than the neutral verb, “doing.”

Esposito alludes to play and games separately at times. This suggests that he probably sees a difference between the two phenomena. Yet the specifics of the difference are never made explicit. He notes that, “the actual physical activity of the game ... is of secondary importance to the player.”⁷⁹ On this interpretation, it seems that he sees games simply as vehicles that allow play to happen. The player can play in any number of ways, and the actual activities or games are expendable, or at least interchangeable. Yet Esposito follows that statement by saying that the player’s “goal is the confrontation with ‘possibility’ created out of the rules and structures of the game and his performance within that structure.”⁸⁰ This would suggest that play is only contingently important. What really matters is that play happens within the structure of particular games. If so, then the unique qualities of games are central to the experience of play.

From this it is evident that Esposito has not done much to clarify the relationship between games and play except to describe the conjunction between them in a normative way. Games experienced as play provide very powerful experiences, and the author explains that such involvement casts a positive light on our humanity. Game-playing, then, is a beautiful experience because it involves playing – an open state of mind to the world – and games which are created and structured by humans for their enjoyment. Furthermore, on Esposito’s view, these two phenomena occur together often enough to describe them as a natural pair or couple, even though it is conceivable that both phenomena are also experienced separately.

The second issue raised by Esposito’s analysis is the locus of “possibility.” Is it in games? Is it in play? Or is it in game-playing? He describes “possibility” as “the common-root experience of all game-playing, an experience which any reflective participant recognizes as the essential point of game-playing, and which even the more unreflective participants can be made to see if probed in the proper manner.”⁸¹ As the characteristic that defines this experience of

game-playing, “possibility” has ambiguous parentage. Would Esposito argue that the “possibility” in play comes from its instantiation as a game or conversely, the “possibility” in a game is contingent on its relationship to play?

Game challenges certainly make plenty of room for “possibilities” related to problem solutions. As Esposito notes, we contrive games as attempts at creating activities in which we can experience “possibility.” However, in our actual game experiences, it seems that there are times when we experience “possibility” and times when we do not. A game may drag on, and we may find ourselves trying to end it as efficiently as possible. In other cases, we may not have the requisite skills to be able to fully experience a game’s “possibility,” or may ignore the “possibility” because we are forced, against our will, to participate. So it seems that “possibility” can be available but is not always present in games.

Can play, rather than games, be the locus of “possibility?” Since it is a state of mind or an attitude that is marked by an awareness of what the world has to offer, it seems to be the better candidate. “Possibility” entails an attitude of openness to the situation and the events that occur in the flow of time. Many scholars have noted the delightful “possibility” and unpredictability of play as a part of its charm. Play has the “possibility” of freedom or liberation from work consequences or necessity. Esposito speaks of the “possibility” and unpredictability of play in the moment the tennis racket hits the fuzzy yellow ball or the moment the golf club hits the dimpled white ball. However, these examples, once again, highlight possibilities related to problem solving in games.

Esposito seems to conclude that “possibility” is most vibrant in *game*-playing, not just play. Because game-playing seems to involve the play attitude that includes the above noted “possibility” and unpredictability; and because game-playing involves games in which humans have structured rules and goals to create “possibilities” for problem solving, he seems to be arguing that game-playing (that is—a game project experienced as play) is uniquely characterized

by “possibility.” Both elements of game-playing have a connection to this characteristic even though he has neither distinguished between the two phenomena nor seen that there are two potential sources for possibility. Thus, based on Esposito’s analysis, “possibility” is the central experience that makes the hybrid phenomenon called “game-playing” a worthy endeavor.

Drew A. Hyland

Hyland relies heavily on Platonic writings for his analysis of play. He argues that play is a unique stance toward the world, one of “responsive openness.”⁸² This description includes two characteristics that he thinks best explain the nature of play. “Openness,” the first characteristic, is the mindset that one takes while in play. A person can be playing or not playing while doing the exact same activity, and openness is the criterion by which we can determine the difference between the two. For instance, a young skier may be forced by his parents to hit the slopes on a frigid morning. This youngster will spend his time thinking about how much he despises his parents’ decision, how much he would rather be sleeping in on this frosty morning, and how good the hot cocoa will taste when his parents finally let him back into the lodge. Another young skier may be fully engaged in her experience on the slopes. She schusses down the runs swept up in every moment by the feel of snow underneath her skis. She begins to differentiate between types of snow beneath her as the day goes on. Some of the snow is soft, wet and powdery. Some of it is hard, icy, and slick. She will alter her skiing accordingly.

The difference between these two young skiers, according to Hyland, is that one is exhibiting openness and the other is not. The young boy has closed himself off to the world that skiing presents. He is focused on other things and would not notice some of the subtleties that can make skiing an intrinsically enjoyable experience. The young girl, however, is open to the

world that skiing has to offer. She is aware of the rhythms and sensuality that make it a beautiful experience.

However, in Hyland's mind she is not playing just because she is open. To be open to the world of skiing does not guarantee play. She must also exhibit Hyland's second characteristic, responsiveness, to the world of skiing. A skier that is open but does not respond would be one who runs into trees, sideswipes other skiers, and often falls. There must be a response to this world for it to be play, otherwise she is simply a spectator with skis on (until a crash releases her bindings, making her neither a spectator nor a person with skis on but a patient receiving medical attention from the ski patrol). The response to the world of skiing is being in the moment of skiing. It is responding by lifting one's skis higher when turning in the powdery snow and leaning into turns earlier on the icy snow.

Hyland chooses skiing as an example of play in a particular sport. However, play as "responsive openness" can occur in any sport. According to Hyland, it can also be experienced in many activities that are not sports. "Lots of activities ... exhibit responsive openness," he says.⁸³ Someone listening to music, for example, could be responsively open, but that does not mean that listening to music is playing a sport. Hyland defines play in sport as "responsive openness," though, because sports are activities that call for a heightened "responsiveness" and a more complete "openness" than do many other activities. In this sense, games in the form of sports have a privileged relationship to play. The stance of play, in other words, is more likely to be achieved in sport than in more mundane or routine activities.

Play as "responsive openness" is a phrase that seems to capture a major characteristic of play. "Responsive openness" has some seemingly obvious connections to what many of the early authors said about play, including James in "Sentiment of Rationality" and Csikszentmihalyi when he describes "flow." However, in defining play, Hyland makes some theoretical claims that help us understand how he wants his definition to be understood and how his definition is

different from James' or Csikszentmihalyi's. Hyland adds three caveats to his claims about play. The first is that he does not see an absolute divide between play and non-play. Instead, like Schmitz, he suggests that our activities lie on a continuum of more or less playful behavior. Secondly, he claims that his definition "is an intentional rather than an extensional conception of play."⁸⁴ That is, he is not trying to delineate between activities that are play (such as basketball, softball, and skiing) and those that are not play (such as going to sleep, eating dinner, and brushing one's teeth). Rather he is trying to understand the orientation of the player toward the activity. So he is looking at the intention of the player rather than the extension of play in particular activities. Thirdly, Hyland says that his definition suggests that an activity is play or not to the extent that it is characterized by "responsive openness." This is largely a reiteration of his first caveat that says that play and non-play occupy endpoints on a continuum. If an experience is characterized by a sufficient degree of "responsive openness," then he would say that it counts as an instance of play.

Hyland concludes that openness and responsiveness are the two things that our play and sport experiences have in common. As such, he looked at what we think of as play and sport and found correlating characteristics that help us understand their nature. He claims that this perspective is different from standard definitions. With a normal definition, play is equivalent to its characteristics (play equals responsive openness and responsive openness equals play, for instance). Hyland, however, does not make such a sweeping claim. Instead, he argues that "responsive openness" characterizes play much like dark hair and brown eyes characterize the men in his family. "In the stance of responsive openness," he says, "I have discovered a necessary but not sufficient condition for play."⁸⁵ Dark hair and brown eyes are not equivalent to the men in his family nor are the men in his family the only ones with dark hair and dark eyes. So, instead of making an authoritative claim about what play is, he is simply identifying what he sees as "an essential dimension of the stance of play."⁸⁶ Indeed, he thinks that presenting play as

“responsive openness” is the best way to understand the phenomenon, even though play has other characteristics, and other phenomena can have “responsive openness” as one of their characteristics.

However, Hyland does make one universal claim about play, and it has to do with play’s relational nature. He echoes Plato when he says that in play we are most human and without play we are less complete in our humanity. We are naturally incomplete creatures, he explains, who are always trying to become more whole. We often try to become more complete by way of mastery and submission – by gaining authority over something or ceding authority to something else. If that is the case (and it often is), Hyland would say that we unfortunately find ourselves much of the time in non-play orientations towards the world. Such is the case with the boy who reluctantly heeded his parents’ command to hit the slopes. He clearly ceded authority.

By way of contrast, when we seek completion through “responsive openness,” we are more fully human because we are working toward completion in a more humane and holistic way. This stance “is called for by our very nature, that we may the better fulfill the project of being human.”⁸⁷ Hyland would argue that, while at play, we are most complete or are most truly seeking completion (even though we may not be aware of it at the time). When we are open and responsive, we are interacting with the world in a way that is most faithful to the things of the world. Through mastery and submission, we are focused on power and status, but with “responsive openness” we are fully focused on the moment, or the activity in which we are engaged.

Bernard Suits

Suits claims that Huizinga “began to find play under nearly every rock in the social landscape.”⁸⁸ To restrict or limit what he sees as an overly inclusive definition, Suits identifies

two characteristics as the necessary and sufficient conditions for play. Suits defines play as autotelic and relational. That is, in addition to having its own end, it involves a reallocation of resources from instrumental to autotelic use.

On the basis of Suits' first condition – autotelicity – play is an end in itself. For Suits, this can include any number of activities from a cat chasing its tail to Aristotle contemplating God. These activities are autotelic in that the reward is in the doing. In other words, if participation in some experience is not encountered as rewarding, it cannot be play. However, this is not enough. Simply because the cat chasing its tail and Aristotle contemplating God are experienced as autotelic activities, Suits is not ready to suggest that both of these activities are instances of play. Although they both may be play, he does not want to say that they are indeed play simply because the end of their activity lies in the doing.

Autotelicity, then, is not a sufficient descriptor of play for Suits. He sees many activities as rewarding experiences—including many instrumental actions at work. If autotelicity were the only defining characteristic of play, then anyone, anywhere, anytime who is enjoying what he or she is doing would be at play. This is why Suits thinks that Huizinga's analysis of play is too inclusive. Huizinga, on Suits' account, is defining intrinsicity rather than play.

Thus, Suits needs another characteristic for purposes of distinguishing between play and other kinds of intrinsically satisfying experiences. To this end, he suggests that play must include “a temporary reallocation to autotelic activities of resources primarily committed to instrumental purposes.”⁸⁹ That is, there must be something with which a player is playing. This may be one's mashed potatoes when a young boy “reallocates” them from purposes of nutrition to the construction of rivers and ponds; or it may be baseball when one is reallocating a resource – time – toward playing a mere game, when it is usually used for various utilitarian purposes. When we reallocate these instrumental resources for autotelic purposes, we are “playing” with them.

The reallocation of resources from instrumentality to autotelicity in play speaks to play's relational nature. Suits claims that the instrumental (work or seriousness) is inherently related to the autotelic (play) much like light is related to darkness. "Light is the opposite of darkness," Suits says. The light that exists at any point in time is inversely correlated to the darkness. When we assert that the sky is light blue, for example, we tacitly mean that it is light instead of dark because the two are related. Play is like light and seriousness is like darkness. One of the two is always present and they directly affect each other's existence.

Not all phenomena are relational in this way. Suits explains that games do not have inverse correlates like play does. Instead, games are like the color blue. There are plenty of things that are not blue, but blue has no inherent opposite. We can say that some things are light blue, others are dark blue, and still others are not blue at all. Play and games can be understood in the same way. There are some things that are play and games (light blue), others that are games and not play (dark blue), and still other things that are not games at all (even though they might still be play – namely, light red, light green, and so on).

Suits' two-part definition, then, suggests that play is both autotelic and relational. It is an experience that is an end in itself and one that is grounded in a reallocation of resources from instrumental to autotelic purposes. In crafting his definition this way, Suits might be excluding a number of activities that are often thought of as play. For one, he has argued that not all autotelic activity is play. An example of autotelic activity that is not play is intrinsically-satisfying work. Appropriately challenging and complex work is often intrinsically rewarding, but we would not want to confuse it with play. Play, for Suits, is like good work, but with a relational quality to it. Play is a stepping out from normal utilitarian living or, again to use his terms, "a reallocation of" our resources.

If we follow this line of reasoning, we have to ask whether or not Suits excludes professional athletes from play when they are getting paid for their performances. Although one

is getting paid to “play” a sport, it can still be autotelic at times. So it seems as though Suits’ first characteristic does not exclude professional athletics from play. The second criterion seems to be more difficult. Is there some resource that is being reallocated from instrumental to autotelic in professional athletics that would allow it to be play? The best candidates for reallocation are the equipment and time. Is a baseball glove or a golf ball being reallocated from instrumental to autotelic use in baseball and golf? It seems not, as those pieces of equipment were made to catch baseballs and be hit by golf clubs, so they are serving their instrumental purposes in baseball and golf. With time we have the same dilemma. When children decide to start a game of baseball or golf in a summer afternoon, we would say that they may be reallocating their time from instrumental to autotelic activity. Yet it is not the same with the professional athlete. A pro baseball player or golfer is getting paid to participate, and so time is not being reallocated. It is work time, albeit in a potentially satisfying game.

In order to clarify these relationships, Suits asks us to imagine a doubles tennis match involving one professional player and three non-professionals. Chrissie Rich, the pro, is involved in this match that goes on for a month without finishing a single game. The judge asks if she wants to continue playing or end the match. (After all, most people cannot afford to play tennis for a month straight.) She chooses to continue and offers the following rationale: “This is no temporary re-allocation of my time, but precisely the activity to which my time has a first priority commitment.”⁹⁰ Professional tennis, in Suits’ mind, is not really play for Chrissie because it is not a reallocation of resources from instrumental to autotelic purposes. Instead he might conclude that her involvement is intrinsically-satisfying work. In this and similar cases, one’s time is committed to instrumentation (making money) and one’s other resources (equipment) are being used in their usual instrumental way. In this manner, a professional athlete is expected to take the sport seriously because it is instrumental in nature.

It is important to notice that it is not just the fact that Chrissie Rich is being paid that makes her a non-player. It is her intentionality as a professional that makes her so. We could also imagine a pseudo-worker who is being paid to play tennis, but behaves like a player. This individual pursues the intrinsicity of tennis even to the demise of her professional commitments. She has in fact made a reallocation of resources because she would not behave that way if she were truly at work. Thus, it is not just the setting or circumstance for Suits that determines work or play—it is the “logic” of the behavior. To the beat of which drummer does this person march? To the beat of autotelicity-reallocation (the true player) or the beat of instrumentality that can incidentally be autotelic (the fortunate worker)?

Suits could have constructed this vignette differently. He could have asked the professional player if she would continue playing even though the game had become tedious. She would have said “yes” because even in the absence of autotelicity, “this is what I do with all my paid time. I get paid to play tennis, not to be happy.” The true player, on the other hand, would say “no” because she has no instrumental reason to keep playing. When activities under conditions of “reallocation” are no longer fun, their reason for being disappears.

This stipulation may seem refreshing to some and inaccurate to others. Those who are discouraged with the negative hoopla surrounding many professional athletes (such as contract disputes, misconduct, and selfish in-game behavior) may feel that Suits hit the nail on the head. To this group, he has expressed the characterization that sets professional athletes apart from amateurs. To others, however, Suits’ distinction may not sit right. After all of the aforementioned negative influences on professional athletes, there are still some elite athletes who seem to thoroughly enjoy themselves even though they are getting paid. These professionals may even admit that they would play in professional leagues for free if it were possible.

Can professional athletes genuinely play? We can facilitate play easily when we are not tied down by work, instrumental needs, or seriousness, but how often do we find play when our

experiences are serious, instrumental, and work-related? As we wrestle with this issue, we need to determine if the extrinsic end to an activity (as in work or the payment of professional athletes) can ever be trumped by the possible intrinsic of that activity.

Klaus V. Meier

Meier likens play to “an affair of flutes.”⁹¹ It is divine and beautiful behavior similar to the flowing melody and simple elegance of the flute. Meier promotes the irrelevance, lack of value, lack of utility, and lack of consequence as the characteristics that paradoxically make play so significant and valuable to humanity. That is, these are the characteristics that, according to Meier, make play so meaningful and important to us in our cutthroat and efficiency-oriented world. With these traits in mind, he suggests that play is an orientation toward specific activities in the world. In other words, play should not be understood as an activity but rather as the manner of engaging in an activity.

Meier gives a descriptive definition of play that captures what he sees as two universal conditions of the play orientation. The first is that play is voluntary. The second is that play is autotelic. Voluntary and autotelic participation in an activity produces what he calls a “play occurrence.”⁹² In the following, I will analyze Meier’s explanation of these two characteristics.

Meier uses the term “autotelicity” to mean a combination of four closely related ideas. Autotelic means (1) “intrinsic,” (2) “noninstrumental,” (3) a “self-contained enterprise which has only ‘internal finalities which do not transcend it’,” and (4) “participated in for its own sake.”⁹³ These would appear to be four ways of saying the same thing, albeit with different emphases. In fact, most authors who use these phrases do so fairly synonymously. They seem to mean that play is done for its own purposes and is its own end. I will pursue a more complete understanding of play with the notion that autotelic, intrinsic, and participated in for its own sake

are all phrases that have been used to denote the same basic idea—namely that the reward is in the doing.

As noted, Meier also argues that play is “of necessity, a voluntary endeavor.”⁹⁴ Play is voluntary in that we choose when to be open to play and when to close ourselves off to it. “During moments of play,” he says, “man is fully his own master”⁹⁵ in that he is in control of answers to two choices – namely, should I play, and, if so, what should I play? This stands in contrast to many other experiences in life that are thrust on us by necessity. The term “voluntary” is sufficient to this extent. There is a sense in which play stands apart from what Huizinga called “the appetitive processes” of life. With so many things over which we have little control, play provides nice contrast. And with so many opportunities for play, it is good to have the freedom to choose our favorite playgrounds and ignore the others.

But is each player really in control of his or her play? Meier seems to be alluding to some controllable feature in play as he explains that each individual has choices and is his own master while at play. When he says play is voluntary he is pointing in the direction of non-necessitated behavior. That is, we are compelled to do many things in life in order to survive, but play is optional or chosen. When play theorists talk about being “in control” or “freely choosing,” I think this is what lies behind the sentiment. To a large extent it is true that we choose play, but work or other survival activities usually choose us.

Other authors have written about play as voluntary in a way that speaks to another aspect of play. If we use the term “voluntary” to mean an act that is “volunteered,” then we see a different side of play. To volunteer still shows an element of control, to be sure, but it also shows submission. When I volunteer to do something – such as the dishes – I am placing myself at the whims of some other power (my spouse, my parents, my boss, or even the dishes). In the same way, when we play we are volunteering to be swept up in the powerful winds of the authority of a particular activity. We cede control and give ourselves to the spirit of play. We endure board

games into the wee hours of the night; we dive on hardwood floors or wet, muddy grass for possession of a ball; and we jump out of airplanes (with parachutes) and off bridges (with bungee cords) not because we are in control of ourselves but because the play spirit bids us to do so. We cannot help but endure, dive, and jump when we are swept up in the play spirit.

These two facets of what might be called the voluntary nature of play generate an important question. Who is in control? Is it the player? Meier and other authors think so because each player can choose whether or not to be in play. Is it the activity? Some of the more phenomenologically-oriented authors believe that there is a mutual cultivation between the player and the playground (the activity and context). This gives some power to the activity or to forces in the world. The player, in a way, gets played. I will suggest that there is an element of both in play.

Certainly the player has the ability to choose to be open to play when particular situations present themselves. Yet it also seems clear that there are times when the player is not in control of the choices. This can be seen by reflecting on two scenarios. The first is the phenomenon of playground silence. One can choose the activity—like baseball. But one cannot choose baseball-as-intrinsically-interesting. Sometimes baseball does not “cooperate.” The potential playground remains relatively silent, and one cannot simply force it to speak up. The second scenario is related to playground authority. The playground may speak so loudly that I am powerless to say “no.” In spite of pressing obligations, I am swept up. The play current has an undertow that is too strong to ignore. When an activity attracts us with this magnetism, it is difficult to say if the player chose to play, or alternately, if play “volunteered” the player, or a little bit of both. Play may involve something of a dance between self and other, choosing and being chosen, freedom and captivity, opening oneself to the spell and falling under it. Play is voluntary compared to some forms of work-a-day necessity. But even in the absence of the compulsion of need and utility, play would seem to be voluntary in only a limited sense.

R. Scott Kretchmar

When defining play, Kretchmar aligns himself with Suits to a large extent. He argues that “play doings are autotelic activities,” and that play “is encountered and experienced in contrast to other sorts of enterprises in which we are more commonly engaged.”⁹⁶ He explains that his two characteristics resemble Suits’ necessary and sufficient conditions for play but also gives credit to a number of other authors who have noticed play’s relational nature. Huizinga analyzed play’s separate time and space, Schmitz argued for play as a suspension of the ordinary world, and Eugen Fink called play an oasis in the desert of life.⁹⁷ These authors see play as a mode of existence that humans enter into only temporarily. The amount of time that one spends in play is a kind of minority commitment relative to the amount of time one spends in other modes of existence (surviving, improving the world, taking on responsibilities, and so on).

In the aforementioned definition, it is clear that Kretchmar is building off the work of earlier writers, but he makes more original claims about qualitative distinctions in play. In doing so, he opens an old discussion about play in a new way. Among the previous authors who wrote about qualitative distinctions, most of them alluded to the difference between good play and bad play. Aristotle, Aquinas, and Calvin made it clear that some play is out of place. Kretchmar furthers this point by saying that play is no different from other phenomena in that sense – there can be good and bad play just as there can be good and bad work or good and bad love. There is no reason to endorse play unconditionally and say that it is different from work or love in this sense. However, Kretchmar goes beyond the early scholars’ arguments about the morality of play to describe actual qualities of this activity. He argues that there are two categories of play – celebrative and acquisitive – and among them are two qualitatively different forms – narrative and aesthetic. I will explain these below.

Kretchmar’s typology of play separates different types of good play. This normative judgment is based on the human ability to play. For his typology to work, this human ability to

play must be clear (if humans are not biologically play-capable creatures, then their play would be much different). Therefore, “the decision to play is grounded in two moments.”⁹⁸ The first is that humans are predisposed to play. Kretchmar believes that play is a natural human inclination or a part of who we are. The second moment is a compelling play invitation from the world. This means that there is something outside the person that participates in the play relationship. Humans would participate less frequently in play if there were fewer or less persuasive play invitations. Instead, our world is scattered with more play invitations than are comprehensible. Kretchmar portrays the play experience as dialogically grounded – a play-ready self in dialogue with a play-inviting world. Thus, he generally disagrees with Meier or anyone who sees the player as autonomous or play decisions as unfettered.

With this basic framework, Kretchmar makes a categorical distinction between two types of play. The first is an “acquisitive” one that is characterized by reminders that there is “something that we have not yet done or something we do not yet have.”⁹⁹ Basically, in this type of play we are attempting to acquire something (a victory, the completion of a performance, skills, etc.) whether we know it or not. Acquisitive play presupposes something we need and it values tension or uncertainty as we try to attain that which we do not have. Games, contests, drama, and make believe are examples of acquisitive play in which there is a delicious uncertainty related to whether or not one can “get it” or “pull it off.”

The second category of play is “celebrative” and it is characterized by “a call to express – to explore, cavort, feel, and experience.”¹⁰⁰ Whereas acquisitive play reminds us that we are incomplete, celebrative play reminds us of our fullness. It is the enjoyment of experiences – a feast, in other words. This type of play presupposes satiation on the part of the player and values joy and expression. The feast includes spontaneous frolic, dance, meditation, and exploration on one hand as well as more organized ritual, dance, and song on the other.

Within these two categories lies a qualitative distinction. That is, acquisitive and celebrative play each contains play examples in two qualitative categories. They are “narrative” and “aesthetic” play. Narrative play is based on “a vision of human beings as fundamentally meaning-seeking, story-telling creatures who value coherence.”¹⁰¹ Aesthetic play relies on “a vision of human beings as fundamentally stimulus-seeking, choice-making individuals who value their uniqueness and freedom.”¹⁰² Kretchmar makes the claim that narrative play is the better choice of the two. As he juxtaposes them, it becomes evident that narrative play is more durable, lasting, and meaningful than the present-minded, novel, and sporadic aesthetic play.

This prioritization seems to contradict Meier’s “Affair of Flutes,” in which he trumpets the power and importance of frivolous, spontaneous, and seemingly unconnected play in our lives. Kretchmar gives more weight to the continuity of narrative play whereas Meier speaks highly of the serendipity found in what Kretchmar calls aesthetic play. While Kretchmar has pointed to a potentially important distinction, it is not clear that he and Meier are as far apart as they might seem to be.

First it must be noted that Meier wrote before Kretchmar, and so the former may not have been aware of the latter’s qualitative distinction in play. Meier essentially wrote an apology for the value of spontaneous play. He seems to have made his point and he was not comparing mere or frivolous play to the deeper play to which Kretchmar alludes. Thus, it is difficult to say what his conclusions would be regarding narrative play. Secondly, as Kretchmar describes narrative play as the better of the two, he is not condemning aesthetic play as an inherently negative experience. Instead, he is simply saying that one type of play is more lasting or durable than the other. If there is a choice between frivolous, shallow play or deep, meaningful play, then Kretchmar would choose the latter and would urge others to do the same.

It seems as though this issue gets us back to the distinction Aristotle made between *paidia* and *praxis* or *theoria*. He maintained that childish play is good at certain times for

relaxation or charm, but contemplation or intrinsically-valued action is the type of play that characterizes the good life. These mature activities can be a deep source of rich, personal meaning much like narrative play while childish play may be analogous to aesthetic play.

Game Theories

Play is a much broader and more elusive topic than games. It is the more expansive phenomenon because it is common to animals and humans, children and adults, and it can be found in both formal and informal settings. It is also the case that philosophers have paid more attention to play and generally assigned it greater value. Some have claimed that it seems more central to the good life. When we are at play, we have been described as being “at our best.”

The status of games relative to achieving the good life is less clear. This is so because we have played good games and bad games, and we have played games well and played them poorly. Games have struck some individuals as relatively trivial activities – that is, as “mere games.” Given these doubts about the status of games, it is interesting to note that the study of games has revolved around a philosopher who argues that games are central to the good life. Bernard Suits wrote about games as being among the most meaningful activities in which we can engage. Suits’ metaphysical game theory has been the standard to which all other analyses are compared. While his seminal work, *The Grasshopper*, is very well respected as a starting point for any understanding of games, it also has its critics. Some have said that his definition is too narrow, others have said it is too broad, and still others have voiced their opposition to his project in principle.¹⁰³ So even though his definition is the one most often cited and used, it has also served as a lightning rod of sorts for critics.

Many authors besides Suits have written about the nature of games. Kretchmar, Carse, and Guttman are among this group. I will begin this section, though, by returning to the analyses of Huizinga and Caillois that are specific to games.

Huizinga and Caillois

As noted, Huizinga and Caillois are not always clear about what they mean when referring to play and games. Neither do they consistently draw a distinction between the two. At times, they even use the two terms interchangeably. Nevertheless, one can still learn a great deal by culling out what they say about games. They both describe types of games. Huizinga mentions contests and representational games while Caillois develops a four-part typology of games that includes contests, chance, mimicry, and vertigo.

In saying that a game can be either “a contest *for* something or a representation *of* something,” Huizinga might be referring to the underlying goal or intent of the activity.¹⁰⁴ What he seems to be saying is that games are played either with competition or representation in mind. That is, we enter into some games to try to win by beating our opponents or improving on a previous score. These are contests in which we take the test with or alongside someone else, or they are tests in which we try to score well, whether in comparison to others’ scores or not. We play other games in order to re-create something or mimic someone else. In children’s games of make believe the girl will act like a mother or teacher and the boy will act like a fireman or gunslinger. In adult games of make believe, we see theatrical presentations, costume parties, and parades as representative of something or someone else.

Huizinga tells us little about the nature of games except for this categorical distinction and his characteristics of play. Of these six traits of play (freely chosen, separate time and space, rule-governed, secretive, orderly, and without material gain), some might apply to games as well,

but it is unclear if and when they are intended to do so. Most sport philosophers would agree that games have some of these characteristics. For instance, they are rule-governed, orderly, and take place within a separate time and space. Furthermore, many would say that while games can provide or lead to material gain, this is not essential to their nature. Yet it is difficult to define game activities as freely chosen and secretive. These traits seem to indicate the mindset of the game player as opposed to the actual activity that is played. Huizinga may or may not agree that a game activity per se is not the same thing as play. He defines play as an approach to life or a way of experiencing the world but he also seems to describe particular activities that are crucial to the emergence of this mindset. If games are distinct from play, they may be activities that stimulate or prompt the play spirit. In fact, games may be particularly well-suited as play inducers because “tension” is a characteristic mentioned often by Huizinga as an important quality of play experiences. Games – whether contests for or representations of – create tension.¹⁰⁵

In Caillois’ typology of games, he tells us a bit more than Huizinga about how he sees games playing a role in our lives. As noted in Chapter One, he describes games in four categories that indicate the intention of the player in choosing the activity. The four categories include contests (*agon*), chance (*alea*), make-believe (*mimicry*), and vertigo (*ilinx*). “I am proposing a division into four main rubrics, depending upon whether, in the games under consideration, the role of competition, chance, simulation, or vertigo is dominant,” he says.¹⁰⁶

These categories explicitly include two groups that Huizinga omitted – games of chance and games of vertigo. Huizinga dismissed games of chance as outside the realm of play because he believed that they dealt with material profit. Caillois takes issue with this claim and says that games of chance are, in fact, clearly a subset of games. “The influence of games of chance is no less considerable [than competitive games], even if deemed unfortunate,” he argues.¹⁰⁷ Roulette, blackjack, and poker, he would say, should not be excluded from the game sphere just because

they are often associated with people of low morals and values. Most contemporary authors agree with Caillois that games of chance are still games even though they usually include material gain or loss.

Caillois' category of vertigo includes activities meant to create a feeling of disarray or uncontrollability within the participant. Such games include "an attempt to momentarily destroy the stability of perception and inflict a kind of voluptuous panic upon an otherwise lucid mind."¹⁰⁸ When children spin around baseball bats until they are too dizzy to walk and when adults ride roller coasters that spin and dip them until they become nauseous, they are involved in games of vertigo. These games dramatically alter the senses and give a person the feelings of chaos and disorientation. Caillois mentions drug-tripping and putting harmful substances into one's body as other, more negative, forms of this type of game.

As these two new categories help describe games more broadly, they still do not expand upon the metaphysics of games. One of the major ideas we can glean from the writings of Huizinga and Caillois is that games seem to be the activities in which we are involved when we are playing. In fact, games may be privileged targets for play, or at least adult forms of play. When we are *at play* we are frequently *in games*.

Bernard Suits

Since its publication, Suits' *The Grasshopper* has been the benchmark for philosophic forays into the world of games. *The Grasshopper* is much like Suits' article "Words on Play," in that it puts forth the necessary and sufficient conditions of the object of interest – in this case, games. Suits' analysis is often seen as too analytical by those who believe the social landscape of experiences to be much murkier than he allows. Nevertheless, he says "that the elements of game are 1/ the goal, 2/ the means of achieving the goal, 3/ the rules, and 4/ the lusory attitude."¹⁰⁹

Any activity that is a game must have a goal. Suits divides game goals into three categories: lusory goals that have to do with winning the game, prelusory goals that have to do with achieving a specific state of affairs regardless of how it is done (that is, without the constraints of game rules), and life goals that have nothing to do with internal game logic. Because many other activities in life have goals, he adds his second necessary condition – means. All games must have means. There must be ways of reaching the goals of games. What separates games from other goal-oriented activities is that games require means that prohibit the most efficient way of reaching the goal. Therefore, there are lusory (permitted) and illusory (prohibited) means in games. Games require rules, then, to describe the lusory and illusory means.

Rules in games come in two forms – constitutive rules and rules of skill. The former are what make a game a game. If a player follows the constitutive rules, he is playing the game. If he does not, he is not (and cannot be) playing the game. Rules of skill, on the other hand, simply dictate whether or not one is playing the game well, as in “follow through across your body,” or “keep your eyes on the ball.” But again, there are many activities that require goals, inefficient means, and rules but are not games. Civic laws and rules of etiquette require behavior of this kind, but we do not commonly regard them as games in spite of their stipulated inefficiencies. So Suits needs at least one more condition to make his definition of games sufficient.

This fourth condition is the crux of his definition. The lusory attitude provides an explanation for why or under what circumstances a game player undertakes the rules, means, and goal of the game. It is simply for the sake of making the game possible. When Suits stipulates goals, means, and rules, he is pointing toward games as activities. However, when he adds the lusory attitude as part of the definition, he changes the phenomenon of interest to “game-playing.”¹¹⁰

Suits refers to “game-playing” as the phenomenon that requires goals, means, rules, and the lusory attitude. Yet if he has defined “game-playing” in this way, then how are we to understand games? If he has defined games, then why does he use the term “game-playing?” The relationship between these two notions is unclear, if they are in fact distinct phenomena. Further, it seems as though the lusory attitude plays a prominent role in this inconsistency. Suits’ first three conditions seem to be characteristics of things – namely, activities. However, the lusory attitude is an intentionality or mindset that a participant in an activity can have, and it is noticeably different from the other conditions of a game or “game-playing.” Is this attitude required on the part of the participants in order for a game activity to be a game? Can a game be defined apart from the attitude of its participants? Maybe it can.

It is possible that Suits would claim that the lusory attitude is a part of the game activity. It could be a part of the roadblock that game players attempt to overcome. He might say that the lusory attitude is a part of the inefficiency in a game. The so-called lusory attitude explains the reason behind the roadblock – natural or important, on one hand, or contrived and artificial just so one can have the experience thereby produced by the roadblock, on the other. Natural or important roadblocks are there for our safety or well-being, as in judicial or ethical codes. When we are told to stop our vehicles at red traffic lights we naturally understand the importance of this roadblock. When we are told in basketball that we are not allowed to step on the out of bounds line we understand the different parentage of this roadblock. It has contrived and artificial – lusory – roots.

Suits could say that the unnecessary roadblocks that are part of game means are gratuitous in nature. That is, the roadblock is present simply to permit testing experiences that those roadblocks create. Thus, the lusory attitude, in a sense, explains the nature of the inefficient means. Ethical restrictions also create “unnecessary” problems, but their presence is not gratuitous. They are there because the tenets of ethics (e.g., preventing harm) require them.

Thus, there are two kinds of rule-governed inefficiency—natural and gratuitous. A game-player must adopt the lusory attitude regardless of his reasons for participation in the first place. That is, the game player has accepted that the hurdles are gratuitous, not natural, even if this individual is using a game to impress his girlfriend more than he is interested in the problems themselves. He is still benefitting, however, from the roadblock (and game logic) in order to impress his date.

Many philosophers have been interested in Suits' idea of the lusory attitude in games. Some have argued that it is the linchpin of his arguments on game metaphysics. However, his other necessary game conditions have also generated much philosophical discussion. For instance, he has raised an issue regarding the relationship between games and rules. When he claims that a person who breaks the rules of a game is not actually playing that game, he is presenting what has been identified as a formalist position. That is, games are defined by their rules, and so to break any of the rules is to not play the game. Opponents of this position argue that what looks like soccer is soccer even if some of the rules are or have been broken or changed. That is, some games allow for particular rules to be broken – either strategically or incidentally – with additional rules for game restoration.¹¹¹ In sport philosophy, the fight over the relationship between rules and games continues unabated. Is one still in a game if one of its central rules is broken? If soccer (a) and soccer (b) differ only slightly with regards to rule interpretation or the enforcement of peripheral rules, are they still the same game? Different scholars produce different answers to these questions.

R. Scott Kretchmar

Kretchmar accepts much of Suits' analysis. Indeed, he builds on Suits' descriptions of game logic. However, he believes that Suits' metaphysical description of games might be expanded in three ways: through the distinction between tests and contests, through

performances, and through games of chance. I will explain Kretchmar's identification of Suits' game logic and then describe his ideas for game expansion.

In "The Normative Heights and Depths of Play," Kretchmar explains that games have a logic to them which requires more intelligence than mere play. While most sentient beings seem to have the ability to be distracted by enjoyable diversions (play), it takes more advanced intelligence to be able to understand the gratuitous, formal, and conventional logic of games. Gratuitous logic "involves the capacity to negotiate a pair of apparent contradictions – specifically, that harder is better and that certain experiences of uncertainty trump those of security and certainty."¹¹² Gratuitous logic is that which undergirds the lusory attitude in games. Formal logic "requires that we understand the necessary relationship in games between means and ends."¹¹³ This type of logic helps us determine which behaviors are and are not a part of the game and establishes a foundation for fouls, penalties, and reasons for disqualification. Conventional logic "requires that we stipulate relationships between things, just as we do when we invent languages."¹¹⁴ Because gamewrights, when they do their job well, have made the means just right in our games, we adhere to these arbitrary relationships (such as the duel between a pitcher and batter or the opportunity for a low score on a par five golf hole). These three types of logic (gratuitous, formal, and conventional) that are inherent in games underline the fact that games are advanced activities that require more advanced intellectual operations than play.

In "From Test to Contest," Kretchmar explains how competition requires a central test. In other words, contesting presupposes testing. "The comparisons inherent in the sport contest," he argues, "are unintelligible in the absence of a true test."¹¹⁵ With this article, Kretchmar broaches a very basic topic. When considering games, two realities are actually folded into this one category—namely, games as tests and contests. Nobody else has emphasized and clarified this distinction in the same way. Even Suits seems to waffle between tests and contest when he

talks about “winning.” Does he mean succeeding (in a test) or succeeding better than at least one other individual on the same test (in a contest)? Kretchmar believes that this distinction is significant. If nothing else, tests and contests have different sources of – and potentials for – delightful tension. So normatively speaking, it seems that games come in two value laden forms—as tests and as contests. If this is the case, Kretchmar has delineated between two phenomena within games, for a game has a central test to it that can be encountered on its own. The test can also be shared in a contest with one or more opponents. These two phenomena are different and can be experienced differently even though we often talk about them as a combined experience.

Kretchmar also discusses games and performances in an article titled, “On Beautiful Games.” In this essay, he steps into a debate among sport philosophers about whether or not activities that are judged on beauty are games or not. Suits has claimed that the Olympic sport of diving is not a game but an athletic performance or presentation because it is judged on beauty rather than comparative athletic skill in reaching a game-stipulated goal. Suits claims that performances cannot be games because they have no prelusory goal. On the contrary, Kretchmar says that it “is a full-blooded game” and he argues for a category of games that many want to exclude from that realm.¹¹⁶

Physical activities judged on their beauty are games, Kretchmar explains, as long as the contestants maintain the lusory attitude. We can imagine a diver doing a double back flip in pike position off the diving board for the sake of the beauty and artistry in that dive. We can also imagine a diver doing a double back flip in pike position because that is a compulsory component of an Olympic meet in which he is trying to win the gold medal. The second example would be a game while the first one is not. The difference is not in the nature of the event, but in the intention of the diver. Kretchmar argues that, “the relevant difference between game and performance is that the ... performer no longer accepts the limitations of the rules solely for the

sake of the activity such acceptance makes possible,”¹¹⁷ whereas the game participant does. Thus he seems to be saying that the same activity can be a game in one instance and not a game in another based on the context and the participant’s reason for undertaking the activity. These reasons, of course, will also affect behavior as one diver is guided by aesthetic criteria per se and the other diver focuses on aesthetics as means to better performances as defined by the rules and ethos of the game.

Lastly, Kretchmar argues for games of chance as a kind of games. While Caillois argued for this subset of games, Suits curiously ignores them in his book. Kretchmar believes that this omission is an error as he says, “assuming that games of chance are *bona fide* games, Suits has given us ... a skewed portrayal of games.”¹¹⁸ From refereed casino games to informal betting on everyday occurrences, Kretchmar says that games of chance fit Suits’ four criteria. They have goals, means, rules, and they require the lusory attitude. Because of this it is unclear why Suits does not mention them in *The Grasshopper*. Kretchmar speculates that Suits indefensibly privileged games that feature human agency. Pure chance events, of course, eliminate agency in any meaningful sense.

James P. Carse

In his book, *Finite and Infinite Games*, Carse presents a picture of life as a game and people as players. His view of games is much broader than that of any other author. If Suits claimed that Huizinga found play under every rock he turned over, it could also be said that Carse found games both under and around every rock he encountered. With that in mind, Carse discusses the possibility of living the good life if people see themselves as players and see life as a combination of both finite and infinite games.

Finite games are those that have a “definitive end” to them. A finite game is “played for the purpose of winning,” and when “the players have agreed who among them has won,” then the game is over. Life is full of finite games. When we win these games, we receive the accolades that go with them. For some games, this includes a title that can never be taken away. We take that title with us wherever we go, but we continually put it up against future tests.¹¹⁹

The rules of finite games are fixed. They include boundaries, serious attempts at victory, yearning for power, fixed time, and eternal recognition. They are “externally defined.”¹²⁰ We participate in these games in every facet of our existences – school, business, relationships, and leisure time, to name a few. We are always involved in them as we strive to be more complete beings, even though we know that this effort is largely futile in the larger picture of life.

Infinite games, on the other hand, are those in which we strive to continue play *ad infinitum*. They are played “for the purpose of continuing the play.” Infinite players “play with boundaries” to keep the game going. They are playful in their use of strength and time to perpetuate existing game patterns and develop new ones that more fully continue the game. These games present opportunities for more rewarding freedom because “whoever plays, plays freely.” Even though they are very mysterious by nature, they fully liberate us when we focus on them.¹²¹

If these definitions sound vague, it is because Carse’s rhetoric is ambiguous. He sees games in any experiences we have in life. His book is about expanded possibilities in life if we play it like a game. We take finite games seriously and try to master them, while neglecting what can ultimately be the best source of fulfillment – the one, all-important infinite game. To Carse, “there is but one infinite game,” and every person of all time has played it and will continue to play it.¹²² What gives us the most freedom, then, is to be players that help perpetuate this one true infinite game, for we are all players on the same team with the same goal.

The tone in Carse's thesis is similar to Suits' in that games are more prevalent and more important in life than we normally think they are. While their arguments are certainly not identical, they both urge us to play games more often with greater zeal, and importantly, without apologizing for it. While games are often seen as wastes of time or trifling activities, these authors encourage us to be more serious about playfully engaging in them. How we participate in games says a lot about who we are as people. Accordingly, Carse describes our futile and monotonous efforts in finite games as somewhat disappointing because we could be focused on the infinite game. Finite games can be fun, but our ultimate efforts to master these games, nature, and other people come up empty.

Carse speaks to a different typology of games than we have encountered before – competitive vs. cooperative games. As he pushes for infinite games where we are all working with each other and with nature, he is essentially arguing for cooperative games. Working with others and with nature to secure its infinite existence is the best way to experience the possibilities in life. This thesis is much different from what Suits and many other authors present. They promote competitive games because of their durability and rich meaning in our lives. Both types of activities can be considered games, but both have distinctive features and goals. Cooperative games, it is said, lose their luster and become dull because uncertainty and tension fade away over time.

Carse, as a religious scholar, says that human existence is one big cooperative game and it would be best for each person to get on board and help the game continue. Suits, an Aristotelian scholar, says by way of contrast that each person should look at life as a game or series of games and find meaning and value in the game or games that one chooses. He does not see the cohesion throughout the infinite game of time that would be more indicative of Carse's religious or spiritual training. Instead, he focuses on the activities that are intrinsically valuable for each particular person (much like Aristotle would have done).

Nonetheless, these two scholars allow us to see more fully that human beings should play games. They both argue, albeit in different ways, that we are game-playing creatures. By neglecting this part of us, we run the risk of living less meaningful lives. Games are for people and, aside from Carse's one infinite game, are made by people and cultures. People create games that they enjoy playing. Carse would add that people also create games in which they show their dominance, such as those games that they force others to play. In business, school, or intimate relationships, Carse explains that sometimes we have to play by the rules of the games. They are, after all, human creations and are perpetuated by human social interactions.

Allen Guttman

Guttman opens his books on the history of sports with philosophical sections distinguishing between play, games, contests, and sports. In these introductions, he cites many of the other authors in this chapter and gives his criticism and praise. He defines play, like many others, as autotelic – experience which is so enjoyably expressive that it does not need interpretation. He defines games as organized play. Whereas pure play is freeing, organized play submits to rules and goals in game form. Contests are struggles that can be games at times and at other times are not games – such as war and legal battles. Lastly, sports are physically active games that are play.¹²³

For our purposes, Guttman's description of games is paramount, for he illuminates a feature that generally goes unnoticed. He focuses on cultural influences on games. Football and baseball are, or at least have been, largely American games. They are played by Americans in an American way. Soccer, on the other hand, is largely a non-American game. It is played by people all over the world. As Americans, we often fall into the trap of believing that everyone in the world plays games and sports like we do – to win first and foremost (the spirit of capitalism).

However, that is often much less the case than we think. Not every game has a goal of winning. Guttman says that “the importance of contests in our society makes it difficult to realize that there are literally thousands of games that are not contests.” He gives the example of Japanese *kemari*, a game that looks like soccer because everyone kicks the ball. In fact, the goal of this game is for everyone to try and keep the ball in the air as long as possible. “No one wins and no one loses,” he says, but it seems to have the same structure as a game.¹²⁴

It is also possible to sense the different objectives of soccer players around the world. While capitalistic first world countries often focus on winning as efficiently as possible, not everyone plays that way. Eduardo Galeano explains that artistry with the soccer ball is a much higher priority for South American than European players. In Europe, he laments, soccer has become an industry that has sucked the aesthetic appeal out of the game. Brazilian-born players who had professional careers in Europe learned abroad to play “an efficient game, but it was stingy on poetry.” He longs for the rhythmic, flowing dance in the game that is still important in Brazil and its neighboring countries.¹²⁵

This discussion speaks to the possible variety of game goals. Clearly every game has goals – some are to win, others are the continuation of play, and still others value style and aesthetics above all else. Are Europeans and South Americans playing the same game if the former are trying to win as efficiently and dominantly as possible and the latter are trying to win but with style and beauty? A more fundamental question might be to what extent we value playful or non-goal-directed activity in games. If game participants are not trying to win first and foremost, then are they just trifling? If games, especially contested games and sports, are to be won and lost, are they also to be played well and poorly? Often in our games the first priority is to win the contest, but there is also value in how the test is taken. This issue seems to force a return to Kretchmar’s position on tests and contests. In most sports leagues around the world, we

keep track of contesting victories and defeats but also take the time to recognize the positives and negatives of team and individual testing. Two things are going on in competitive games, not one.

A basic implication of Guttman's interest in this issue, then, is that games are influenced by history and culture. Kretchmar explains that games are artificial or man-made problems. Because of this, games are made within the context of culture. Thus, game participants in different cultures around the world may have different notions of what it means to play a game. These games might have similar structures and rules, and might even be called the same name, but there are often differing viewpoints when it comes to game playing and the meaning that springs from it. Therefore, it seems as if the activities are the same, but the goals are often prioritized differently.

Conclusion

We can see that these contemporary authors have described play and games in more specific ways than the early authors did. They have drawn different conclusions about the two phenomena. According to many of the authors, play seems to be the broader of the two categories. It may be explained as a state of mind or an orientation toward the world that we often take when involved in games or sports even though some of the authors have also alluded to particular activities as play. Games, on the other hand, have been presented as activities even though some of the authors have alluded to a particular orientation that must be taken by the game participant for it to be a game.

We can also see that the authors reviewed here endorsed different epistemologies and thus, engaged in their definitional efforts with different goals in mind. I have not specifically labeled each author as belonging to a particular definitional camp although I think I could have done so. I avoided this because my focus was on the potential substantive contribution made by

each individual whether advertised ambitiously as necessary and sufficient conditions or more cautiously as tendencies or family resemblances. That is, this research is designed to uncover useful descriptions of play and games whatever their epistemological origins. In Chapter Four, my own summation of play and game features will be offered from a middle ground – one that identifies central features but stops short of claiming them to be both necessary and sufficient.

The more important issue for the present purposes is discerning the nature of games and play. Regardless of any author's particular epistemological position, my emphasis will continue to rest on the metaphysics of games and play. Even though epistemology and metaphysics are related, I hope first and foremost to clarify the nature of play and games. Accordingly, in Chapter Three I will try to describe the conflation of play and games. In doing so, I will attempt to clarify their metaphysical relationship and then present three causes or sources of their conflation. This will lead to my views on the nature of play and the nature of games at the beginning of Chapter Four. I will present the characteristics that I think most centrally represent the two phenomena and then proceed with a re-conceptualization of their value in our lives.

⁶⁸ Ronald Dworkin, *Law's Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986).

⁶⁹ Kenneth L. Schmitz, "Sport and Play: Suspension of the Ordinary" p. 23

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁷⁴ Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), p. 9.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁷⁶ Schmitz, "Sport and Play," pp. 25, 26.

⁷⁷ Joseph L. Esposito, "Play and Possibility," in *Philosophic Inquiry in Sport, 2nd Edition*, ed. by William J. Morgan and Klaus V. Meier (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 1995), p. 115.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 114-115.

⁸² Drew A. Hyland, *Philosophy of Sport*, p. 125.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

⁸⁴ Drew Hyland, "And That is the Best Part of Us," *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*, IV, Fall 1977, p. 39.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 47.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

⁸⁸ Bernard Suits, "Words on Play," p. 17.

- ⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 22.
- ⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 25.
- ⁹¹ Klaus V. Meier, "An Affair of Flutes: An Appreciation of Play," in *Philosophic Inquiry in Sport, 2nd Edition*, ed. by William J. Morgan and Klaus V. Meier (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 1995), p. 120.
- ⁹² Ibid., p. 121.
- ⁹³ Ibid.
- ⁹⁴ Ibid.
- ⁹⁵ Ibid.
- ⁹⁶ R. Scott Kretchmar, "The Normative Heights and Depths of Play," *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*, 2007, Vol. XXXIV, p. 2.
- ⁹⁷ Eugen Fink, "The Ontology of Play," in *Philosophic Inquiry in Sport, 2nd Edition*, ed. by William J. Morgan and Klaus V. Meier (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 1995), p. 103.
- ⁹⁸ R. Scott Kretchmar, "Qualitative Distinctions in Play," in *The Relevance of the Philosophy of Sport*, ed. by Gunter Gebauer (Academia Verlag), p. 5.
- ⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 6.
- ¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 7.
- ¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 9.
- ¹⁰² Ibid.
- ¹⁰³ To name a few of his critics, Meier and Kretchmar said that he was wrong about performances; Schneider said he was dead wrong about his Venn diagram; and McBride said his definition was both too broad and too narrow.
- ¹⁰⁴ Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, p. 13.
- ¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 10.
- ¹⁰⁶ Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, p. 12.
- ¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 5.
- ¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 23.
- ¹⁰⁹ Bernard Suits, *The Grasshopper: Games, Life and Utopia* (Boston: David R. Godine Publishing, 1990), p. 36.
- ¹¹⁰ Suits, *The Grasshopper*, p. 38.
- ¹¹¹ See Cesar R. Torres, "What Counts as Part of a Game? A Look at Skills," *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*, XXVII, 81-92.
- ¹¹² R. Scott Kretchmar, "The Normative Heights," p. 7.
- ¹¹³ Ibid.
- ¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 6.
- ¹¹⁵ R. Scott Kretchmar, "From Test to Contest: An Analysis of Two Kinds of Counterpoint in Sport," in *Philosophic Inquiry in Sport, 2nd Edition*, ed. by William J. Morgan and Klaus V. Meier (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 1995), p. 37.
- ¹¹⁶ R. Scott Kretchmar, "On Beautiful Games," *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*, 1989, Vol. XVI, p. 34.
- ¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 42.
- ¹¹⁸ R. Scott Kretchmar, "Gaming Up Life: Considerations for Game Expansions," *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*, 2008, XXXV, p. 150.
- ¹¹⁹ James Carse, *Finite and Infinite Games* (New York: Free Press, 1986), p. 3.
- ¹²⁰ Ibid., p. 7.
- ¹²¹ Ibid., pp. 3, 4, 10.
- ¹²² Ibid., p. 177.
- ¹²³ For a chart of Guttman's metaphysical leanings, see Allen Guttman, *Sport: The First Five Millennia* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004), p. 2.
- ¹²⁴ Allen Guttman, *From Ritual to Record: The Nature of Modern Sport* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), p. 5.
- ¹²⁵ Eduardo Galeano, *Soccer in Sun and Shadow*, transl. by Mark Fried (London: Verso Publishing, 1998), p. 207.

Chapter 3

THE “PLAYING” FIELD: ATTITUDES, ACTIVITIES AND THE CONFLATION OF PLAY AND GAMES

Preface to Chapter Three

Note: This chapter has been written as a free-standing article, one that has been submitted to the *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport (JPS)*.

Because this chapter has to stand on its own, some of the content may seem redundant. For instance, my exegetical work on Huizinga, Caillois, and Suits was presented in both Chapters One and Two. Similarly, my discussion of the reasons for conflation has elements to which I alluded in my previous chapters.

Introduction

Many philosophers have attempted to describe the nature of play and games.¹²⁶ In doing so, they have come to a number of similar conclusions. Many have said, for instance, that play has non-derivative value, that games have rules, and that these human projects are universal in scope. Yet important metaphysical questions remain. Indeed, philosophers continue to debate the nature of play and its relationship to games. What exactly are games and play, and how are they related?

The persistence of these fundamental questions indicates that at least a degree of uncertainty remains. Some authors speak of play and games interchangeably, while others regard them as two distinct phenomena. However, even some of those who attempted to

distinguish games from play provided ambiguous or otherwise confusing descriptions. The end result has been a tendency to conflate the two entities. This conflation is so commonplace that we regularly speak of participating in all and any games as “*playing games*.”

Conflation is the unwarranted combining of two things into one. It often occurs when important differences between closely related phenomena are overlooked, ignored, or mistaken. Conflating two phenomena is to mix or fuse them into one even though each phenomenon has its own distinct features. This seems to be the case with play and games.

In this paper I will address the issue of play-game conflation and show that it comes in many forms. I begin by citing examples of this problem that are found in the writings of Johan Huizinga (*Homo Ludens*), Roger Caillois (*Man, Play and Games*), and Bernard Suits (*The Grasshopper*).¹²⁷ All three authors, albeit in different ways, provide confusing analyses of games and play and the relationship between them. Huizinga and Caillois so conflate play and games that they frequently use the two terms synonymously or move from play to games and back again without any mention of possible differences. Suits, on the other hand, tries to determine the distinct features of the two but still leaves important metaphysical questions unanswered. In fact, a great deal of recent criticism directed toward Suits’ writings focuses on play and game relationships.¹²⁸

After analyzing the work of the three authors, the second section of my paper will include a clarification of the elements that appear to generate the conflation. I will explain that fundamental category confusions make the play-game distinction opaque. This confusion has to do with a failure to distinguish intentional acts from intentional objects. Related to this is a failure to clarify differences between game and play acts, on one hand, and game objects from their play counterparts, on the other.

The third section will include an explanation of the basic causes of confusions discussed in the first two sections. I will argue that the conflation of play and games can be traced to three

fundamental sources or root causes. The first one is metaphysical in nature. I will argue that a high degree of compatibility can be mistaken for identity. The second cause lies in the tendency to reify or abstract play and games. I will show that discussions of these phenomena without mention of their evolutionary context shows them to be mutually dependent and, for this reason, likely candidates for conflation. The third cause is related to the fact that well-constructed games are idealized conventions. Because they are ideal, they are powerful play attractors. This helps to explain the frequent conjunction of play and games and the mistaken assumption that the two are always (or nearly always) found together.

Analysis of Huizinga

Huizinga discusses what he calls “the play-element in culture.”¹²⁹ In doing so, he identifies a number of characteristics of this phenomenon, some of which encourage its conflation with games. “Play is a voluntary activity,”¹³⁰ he says, explaining that forced participation is nothing more than an imitation of true play. It is “free”¹³¹ because we are never obligated or required to do it. Play is “a stepping out of ‘real’ life into a temporary sphere of activity,” he says because it is “only pretend.”¹³² It is experienced “within certain limits of time and place,” and thus takes place during “fixed intervals” and in “consecrated spot[s].”¹³³ Huizinga explains that play “creates order” or it “is order.”¹³⁴ The orderliness comes when the player follows the rules, because “all play has rules.”¹³⁵ We follow the rules because they will lead us into the mysterious world of play that “is tense” and has uncertain outcomes.¹³⁶ Huizinga summarizes his views on play as follows:

We might call [play] a free activity standing quite consciously outside “ordinary” life as being “not serious,” but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it. It proceeds within its own

proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner. It promotes the formation of social groupings which tend to surround themselves with secrecy and to stress their difference from the common world by disguise or other means.¹³⁷

Inherent in this description are the roots for Huizinga's conflation of play and games. When describing play, he fails to distinguish clearly between two aspects of lived experience. Play can be understood as a way of doing something or the particular thing that is done. That is, play can be a kind of attitude in contrast to a type of activity. Some of Huizinga's characteristics, such as play being voluntary, free, and absorbing the player intensely and utterly, speak of play as an attitude or stance toward things we do. Yet, some of his characteristics are those of activities. For example, when he discusses fixed rules and orderliness, he is describing the nature of the things we encounter in the world.¹³⁸

Huizinga never makes it clear whether he sees play as an attitude, an activity, or both. In fact, he speaks of play in a number of ways that cut across this important distinction. At different times in his work he refers to the "play process,"¹³⁹ "play note,"¹⁴⁰ "play quality,"¹⁴¹ "play sense,"¹⁴² "play product,"¹⁴³ "play community,"¹⁴⁴ "play mood,"¹⁴⁵ "play group,"¹⁴⁶ "play factor,"¹⁴⁷ "play content,"¹⁴⁸ "play spirit,"¹⁴⁹ "play function,"¹⁵⁰ "play character,"¹⁵¹ "play sphere,"¹⁵² and "play activity."¹⁵³

With all of these diverse characterizations provided as partial definitions, it is not clear what Huizinga thinks play is. Is play an attitude, a group of activities, or both? Without a clear understanding of play, it follows that play-game relationships would also be difficult to discern. And when relationships are muddy, particularly among closely related phenomena, conflation looms as a potential problem. Furthermore, with Huizinga's emphasis on the single feature of autotelicity as a core characteristic of play (i.e. play is a "free activity" with "no material interest"), it is not surprising that play is an expansive concept. Indeed, Huizinga was criticized for finding play under nearly every rock in the social landscape.¹⁵⁴ Given play's ubiquity, it

becomes difficult to find exemplars of games that are not play, or are not likely to be encountered as play. When it becomes difficult to see games alone or apart from play, conflation of the two concepts becomes more likely. In short, both the lack of clarity about play and its purported ubiquity lead to problems of play-confusions including potential conflation.

Huizinga fosters additional opportunities for conflation of games and play by emphasizing what he calls higher forms of play while, at the same time, neglecting lower forms. The latter, such as the activity of infants and animals, have an “irreducible quality”¹⁵⁵ that he says makes them difficult to analyze and interpret. Higher forms of play, on the other hand, have many more observable features. Higher order play is, to use Huizinga’s own words, “a contest *for* something or a representation *of* something” that “can unite in such a way that the game ‘represents’ a contest, or else becomes a contest for the best representation of something.”¹⁵⁶ It could be concluded from this statement that Huizinga regards games as the activity *par excellence* that promotes or constitutes higher forms of play. Because he focuses on many features of gaming activities in his discussion of adult play, he seems to consider one as a concomitant of the other. That is, when adults are *at play* they are also *in games*. By focusing on adult play in the form of ideal games, Huizinga leads us to believe that games comprise the whole or nearly the whole of the play domain. In the absence of definitional precision, such close relationships can breed conflation between two potentially independent entities.

Analysis of Caillois

Caillois draws conclusions that are, in many cases, similar to those of Huizinga. In fact, his definition builds largely on Huizinga’s findings. He says that play has six characteristics. It is “a free and voluntary activity”¹⁵⁷ that speaks of no obligation. It is “a separate occupation, carefully isolated from the rest of life.”¹⁵⁸ This separation involves “limits of space and time,

defined and fixed in advance.”¹⁵⁹ Play is “an uncertain activity” in which “doubt must remain until the end.”¹⁶⁰ In play, “property is exchanged, but no goods are produced.”¹⁶¹ It is governed “by precise, arbitrary, unexceptionable rules that must be accepted as such.”¹⁶² And lastly, play is “make-believe” or involves “awareness of a second reality or of a free unreality.”¹⁶³ In summary, he says that it is “an activity which is essentially ... free ... separate ... uncertain ... unproductive ... governed by rules ... [and] make-believe.”¹⁶⁴

Much like Huizinga, Caillois underscored some characteristics (e.g., rule-governed and limited by space and time) that seem to define games—that is, activities that may or may not be encountered from the stance of play. Still others, such as “free” and “unproductive” define an attitude or stance that we often ascribe to play. However, Caillois does not describe any difference between attitudes and activities nor does he draw any clear distinction between play and games.

Throughout his writing Caillois uses the terms play and game interchangeably. For instance, while Chapter One of *Man, Play and Games* is entitled “The Definition of Play,” Chapter Two goes under the heading of “The Classification of Games.” This shift in terminology occurs without any indication of a transition from one phenomenon to another.¹⁶⁵ In Chapter Two he identifies four “categories of games” as contests, games of chance, simulation, and vertigo. However, in this chapter he also notes that, “all four [categories of games] indeed belong to the domain of play.”¹⁶⁶ This would imply that games and play are different things. Yet, curiously, later in his volume, he refers to these four categories of games as “the different categories of play.”¹⁶⁷ This could be interpreted as a claim for identity between games and play.

Nowhere in the text does Caillois explain to his readers why he uses the term “play” in certain instances and “games” in others. Even though he purports to define play in the introductory chapter and classify games in the next section of the book, he does not specifically identify these phenomena as identical, distinct, or somewhere in between. The reader is left

wondering if play and games, for Caillois, are distinct phenomena or not? If they are distinct, how are they related?

One potential answer to these questions is found in Caillois' explanation of the difference between spontaneous and organized play and games. He introduces the terms *paidia* and *ludus* to denote opposite poles of the progression from simple to more sophisticated play and game activities. *Paidia* refers to "the spontaneous manifestations of the play instinct,"¹⁶⁸ while *ludus* is "the specific element in play the impact and cultural creativity of which seems most impressive."¹⁶⁹ *Ludus*, in other words, is the refinement and enrichment of *paidia* activities.

With these terms, Caillois may be referring to the evolutionary and developmental sequence by which hominid or childhood play activities, respectively, are institutionalized into games over time, but he has not made that idea explicit. While it is clear that the *paidia-ludus* continuum represents a progression from spontaneous to organized behavior in each of the four categories of games, Caillois has not differentiated between games and non-games or play and non-play. All of the activities he describes on his *paidia-ludus* continuum are games and all of the experiences encountered therein are also play. So although he presented a progression of behavior from simple to complex, what this tells us about the nature of play and games is not at all clear.

Analysis of Suits

Unlike Huizinga and Caillois who focus on play and games in culture, Suits' main thrust is metaphysical in nature. He says that play is autotelic and relational. It is an experience valued for its own sake, and one that includes a "reallocation to autotelic activities of resources primarily committed to instrumental purposes" (23: p. 22).¹⁷⁰ Games, on the other hand, involve the "voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles."¹⁷¹ They are activities that are the

products of constitutive rules, goals, unnecessarily restricted means, and whose challenges are contrived just so those challenges can be experienced and enjoyed. Suits calls this latter feature the lusory attitude. From these descriptions it is clear that Suits regards play and games as two distinct and independent phenomena.¹⁷² One can be at play but not in a game. (Games are only one kind of play attractor among many others.) And conversely, one can exhibit the lusory attitude while inventing or encountering artificial problems without also experiencing autotelicity and effecting reallocations. (Games can be used for any number of utilitarian purposes.)

From these definitions, it also seems that Suits has a clear understanding of the difference between play and games. However, his analyses still carry some ambiguities. At times he speaks of “games” as activities and at others he describes “game playing” as a kind of action or behavior. In point of fact, he begins his definition by referring to an action ... “to play a game is to ...”¹⁷³ as opposed to the activity ... “a game is an object with certain necessary and sufficient characteristics.”

This is how the lusory attitude enters his description as a central element of gaming. His first three descriptors – goals, means, and rules – are characteristics of games as activities. They are clearly attributes of things that we encounter in the world. The lusory attitude, however, describes the intention or frame of mind of the participant. It is not something we do, but a way in which we do it. This raises questions about whether games are best described simply as activities, or as activities that require certain attitudes. Suits may be arguing for both.

It is the lusory attitude that is arguably the primary source of conflation between games and play in Suits’ analyses. This is the case for two reasons. First, even though Suits thinks that the lusory attitude is different from the play stance, the definitions are similar. The lusory attitude speaks to the recognition, tolerance, and acceptance of the hurdles inherent in games, stating that game means are endorsed “just so the activity made possible by such acceptance can occur.”¹⁷⁴ However, the “just so” part of this definition can be mistaken for a way of describing one of

Suits' play characteristics – namely, autotelicity. Autotelicity answers questions about motives for engaging in an activity. When people are engaged autotelically, they participate for no reason other than the activity itself. In other words, we assume the play attitude “just so” we can have the experience such play affords. Similarly, we adopt a lusory attitude “just so” the activity of solving an unnecessary problem can be experienced. The applicability of the “just so” language to both lusory and autotelic stances toward the world can lead to a conflation of the two.

When Suits argues that games are not simply activities but that they are also the product of certain attitudes, he inadvertently provides a second reason for conflation. Instead of claiming that play belongs to the category of stances or attitudes and games to the category of activities, he provided descriptions that suggest that play and games involve both attitudes *and* activities.¹⁷⁵ This expansion of play and game features multiplies possibilities for conflation – specifically, confusing one attitude with the other and one set of activities with the other.

As noted above, Suits' descriptions of game and play attitudes are similar in that they both seem to require what might be called a “just so” intentionality. This is one site for conflation. A second one lies on the side of play and games as activities in what appears to be a genus-species relationship. Play activities, for Suits, are “all those activities which are intrinsically valuable to those who engage in them.” A game “*is* one such activity ... not all such [play] activities are game-playing.”¹⁷⁶ Conflation can occur here because, in certain situations, game and play activities are one and the same.

Suits also inadvertently promotes the conflation of games and play by idealizing games. He argues that games are not just *one of many* subsets of play activities, but that they are *the ideal* species of all play activities. Suits sees “*game* playing, and not merely playing in general, to be the essential life of the Grasshopper,” his protagonist and the one whose leisurely life he encourages us to emulate.¹⁷⁷ When making recommendations about good living, he writes almost exclusively of games such as chess, car racing, and mountain climbing rather than play activities

that are not games such as holding a deep conversation, playing music, or eating a delicious meal.¹⁷⁸ In ignoring play activities that are not games, Suits seems to imply that when one is at play, that person would (or should) also be in a game. Worthy play, for Suits, is game play. His focus on games as a premiere play activity can contribute to the conflation of these phenomena.

Suits describes games and play as distinct and independent phenomena. Nevertheless, his discussions of lusory and autotelic attitudes, his expansion of game and play characteristics to include both stances and activities, and his analysis of games as ideal play (and the concomitant neglect of play activities that are not games) inadvertently contribute to difficulties in seeing differences between play and games. To exacerbate these potential confusions, Suits frequently uses an ambiguous hybrid term – “game playing” – in his metaphysical analyses. Consequently, it is frequently unclear whether playing means merely participating, on one hand, or genuinely playing as an autotelic relational experience, on the other. Given the very close relationship Suits sees between them, one wonders if this ambiguity is often intended or intentionally overlooked.

Metaphysical Clarity

Confusions between games and play beg for additional metaphysical clarity, in particular an identification of those elements that contribute to play-game conflation. In this section I attempt to shed some additional light on these elements before turning to an analysis of three sources or roots of play-game conflation.

At the heart of the conflation is an important distinction between play and games as attitudes, stances, or ways of approaching an activity on one hand, and the thing that is approached – a play or game activity – on the other. Play, as we have seen, is an autotelic approach to the world, a way of engaging any variety of activities as ends in themselves. But play has also been described as the thing in which one is engaged – say, the activity of climbing

trees, building sand castles, or hitting baseballs. Likewise, games are understood as things, activities, or conventions like chess, Sudoku puzzles, and football. But we also refer to “gaming” as an attitude, perhaps an ironic or gratuitous attitude of looking for and taking on unnecessary problems.¹⁷⁹

Thus, it would seem reasonable to distinguish playing from play activities and gaming from game activities. Playing and gaming, as stances or attitudes, are ways in which we do things, ways in which we act. They are distinct intentionalities toward the projects we encounter. For playing, the intentionality or act is autotelic – an act that aims at and ends in the activities themselves. For gaming the act is lusory – one that aims at the solution of unnecessary problems, whether such problem solving is an end in itself or not.

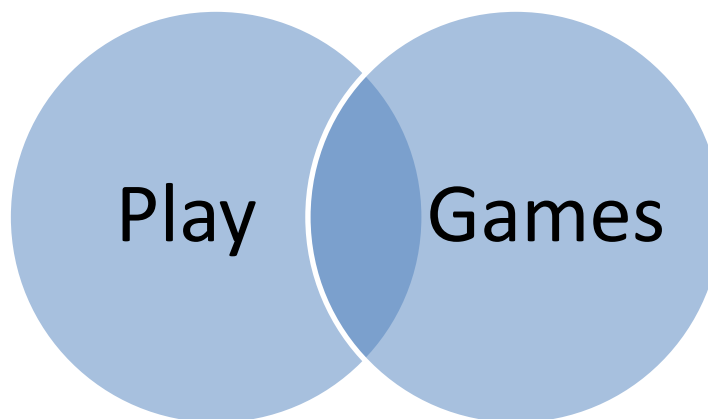
Games and play activities, on the other hand, are things that we do. Playing is always a playing at or with something where that something has the potential to provide intrinsically satisfying experiences. Likewise, gaming is always a gaming at or with some activity in which unnecessary challenges or problems are found.

Conflation problems stem from a failure to honor these distinctions and accurately characterize them. On the side of intentionality – that is, the side of attitudes, stances, and approaches to the world – it is apparent that the play stance and the gaming attitude are distinct and compatible. That is, they have a life of their own, but they also overlap. We see their overlap in the compound or nested intentionality of what Suits ambiguously calls game playing. It is an intentionality that is both autotelic and lusory at the same time. Game players, in the deepest sense of those terms, are looking for or engaging in artificial problems *as ends in themselves*.

On the side of the intentional object, play activities and games once again are distinct and compatible. They have a life of their own and they also overlap. Many things or activities, for example, are strong play attractors but clearly are not also games. Reading good books, listening to lovely music, and dining on delicious food are three cases in point. Similarly, games need not

be play activities or attractors as, indeed, they are not play for those who participate only for extrinsic satisfaction or are forced to take part against their will. However, like play and game stances toward the world, play activities and games can be experienced together. As Huizinga, Caillois, and Suits hinted, many of our most popular play activities are games and many of our games are also often play activities.

Figure 1



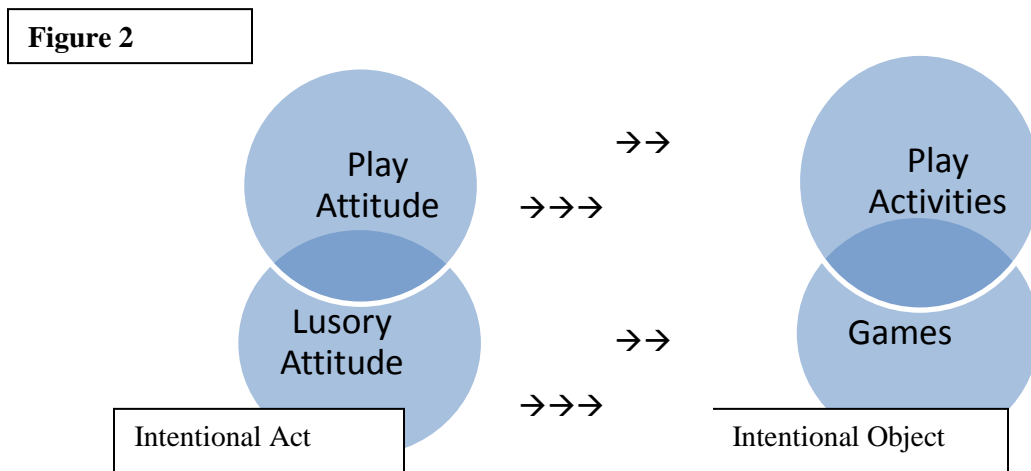
Frequently, play and games are depicted by a single Venn diagram that mixes acts and objects (see Figure 1). In this diagram one circle stands for the *stance* of play and the other represents the *activities* we call games.¹⁸⁰ They are separate circles, but they also overlap indicating independence and compatibility. Play (as a stance) may or may not be directed toward games (as activities), and games like chess may or may not be experienced as play. These claims would seem to be noncontroversial. Thus, it might be concluded that this mixed or hybrid Venn diagram can be helpful in sorting out play-game relationships, as indeed Suits himself argued against his critics.¹⁸¹

However, a more complete and potentially clearer depiction of play and games may require two diagrams, one for relationships between games and play considered as intentional stances and another one for games and play considered as activities (see Figure 2). On the Intentional Act side of the diagram, the play attitude intends involvement that is autotelic and fully self-sufficient – doings that are simply interesting, fun, exciting or otherwise engaging. The

play attitude would have us listening for, seeking, or happening upon play attractors and driving toward experiences that are interesting in their own right.

The lusory attitude, on the other hand, intends involvement that includes good problems – searching for challenges that are neither too hard nor too easy. It is an ironic attitude suggesting that harder, within limits, is better. As Suits noted, the lusory attitude is similar to our everyday work stance – one that would have us trying to figure things out and find optimal solutions. But it is also significantly different in that it does so under self-imposed, unnecessary limitations.

Neither attitude requires the other. One can be fully autotelic without also being lusory, for example, when one is dancing around the Maypole or reading a good book. And conversely, one can be looking for gratuitous problems without also being autotelic, as is often the case with some professional athletes who use games for extrinsic purposes and find no joy in them. Nevertheless, the two stances are compatible. The overlapping portion of the Intentional Act diagram symbolizes the previously mentioned potential for hybrid or compound intentionalities when the two stances toward the world are taken up concurrently—that is, when the self-sufficiency or autotelicity of play is combined with the gratuity or irony of the lusory attitude.



The Intentional Object side of Figure 2 mirrors the Intentional Act diagram. It includes a section for those activities that are self-sufficient play attractors or playgrounds, and another section of activities that are artificial challenges that we attempt to overcome – namely, games.¹⁸²

The two diagrams of act and object have a one-to-one relationship with one another. That is, the section on the Intentional Act diagram that includes only the play attitude correlates with the Intentional Object side of the diagram that includes play activities exclusive of games. The same can be said for the lusory attitude and its relationship to games that are not also play, as well as the middle sections of both sides of the diagram where the nested autotelic-lusory intentionality on the left are correlated with play activities that are also games on the right.

In this double Venn diagram model we can more clearly see the two categories in which play and games reside. The phenomenon of play is a way of doing something – the intentional act – even though we can also refer to play activities. The phenomena of games – the objects of intent – are things that can be done even though there is also a gaming attitude to which we refer. In sum, play and lusory attitudes are manners in which the world can be engaged. Play activities and games are objects in the world that can be so engaged.

While the double Venn diagram model helps to clarify the issues at stake, it does not explain how intimately the categories of act and object are experientially connected. Play is an attitude but it also requires an activity that is being “played.” As Suits puts it, “playing always means playing *with* some x or other.”¹⁸³ Games, on the other hand, are commonly thought of as activities that pose unnecessary problems, but such problems make sense only in relationship to an intending subject who will see them as gratuitous.

So play can be considered an attitude, but it is inseparable from play activities. Games can be considered activities but they require the lusory attitude or gaming stance. Attitudes and activities come together in our lived experiences in such a way that the stance necessarily colors the activity.

Husserl has made this clear, saying that there can be “no noetic phase [the intentional act] without a noematic phase [the intentional object] that belongs specifically to it.”¹⁸⁴ Attitudes and that to which the attitudes belong (activities) could be called phenomenological pairs because of

their intimate relationship. There is, for instance, an inseparable marriage between loving and that which is loved, wondering and that which is wondered about, hoping and that which is hoped for, playing and the activity that is played, and gaming and the activity to which the gaming is intended.

With two stances or kinds of intentionality and two activities or kinds of objects and the various combinations thereof, opportunities for confusion are manifest. Some confusion is related to the fact that the two *stances* are at once independent and compatible. Further confusion can be traced to the fact that the two *objects* are likewise independent and compatible. Finally, if it is true that games have not just a logically compatible but an existentially privileged relationship to play, conflation becomes even more likely. Philosophers who intuit such a relationship might well begin by talking about play but end up analyzing games without noticing that they have moved across important boundary lines—from stance to activity (a horizontal move on Figure 2) and from one stance and set of activities to others (a vertical move on Figure 2).

To summarize the metaphysical landscape, then, three missed distinctions can lead to the conflation of play and games. The first and broadest has to do with a category mistake. Play and games belong to two categories, not one. Conflation can occur when play, for example, is conceptualized as an inclusive stance and games are seen as ideal objects or recipients of that stance. Under these conditions, talk of play is invariably dominated by descriptions of games. The second and third missed distinctions have to do with confusions based on the more inclusive view of play and games as correlative acts and objects. On the side of acts, autotelic and lusory attitudes, as “just so” approaches to life, can be difficult to keep apart. One can be mistaken for the other. Furthermore, their logical compatibility (and experiential affinity for one another) can be mistaken for identity. On the side of the objects or activities, play activities that are not games are often ignored (Huizinga, Caillois) or dismissed for normative reasons (Suits). Under such

frameworks, analyses of play activities become *de facto* discussions of games. Clarification of these points will be pursued in the section that follows.

Causes of Conflation

With the “playing” field clarified, I will continue the analysis of conflation by building on the causes or roots of this problem to which I alluded in the previous sections. I will describe three sources of conflation. The first is related to the high degree of compatibility that exists between the two phenomena. Play and games are so frequently experienced together that one can be confused for the other. Second, games and play are abstracted and reified in much of the literature. When this happens, we miss differences that are evident when we examine their shared but distinct evolutionary and developmental roots. Third, conflation between games and play comes from the unusual autotelic powers of games. As ideal play attractors, games often monopolize our analyses of play and, as a result, cause us to neglect play activities that are not games.

High Compatibility

I have argued that play and game features emerge in two categories – those of attitudes and activities – but I have also argued that they are related. I will describe the compatibility between play and games and explain that it derives from their common parentage. These two human projects are often experienced together because they both provide solutions to the same dilemma – namely, finding something interesting to do, something that has autotelic potential. Conflation can result when we acknowledge their common parentage but neglect their distinct features.

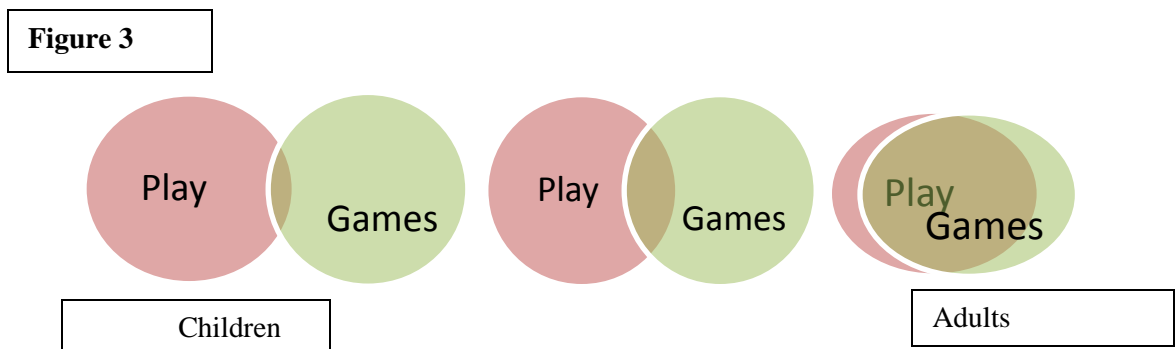
I have highlighted the relationship between play and games with a double Venn diagram (see Figure 2). Our phenomenological experiences of play and games can be expressed as follows: at times we can be experiencing play that is not a game, a game that is not play, and play and a game together. This description of varied experiences holds true for both attitudes and activities. The middle sections of the double Venn diagram – the place where the autotelic and lusory attitudes are present on the act side and the place where play and game activities are present on the object side – leads to confusion between these phenomena. The confluence on the diagram speaks to their compatibility. We often have experiences, in other words, that are play and games at the same time, but we fail to differentiate between the phenomena that are experienced together.

The play attitude and game activities are so compatible and so often jointly experienced that we speak of them together in ways that perpetuate their conflation. We talk about *playing* games when we mean *participating in* or *doing* games, for we know that game participants are not always in the play spirit. This verbal error is more than linguistic laziness or the result of poorly crafted lexicons. We say that we *play* games because of the natural and logical relationship play has to games. We are often in or seeking the play attitude when we are participating in games. Our language, consequently, has adapted to this natural and logical relationship in such a way that we often use the terms in misleading ways.

Huizinga and Caillois exemplify this point. They talk about “play” as a verb and they use “play” and “games” as interchangeable nouns. As already noted, Suits is also guilty of employing common parlance when he uses the terms “game playing” in his analyses of games. Throughout his text, it is unclear whether he is using the term “playing” colloquially or if he means the autotelic attitude that he defined in “Words on Play.”¹⁸⁵ Regardless of his intentions, the two phenomena have a natural and logical relationship because they are highly compatible. The play stance, particularly for adults, often has games as its object (that is, the thing that is

played) and vice-versa. Our language, then, is a product of these common experiences but it inadvertently also is a source of conflation.

Suits may have used the terms “game playing” because he understood the high compatibility between the two phenomena. He argues in *The Grasshopper* that most (worthy) play experiences fall within the game section of the Venn diagram.¹⁸⁶ While some play would not be considered games, Suits argues that most mature play is experienced as a game. Aesthetically enjoying the opening number of a symphony concert or finding spontaneous delight while eating an ice cream cone can be play, but Suits thinks that these activities lose their attraction quickly. They are intrinsically satisfying, but we cannot engage in them for long periods of time without getting bored.¹⁸⁷ Instead, most of our play time is spent experiencing the rich and durable challenges of games. We seek games and choose them as our most popular play activities because we frequently find them to be autotelically compelling and durable. In short, human beings who are looking for something to do would be well-advised to choose games. This recommendation is reflected in Figure 3, one that shows developmental and normative relationships.



In the middle of Figure 3 is a conventional Venn diagram. It is not meant to represent the percentage of overlap between play and games, but it serves to highlight the contrast between the diagram on the left and the one on the right. The left side of Figure 3 symbolizes the play and games of young children. The diagrammed circles of play and games for them might only have a

slight overlap. Children are easily distracted by non-conventional or natural play activities but they have difficulty accessing games in any robust way. Kretchmar argues that it takes time for children to develop the ability to fully negotiate the logic of the rules, relationships between means and ends, and other intellectual hurdles required for knowledgeable game participation.¹⁸⁸ The right side of Figure 3 shows what Suits, Huizinga, and Caillois might say represents the play and games of adults. These authors seem to be arguing that mature adult play includes mostly activities that are games. Instead of the serendipitous, non-conventional, and natural play activities that children seem to be so distracted by, adult play is generally more structured and conventional in game form.

The high compatibility of play and games to which Huizinga, Caillois, and Suits pointed may be explained by a common parentage. That is, games and play come from the same source. They give us something to do when there is nothing to do, or, more broadly, they give us something interesting to do when routine daily life offers no such invitations. Both play and games speak to the human need for diversion, distraction, serendipity, or a solution for the condition of having too much time and too little to do. In a word, boredom is undoubtedly one of the well-springs of these twin human projects. When bored, we either seek experiences that are attractive in themselves (play), experiences in which we attempt to solve unnecessary problems (games), or both at the same time. We conflate these highly compatible phenomena by missing the distinctions and grouping them together – as a class of boredom remedies, leisure activities, or recreational pursuits.

In this compatibility-generated conflation, we focus on the fact that play and games produce the same result – namely, they give us something interesting to do. By focusing on the common destination, we miss the distinct ways offered by play and games for getting there. In play, we combat boredom by finding intrinsically interesting natural distractions or diversions, or by being found by them. A tree “invites” us to climb in its branches. A mud puddle “wants” to

be splashed in. A compelling novel “asks” us to open up its cover. In games, we combat boredom by finding artificial challenges, or by being found by them. We are driving home from work and decide, first, to take the longer way home but, second, stipulate that we must do so in a provocatively short amount of time. The first is a natural serendipity, the second is a convention. The first is only incidentally related to problem solving. The second is built squarely around it. The first is accessible to animals and young children. The second requires knowledgeable rule adherence and other intellectual feats characteristic of uniquely human and adult behavior.¹⁸⁹ Therefore, although play and games are highly compatible, often experienced together, and offspring of common parents, they are still distinct phenomena.

Reification and Abstraction

Huizinga, Caillois and Suits discuss play and games in theory rather than how they actually occur in different animal species, in various cultures, or across the human lifespan. In these ways, they have taken the two phenomena out of context and made them abstract or reified entities. Each of the three authors, in fact, focuses on ideal, advanced, and intellectually-capable playing and gaming. In essence, they have taken freeze-frame pictures of mature play and games that omit crucial information about the distinctions that are evident in their various immature forms. Although Huizinga mentions animal play¹⁹⁰ and Caillois points to *paidia*¹⁹¹ – child-like behavior – neither author focuses on these rudimentary experiences or draws important generalizations from them. Their preoccupation with mature play and games prevents them from seeing and emphasizing important differences between the two projects.

We naturally focus on mature play and its domination by games because our experiences of them are immediate (see Figure 3). And, as adults, we are naturally more interested in the normative values of game play for adults than for animals or children. Because of this selective

attention, we perpetuate the unity or marriage of two separate phenomena and tend to overlook their distinct features. We reify their partnership by emphasizing the way they mutually support each other – even though they have lives of their own. The likelihood of conflation is increased when games and play are portrayed in a reified partnership.

When we look at play and games at their most sophisticated levels, a case can be made for their experiential dependence on one another. In our day-to-day experiences, in fact, we often find them as reliable partners. Games are fluid, alluring, and durable access points into the play attitude. That is, games induce play. Because of the intrigue inherent in “just right” problems, they are excellent play attractors. As play attractors, they are natural “friends” of play.

But play is also a “friend” of games. If we could not or did not often find play in our games there would be little reason for them to exist. The gratuity of games, in the absence of play, would be plainly illogical not just ironic. That is, it would be odd for anyone to voluntarily take on an unnecessary problem unless its instrumentality, as Suits says, was tied to utility. Game means (including unnecessary hurdles) are the way they are because we *want* them that way. We find such hurdles oddly attractive. If they did not so attract us, if we did not find play in them, we would probably not participate in them. Games without play potential, in short, are bad games. Games without play potential would quickly die off.¹⁹²

In sum, this two-way friendship has an element of truth to it. In describing mature play, it is natural to talk of the important play attractor called games. And in explaining the nature and value of games, it is natural to show their inherent dependence on play.

In reality, though, games and play are not always in an ideal or mature state. When Huizinga, Caillois, and Suits abstract and reify them, games and play are portrayed in an incomplete or otherwise distorted way. Games and play have important evolutionary and developmental roots, but none of these three authors analyze this background. Play has always been a part of who we are and who our predecessors were. Games have developed over time

within the context of culture and continue to develop as a part of the human experience from neonate to adulthood and then to old age.

When we look at less refined versions of play and games, we can see how they are independent and distinct. Play capability does not and never has required gaming. Play comes first both in human development and undoubtedly, too, in human evolution. Games come later in our childhood and only recently in the grand sweep of human evolution.

This is apparent when we look at the progression of intelligence as it pertains to games and play. Kretchmar argues that we are able to play before being able to participate in games.¹⁹³ This controversial thesis describes how the ability to negotiate game logic shows more intelligence than play. He gives two examples to underscore his position. The first is evolutionary. What separates human intelligence from that of other animate creatures is our ability to understand and otherwise negotiate game logic. Dogs can chase humans and monkeys can dance and clap their hands as play, but they would not be able to create or participate in games because they do not have the ability to intentionally create or honor activities with inefficient means-ends relationships just for the sake of making such activities possible. They can surely mimic human behavior that looks like gaming, but they “are not conventionally smart like we are.”¹⁹⁴

The second example is related to the chronology of human development. Kretchmar argues that a human neonate is able to play almost at birth but the child must develop the ability over time to adhere to game logic. Studies have shown that young children have the ability to delightfully engage in playful behavior from their earliest nascent moments. They can responsively smile, giggle, and be amazed by the world around them. Yet they must learn how to acceptably participate in games through experience and instruction when their cognitive functions are able to process means-ends relationships (formal logic), arbitrary stipulations (conventional

logic), and unnecessary difficulty (gratuitous logic). This required logic of games necessitates a cognitive development before the child's behavior can be considered game-playing.

Therefore, the natural development and evolutionary sequence is from play to games. When we have the prerequisite intelligence we build games from the activities that distract us in play. We game up or institutionalize our play. As Kretchmar points out, we are habitual players and problem solvers who turn play into structured games to keep them interesting.¹⁹⁵ We impose artificial rules on our play activities to create games that are more durable and reliable avenues for autotelic experiences. For if running or throwing, for example, frequently generate the play attitude, it seems only natural to harness those activities in games whose "just right" problems are more reliable and interesting than running and throwing in day-to-day life.

If we see that gaming and game activities build on our play and play activities, it becomes clear that the phenomena are independent. They can be (and have been) experienced separately and can have (and have had) lives of their own. However, when we abstract and reify them in their ideal or mature states only, we tend to see them as dependent on each other and likewise tend to miss the differences between them. In their mature states, games rely on play for their very existence while play often finds its expression in games. But to look at them only in this manner is to miss crucial information about their independence. Abstracting and reifying the frequent marriage and co-dependence of games and play can lead to a conflation of the two phenomena.

Games as Idealized Forms of Play

Idealization is a third cause of the conflation of play and games. Games have unusual power as ideal forms of play activities. That is, games are activities that are reliable and durable play inducers. As noted, games are constructed to be just right problems. When such

constructions are successful, games provide optimal challenges, stimulation, excitement, aesthetics, and cultural value. When games do not meet these high standards, we quit playing them or change their rules until they satisfy our interests.

Naturally-occurring play activities, of course, do not show this flexibility. Because they are not the product of their constitutive rules, they lack the wherewithal for modification. A mud puddle, in one sense, remains a mud puddle with its more or less fixed invitations for play.

Essentially then, the playing field between play activities and games is not level. Natural problems or activities are trumped by these just right, sophisticated, and human-made artificial problems. The variable attractions of nature prove no match for the constructs of culture.

Games are built by us for us to enjoy, and it seems that they are unusually reliable at doing what we expect and hope for from play and games. They give us something to do when there is little to do and they give us something interesting to do when we are under-stimulated. Games are more accessible to us because we are more in control of them than play activities that are not games. I can easily get a game of soccer going, for example, as long as I have a round object, a rectangular open area, and at least one other person. Although I may have to change some ancillary rules to make soccer viable in my surroundings, I can have it virtually whenever I wish. We choose and create games so that they will be there to fulfill our needs. Soccer is there for me when I need it.

Play activities that are not games, on the other hand, are less reliable. They come in two forms – natural and artificial. Natural play activities, such as making snow angels and body-boarding in the ocean, are often inaccessible because they force us to submit to the world's invitations at that moment. They are not possible without snow or ocean waves that allure us. We have little control over whether or not the world will invite us to experience them. Artificial play activities, such as performing guitar music or enjoying a delicious meal, are more reliable to us than natural play activities. Since they are artificial, we can access them without having to

wait on the world to present opportunities to us. However, Suits sees them as less reliable than games because they are not as durable. That is, they are fun at first, but their novelty wears off quickly because they lack the challenge inherent in games.¹⁹⁶

Those who do not delineate between play and games miss these distinctions. Games are discussed as if they are the whole or nearly the whole of play. To be sure, games are the most prevalent and among the best and most reliable examples we can give when we describe play, but they are not the only type of activities that can be played. Playing in the rain or with a pet is not a game, but playing basketball or chess is.

This confusion, as I mentioned earlier, is apparent in the writings of all three authors. Huizinga, while purportedly focusing on play, continually gives examples of human-constructed play activities that are games. He describes bridge, hopscotch, jigsaw puzzles, and soccer as his play activity exemplars even though each of these activities is a game. More poignantly, Huizinga discusses language and religious ritual as play. These activities are conventional, artificially-created and orderly – like his other examples of games.¹⁹⁷ By continually using games as examples of play, Huizinga missed the distinctions between natural, artificial, and gratuitous problem-solving activities.

Caillois idealizes games as his exemplars of play, too. One of his criticisms of Huizinga, for example, is that he (Huizinga) does not give adequate attention to games of chance or games of vertigo as subsets of play. He says that Huizinga “discovers play in areas where no one before him had done so, [but] he deliberately omits, as obvious, the description and classification of games themselves.”¹⁹⁸ While both authors agree that constructed activities such as sports, contests, cops and robbers, and theatrical performances (competitive and simulated games) are play activities, Caillois wants to argue that games like roulette, the lottery, mountain climbing, and tightrope walking (games of chance and vertigo) are also authentic play activities. While

they may be, Caillois has ignored serendipitous or otherwise naturally-occurring actions (play activities) that are outside the realm of games.

Huizinga and Caillois, therefore, reinforce the idealization of games within the realm of play. They usually cite play activities that are games, at the expense of play activities that are not games. They could have chosen such examples as listening to music, taking a walk, engaging in a deep conversation with friends, or other play activities to which many other authors have alluded.¹⁹⁹ Instead they chose examples of play that are games. They may not have been aware that they were confounding two phenomena by idealizing games, but Suits was clearly cognizant of this leaning. He made idealization a central part of his text, and argued as to why it is so powerful and true.

Suits tells us that games are *the* ideal form of play.²⁰⁰ He asserts that game playing constitutes the good life. In his view, games are the most durable form of play because they are problem solving activities. Games continually offer us challenges whereas play activities that are not games do not – their novelty often wears thin over time. It is interesting for us to seek and construct artificial challenges, and they are more closely aligned with the good life than non-game play activity (he uses the examples of vacationing in Florida, collecting stamps, reading a novel or playing the trombone in this non-game play subset). Suits juxtaposes chess with the previous list and proclaims that it is better than his other examples of play activities unless, of course, we can make a game out of the others. He states that the good life should not “consist simply in leisure activities [play], but that it ought to consist in playing *games*.”²⁰¹ Although vacationing in Florida, collecting stamps, reading a novel and playing the trombone are good leisure time or play activities, gaming them up by racing down to Florida, collecting full sets of stamps, reading a novel in one day, and playing the trombone in a competition are better types of play because they have been enhanced with artificial challenges or problems and have become

games. These games, according to Suits, are more durable and therefore better than other leisurely pursuits that enable the play spirit.

Durability is the key characteristic of games in the idealization argument. Suits says that games are the ideal type of play because they are “the essence, the ‘without which not’”²⁰² of play or leisure time activities. Games have unusual power as play activities and gaming has unusual power in the play attitude realm. Well-crafted games are durable and have obstacles to overcome or challenges to face that are neither too hard nor too easy, leaving them as just right, interesting, and attractive projects to the participant and/or observer. As they are so often successful at evoking the play attitude, games are ideal forms of play. And as games are ideal forms of play, they lead to conflation of the two phenomena because we neglect play activities that are not games.

Conclusion

In summary, the conflation of play and games has hindered our abilities to accurately understand these phenomena. Conflation means mistakenly mixing, jumbling, or combining two separate things into one thing. By conflating play and games, we do not see the two phenomena as separate yet related entities. Play-game conflation is evident in philosophical literature. Huizinga, Caillois, and Suits are three cases in point. Each of them conflated the two phenomena in different ways, and my analysis of their writings displayed the breadth of the conflation problem. These and other philosophical analyses of play and games reveal a lack of metaphysical clarity that allowed the conflation to go unchecked. When we understand that play and games reside in two separate but related categories – as attitudes and as activities – we are in a better position to understand play, games, and the relationship between them.

The metaphysical “playing field” becomes even clearer as we look at the roots of conflation. I noted three factors that have led to this confusion. First, play and games are highly compatible. They are often spoken of and experienced together. This close relationship has been mistaken for identity. Second, play and games have been abstracted and reified. They are often described without regard for their context. Our neglecting their roles in evolution and human development leads to identity. Third, games are idealized play activities. Games show unusual power as reliable and durable examples of play activities. However, neglecting examples of play that are not games leads to conflation.

While we learn much from Huizinga, Caillois, Suits, and other play and game authors, they left us with some work to do. For that reason, I have tried to dust off the cobwebs of ambiguity that have grown around play and games as philosophers have continually studied the phenomena but neglected some of the major, although intricate, details. Even though it has been overlooked, understanding the distinctions between play and games is a key aspect of the metaphysical understanding of these human projects.

¹²⁶ Each of the authors listed in my bibliography and numerous others have tried to tackle metaphysical issues involving games and play.

¹²⁷ Roger Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, translated by Meyer Barash, (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2001); Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955); Bernard Suits, *The Grasshopper: Games, Life and Utopia*, (Boston: David R. Godine, Publisher, 1990).

¹²⁸ Allan Bäck, “The Paper World of Bernard Suits,” *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*, 35 (2), 2008, 156-174; William J. Morgan, “Some Further Words on Suits on Play,” *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*, 35 (2), 2008, 120-141.

¹²⁹ This phrase comes from the subtitle of Huizinga’s book.

¹³⁰ Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, p. 7.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

¹³⁸ Kretchmar, Meier, Morgan, Searle, and Suits are the most notable among this group that has defined games as rule-bearing.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 189.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

- ¹⁴² Ibid., p. 75.
- ¹⁴³ Ibid., p. 56.
- ¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 11.
- ¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 132.
- ¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 198.
- ¹⁴⁷ Ibid.
- ¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 199.
- ¹⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 197.
- ¹⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 35.
- ¹⁵¹ Ibid., p. 18.
- ¹⁵² Ibid., p. 85.
- ¹⁵³ Ibid., p. 20.
- ¹⁵⁴ Bernard Suits, "Words on Play," *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*, IV (4), 1977, p. 117.
- ¹⁵⁵ Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, p. 7.
- ¹⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 13.
- ¹⁵⁷ Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, p. 6.
- ¹⁵⁸ Ibid.
- ¹⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 9.
- ¹⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 7.
- ¹⁶¹ Ibid., p. 5.
- ¹⁶² Ibid., p. 7.
- ¹⁶³ Ibid., p. 10.
- ¹⁶⁴ Ibid., pp. 9-10.
- ¹⁶⁵ Ibid.
- ¹⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 12.
- ¹⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 40.
- ¹⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 27-8.
- ¹⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 33.
- ¹⁷⁰ Suits, "Words on Play," p. 122
- ¹⁷¹ Suits, *The Grasshopper*, p. 34.
- ¹⁷² Ibid.
- ¹⁷³ Ibid.
- ¹⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 40.
- ¹⁷⁵ Ibid.; Suits, "Words on Play."
- ¹⁷⁶ Bernard Suits, "The Grasshopper: A Thesis Concerning the Moral Ideal of Man," in *The Philosophy of Sport: A Collection of Original Essays*, edited by Robert G. Osterhoudt, (Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas Publisher, 1973), p. 205.
- ¹⁷⁷ Suits, *The Grasshopper*, p. 16.
- ¹⁷⁸ Ibid.
- ¹⁷⁹ William J. Morgan, *Leftist Theories of Sport: A Critique and Reconstruction*, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994).
- ¹⁸⁰ Bernard Suits, "Venn and the Art of Category Maintenance," *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*, 31 (1), 2004, pp. 1-14; Angela Schneider, "Fruits, Apples, and Category Mistakes: On Play, Games, and Sport," *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*, 28 (2), 2001, pp. 151-159.
- ¹⁸¹ Suits, "Venn."
- ¹⁸² These two categories – play activities and games – can be broken down into more specific categories. The play activities circle, for instance, is made up of two subsets – natural and artificial play activities, the latter of which includes the overlap with games. For now, though, the two-circle diagram will suffice.
- ¹⁸³ Suits, "Words on Play," p. 120.
- ¹⁸⁴ Edmund Husserl, *Ideas: A General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, translated by W.R.B. Gibson, (New York: Collier Books, 1967), p. 250. Husserl explains that *noesis* is the perception or the intent of the act and *noema* is that which is perceived or the object that is intentionally acted upon.
- ¹⁸⁵ Suits, "Words on Play."
- ¹⁸⁶ Suits, *The Grasshopper*.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 174.

¹⁸⁸ R. Scott Kretchmar, "The Normative Heights and Depths of Play," *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*, 34 (1), 2007, pp. 1-12.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, p. 7.

¹⁹¹ Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, p. 13.

¹⁹² Morgan, *Leftist Theories*, p. 215. Morgan describes this claim beautifully as he says, "To say, as I do, that the gratuitous logic of sport is a contingent universal condition of its practice is to say that when such practices cease, when they no longer resonate in any social order or are no longer found sufficiently worthy to be included as a part of any cultural tradition, then the logic that founds and sustains them will cease as well."

¹⁹³ Kretchmar, "The Normative Heights."

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 8.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Suits, *The Grasshopper*, p. 174.

¹⁹⁷ Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, p. 4, 20. The "game" of language has been the main thrust of several books by philosophers such as Wittgenstein and Searle, while religious ritual can also have the elements of a game.

¹⁹⁸ Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, pp. 3-4.

¹⁹⁹ For arguments pertaining to this type of play, see Thomas Aquinas, *St. Thomas Aquinas: Philosophical Texts*, translated by Thomas Gilby, (London: Oxford University Press, 1967); Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, translated by Joseph Sachs, (Newburyport, MA: Focus Publishing, 2002); and Klaus V. Meier, "An Affair of Flutes: An Appreciation of Play," in *Philosophical Inquiry in Sport*, 2nd Edition, edited by Klaus V. Meier and William J. Morgan, (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 2005).

²⁰⁰ Suits, *The Grasshopper*.

²⁰¹ Ibid., p. 16.

²⁰² Ibid., p. 176.

Chapter 4

“DIGGING IN” TO PLAY AND GAMES: A METAPHYSICAL AND AXIOLOGICAL RE-CONCEPTUALIZATION

Throughout chapters one, two, and three, I have analyzed some of the major issues in the play and game literature. These issues and my own analyses have helped to clarify the nature and potential value of these two human projects. This chapter includes two main sections that build on the previous analyses. In the first I will discuss the specific characteristics that I think best describe play and games. This discussion constitutes a culmination of my work in the first three chapters. The second section is axiological in nature. It builds on my metaphysical arguments but speaks to the normative value of play and games. I will attempt to use insights provided by my metaphysics to more accurately pinpoint sources of value. That is, I will explain how my metaphysical descriptions reveal that play and games are ways in which we deeply engage the world.

In the metaphysical section of this chapter, I will attempt to identify attributes that seem to be most central to play and games. I am not claiming that these attributes are the only ones that describe play. Instead, I argue that they will help us better understand game and play projects because I take them to be central or core features of these two phenomena. My intent, in other words, is not to devise a hard and fast definition of play or games replete with a full accounting of their necessary and sufficient conditions. As an alternative, I hope to describe some of their most fundamental and illuminating features. Most importantly, I believe that these features lay a sound foundation for the axiological claims to follow.

As I argued in Chapter Three, play and games can be understood as attitudes and activities. Attitudes and the activities to which they apply are inextricably linked. With that in

mind, play and games require both attitudes and activities, but in differing ways. Play, as we have seen, is an attitude, stance, or orientation we can have toward any variety of activities. We refer to both the unique play intentionality and the things intended as play. Most of the literature reviewed in this study emphasizes the intentional side of play. Play therefore, is commonly understood as a way of approaching the world and less frequently as those activities or aspects of the world that are approached in this manner. Games, on the other hand, are commonly understood as activities, but they are also activities that require a lusory or gaming attitude from the participants.

The following analysis will be based on this common understanding. I regard play primarily as a way of intending the world, a way of approaching a milieu that contains a host of potential play activities. I regard games primarily as activities, projects that can be encountered and undertaken, even though such activities are colored by the gratuitous intentionality directed toward them. Thus, when I use the term play, I will typically be referring to a way of addressing the world—a stance, an attitude, a particular intentionality—even though we understand that this intentionality is incomplete without its correlating object. When I refer to games, I will usually be pointing to things that populate that world—activities that can be intended from a gratuitous stance or not—even though we understand that games are incomplete without their noetic correlate.

Attributes of Play

Scholars have described play in a number of different ways. They used terms such as intrinsically valued, sacred, instinctive, unpredictable, freely chosen, ambiguous, responsively open, relational, a product of reallocated resources, secluded, limited, something that takes place in a separate space and time, not ordinary, and many more. The four attributes that I highlight in

what follows draw from some of these characteristics. I have chosen these four attributes for two reasons. First, play research employs too many descriptors, and it is not clear that all of them are needed. For example, the notions of “freely chosen” and “intrinsically valuable” may point to the same or a similar feature. Second, I believe that the four attributes I have chosen do a reasonably good job of distinguishing play from other similar and dissimilar enterprises. Finally, these features of play lay a good foundation for analyzing its value.

I describe play as autotelic, fragile, voluntary, and uncertain. Autotelicity has to do with why we play. We are drawn to and find great meaning in those experiences that are ends in themselves. Fragility has to do with why we stop playing. Our play experiences can be interrupted very easily. Play’s voluntary attribute has to do with the human agency in play. We have the ability, within limits, to open ourselves up to or close ourselves off from play. This speaks to play as planned or chosen. And uncertainty has to do with the uncontrollable factors that influence play. This speaks to play as serendipitous and the player as being chosen. The world, I will argue, produces a variety of siren calls and empty invitations that alternately enable or hinder play in ways we cannot fully predict or control.

Play as Autotelic – Why We Play

I mention autotelicity first because I think it is the most central and prominent feature of play. It is among the most commonly cited features of play, and I think that this speaks to its importance. In other words, I believe that the many authors who characterize play as autotelic have alluded to its most significant facet.

The term “autotelic” has etymological roots in classical Greek. Its literal interpretation is “self end.”²⁰³ Suits, as an Aristotelian scholar, would have been aware of this heritage. He says that autotelic activities are those doings that are “ends in themselves.”²⁰⁴ With this explanation,

Suits specifically ties autotelicity to activities or things we encounter in the world. He suggests that the goals of play activities, or the reasons for participating in them, are found within the activities themselves. Suits seems to focus more on the activities that are “played” than a prevailing attitude that one might call “play.”

However, Suits alludes to a particular mindset that is necessary for an activity to be played, as he notes that “playing always means playing *with* some x or other.”²⁰⁵ In this sense, we could juxtapose two activities: “playing with some x” and “working with some x.” These *activities* could potentially be the same (such as reading a book), but the *mindset* or *intentionality* is not identical. Playing would entail reading to become immersed, say, in a thrilling novel – reading for the sake of reading – while working at reading could include such things as reading for a class assignment that determined one’s grade.

Morgan gives a similar definition when he claims that autotelicity refers to “activities” that “are valued and pursued as ends in themselves.”²⁰⁶ Although this definition connects autotelicity with activities, it seems to be an attitude of the participant that makes a particular activity autotelic. For instance, we might say that baseball is an autotelic activity. However, baseball’s autotelicity, Morgan might say, is not inherent to the game. Instead, it is autotelic when we approach the game as an end in itself.

Meier clearly sees play’s autotelicity as an attitude or spirit. He refers to play “not as a specific activity or set of activities, but rather ... a stance, a manner of comportment, a fundamental mode of being-in-the-world.”²⁰⁷ More specifically, he describes autotelicity as an “intrinsic, noninstrumental, self-contained enterprise.”²⁰⁸ Each of the terms and phrases that Meier uses to define play speaks to the basic idea of play having its end within itself. By using them, he might be arguing that these terms and phrases have similar if not identical meanings. Yet he chose autotelicity to describe play and the other phrases to describe autotelicity. He may have been following Suits’ definition in doing so, he may believe that all of these terms denote

the same idea, or he may simply believe that the notion of autotelicity best captures play's essence. Thus, it is unclear why he describes play as autotelic and not, for example, intrinsic.

Schmid also sees a connection between similar terms in his definition of autotelicity. He argues that it can best be understood as “intrinsically motivated action.”²⁰⁹ In this sense, we can understand our play behaviors as autotelic when we participate in them for intrinsic reasons or motivations. This definition makes explicit what Suits, Morgan, and Meier hinted at – namely, that autotelic and intrinsic have very similar meanings, so much so that they did not differentiate between the two.

As these authors explain the meaning of autotelicity, they claim that the reward and purpose of play is the doing or the process rather than the product or what can come of it (even though play can produce pleasure, satisfaction, or happiness, for example).²¹⁰ While there may be external consequences to our autotelic activities, we participate in them primarily to be experiencing them.

Our awareness of play as an experience in which the reward is the doing is central to our understanding of play. Autotelic activity involves doing something simply to be doing that thing rather than doing something as a means to something else. Autotelic experiences are those that are self-sufficient in the sense that they are captivating, exciting, adventurous, satisfying, interesting or otherwise intriguing in their own right.

Autotelicity, so understood, explains why we play. Players give themselves to the play world before there is anything to take from it (such as pleasure or happiness). This is different from our normal experiences. In much of life we are cautious. We act prudently in the present so that we can assure ourselves a better future. We buy insurance, pay for protections, save for the future, and otherwise plan ahead so that we can survive, even if our lives take an unexpected turn for the worse. So in our normal engagement with the world, we typically assess what is offered to us before giving ourselves to it. In play, on the other hand, we give ourselves to the

playground and throw caution to the wind. We do not bargain with it, deal with it prudentially, or ask for guarantees before jumping in – at least not with deep play experiences. We simply provide our assent and hope that the particular activity cooperates and carries us away. So we give ourselves to play before we are able to take anything from it, and this can result in a more intimate and meaningful engagement with the world. When we give ourselves fully to something, we come to have a deeper connection with the object of our trust – a deeper connection than with the objects of our prudential negotiations in our workaday lives.

There is something special and liberating about having experiences in which we are not focused on outside consequences – where we have incautiously given ourselves to the world without the expectation of being able to take something in return. It is risky to do so, but we gravitate to these types of self-sufficient experiences because in these moments we are free from the shackles of duty, obligation, and prudence – the kinds of motives that dominate much of the rest of our lives. And it is these moments that create in us a deeper engagement with the world. Deeper, in this sense, means unusually care free, largely without conditions, and uniquely imprudent. We play because we want to experience the world intimately and meaningfully, and we do so when we are intrinsically-motivated in autotelic behavior.

Play as Fragile – Why We Stop Playing

Many authors have alluded to the fact that play seems to be the perfection, completion, or ideal of humanity. Schiller refers to the “beauty” of this experience.²¹¹ Pieper argues that play “is the centre-point about which everything revolves.”²¹² And play is, to quote Plato, “the best part of us.”²¹³ If these authors are correct and play is the central or best part of our lives, then it must be among our deepest or most meaningful engagements with the world. However, if this is

true, important questions follow. Why would we ever stop playing? Why not play as much as we can or play out the rest of our lives?

These questions have two answers, and they both point toward play as a fragile enterprise. The first is practical. For mortal beings, perpetual play is not possible. If we tried to play for indefinite periods of time, we would likely not survive for very long, for all play and no work (save for a host of friendly, unintended consequences that might emerge from play) means no survival. Such is the moral behind the short life of Aesop's fabled grasshopper. We have to tend to necessity – eating, sleeping, and working – at least to some degree and from time to time in order to survive. In this sense, prudence trumps serendipity.

The second answer is logical. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Suits said that play is a relational concept – it is like light, which is comprehensible only in relation to darkness.²¹⁴ Similarly, we only understand play in relationship to its counterpart – that which is not play. So if we could live out our lives in perpetual play (such as in Utopia or heaven, for instance), then this experience would, in fact, no longer be play. It would not be play because there would be nothing that serves as a background from which it can stand out, as it were. In this sense, if everything were play, then nothing would be play. A delightful oasis in a desert of other experiences would simply be the way things are.

Since we are not in Utopia or heaven and must attend to certain necessities in order to survive, we will regularly experience non-play. And non-play often dethrones, overpowers, or outmuscles play in our experiences, rendering play fragile and submissive. Play's fragility has to do with the many ways in which the world invites us, indeed requires us to be reliable, responsible, and attend to our various duties. It also has to do with the many ways in which the world dictates the quality of our experiences. The play of enjoying a walk on the beach can be interrupted by cold gusts of wind or the rancid smell of dead fish. The play of enjoying an action movie can be interrupted by commercials or a phone call. The play of engaging in a lunchtime

game of racquetball can be interrupted by an eye towards an important one o'clock meeting or a nagging shoulder injury. Play, in short, can be dethroned by any number of uninvited guests at a moment's notice. Given this existential reality, we might be well advised to treat play with gratitude and humility, knowing (as we do) that it might be called away at any time and understanding, too, that we can do little to prevent its departure.

The world offers us an array of experiences. It gives us play-attractors, play-inhibitors, and play-destroyers. Play-attractors are those things that draw us to play. They have to do with play's autotelicity. Play-attractors ask us to give ourselves to the play-world with the enticement of possible returns such as pleasure, joy, satisfaction, happiness, excitement, drama, and other kinds of gratifying meaning. These siren calls can range anywhere from those that are irresistible to others that are only mildly interesting.

Play-inhibitors are those things that either slow down our play times or discourage us from playing. A player may be less inclined to play for any number of reasons – a nagging cough, sadness, a monotonous and bleak work environment, a chemical imbalance, or the actions of an annoying friend. These play-inhibitors do not prevent a player from playing. They simply make the player less likely to play (or more likely to be pulled from play). While the strongest play-inhibitors may never be able to totally snuff out play, they can still end it very quickly or make our play interludes less frequent.²¹⁵

Play-destroyers are those things that prevent us from playing. At times, we simply cannot play. Some play-destroyers have to do with morbid health situations such as a seizure, a stroke, or a heart attack. Some play-destroyers have to do with powerful emotions like abject fear. Play opportunities evaporate quickly when a would-be player has a gun pointed at his head or is being chased by a rabid animal. When we are in these situations, we do not have the luxury of choosing to play or not. Autotelicity understandably (and usually automatically) gives way to needs and objectives that transcend the doing.

The strength and frequency of our encounters with play-inhibitors and play-destroyers support my argument about play's fragility. Play can always be placed out of reach or snuffed out quickly. Thus, play provides a deeper engagement with the world in the sense that it is fragile and, for that reason, special. Its fragility makes it a "minority" experience, one that forever lives between the shadows cast by need, duty, responsibility, and survival. This temporary nature of play is an attribute that makes it a more meaningful engagement with the world.

We tend to handle tangible objects in the world that are fragile with extra care and respect gently because we know they can easily be broken. This potentially short shelf-life, in turn, enhances our appreciation for the fragile goods. That is, since we handle them in an extraordinary way, we begin attaching extra-ordinary meaning to them. Play seems to function similarly in our lives. Because it is an extra-ordinary experience, we attribute greater significance to it. It is probably the case that we treat our play with greater care, respect, and gentleness than our ordinary engagement with the world and, in the process, relish play's meaning. We know that the magic may not last long.

Play as Voluntary – Human Agency in Play

Play as voluntary means that there is something that I contribute to the play act. It speaks to my limited but unmistakable role in producing play. It is extending my arm toward play or making myself available to it. Play as voluntary, in short, points to the role of human agency in play experiences. While play is not totally the product of my own hands (play's uncertainty still has a say, as we will see in the next section), and while there are times when I am unable to play (due to play inhibitors and destroyers), I still enjoy limited control over play – what, how long, and how well I play. I can volunteer to be open to play. I choose to seek play. I can go to places and seek out activities that typically induce play. Meier has pushed this point to the extreme. He

argues that in play man is “fully his own master.”²¹⁶ While we would like to think that we are our “own masters” in the play-world, this characterization of play seems exaggerated.

Nevertheless, I think that Meier is alluding to a crucial aspect of play. While we may not fully be our own masters in play, we are able to present ourselves to the world asking to be drawn in by its magnetic charms. It is partly voluntary, then, in that we have the ability to seek it. When we choose to open ourselves up to play, this is our friendly gesture toward a potential play world. We are asking the world to allure us, charm us, and tempt us with its best and most gratifying experiences. Thus, we choose in a humble way. Since the world is full of powerful forces that can dictate our experiences to a large extent, it seems that the most we can do is volunteer ourselves to be swept up in play.

Yet “volunteering” is no simple decision. It is quite complex. If I decide to play when my house is burning down, the likelihood of play occurring is very low. In this example, the world tells me that I should not – and often I cannot let myself – voluntarily seek play. “Volunteering” is a complex phenomenon of preparing, clearing the decks, getting ready psychologically, physically, and emotionally for some delightful time away from prudence and necessity. And it is also a matter of the will, of choice. I “choose” to spend some potentially free time in delight or serendipity rather than the pursuit of more security or wealth.

At times it is very easy for me to play – on Saturday afternoons during football season or in an empty gym with a basketball. And at times it is very difficult for me to play, such as when I have a lot of work to do before a deadline or when I am feeling sorry for myself. So my openness to play is voluntary in that it is accompanied by factors that speak to the strength or sincerity of my openness. I have within me the ability to look for the enjoyable experiences this world has to offer when the circumstances permit such options.

To push this point further, my playgrounds, or the play activities that I am most accustomed to, are chosen by me, and this is what makes them a deeper engagement with the

world. I am the one who chooses crossword puzzles to be a part of my life, and I am the one who goes to the gym to play basketball whenever I can. I engage in these activities in an attempt to find play. In other words, I open myself to play and simultaneously make myself vulnerable to the forces of play. When I am open and vulnerable in this way, I become play-grounded, basketballed, or crossworded. I am deeply engaged with the world because I give myself to it knowing that I will be changed in some way by the play that I experience.

My ability to voluntarily seek play and make myself vulnerable can lead to a deeper engagement in a different way, as well. Because I have some agency in play, I can take ownership of it and become more intimately and meaningfully connected to it. I can choose where and when to make myself vulnerable. If I did not volunteer to be a part of basketball or crossword puzzles, or if I did not enjoy them, then they would not be play for me and would be less meaningful in my life. I am the one who asks for and allows the infusion of the play attitude when I do crossword puzzles or shoot hoops, and this reveals something about me. The world has given us a seemingly endless supply of ways in which we can enter the kingdom of play, and I have chosen basketball and crossword puzzles, among others as my particular doorways. Over time, then, I engage with these chosen activities on an ever-deepening level. My choices for when and in which way to play are a part of who I am and my decision to be open to play – it is within my power to volunteer myself for when and how I would like to seek play, but always as someone who has already been partly shaped by that play world.

Play as Uncertain – Serendipity in Play

Play provides some interesting contradictions or dichotomies. On one hand, as I have just discussed, play is voluntary. But on the other hand, as paradoxical as it may sound, play is also involuntary. Play is in our control in one sense and out of our control in another. It is

influenced by me but it is also influenced by something other than me. It is caused and uncaused. Play can be described as a part of the self and a part of the other, or as part “will” and part “grace.”²¹⁷ This means that play is the product of ambiguous agency. We do not always know who or what the primary agent is in play.

Because of this ambiguity, I will argue, play is a deeper engagement with the world. When we are unsure whether we will find play or not, we are often delighted with the serendipitous arrival of play and the company it may continue to provide. We are surprised by what the world reveals about itself and about us. In much of ordinary life, I am in charge or I am not in charge – there is no ambiguity or surprise. I sense a need and take care of it. I know I have a duty and I act accordingly. When I fall into one of my playgrounds, however, it is not clear if I am playing or being played, controlling or being controlled, causing or being caused, influencing or being influenced.

These dichotomies explain play’s uncertainty. Play as uncertain means that there is something that the world presents to us as a part of play. It also means that play is a deeper engagement with the world and has great meaning to us. Even as we are drawn to autotelic activities (why we play), as we acknowledge that play is fragile (why we stop playing), and as we are voluntarily able to manage our openness to play (the human agency in play), what makes play experiences so meaningful is that we do not know how or when we will encounter these special experiences. This mysterious or surprising element of play explains its depth through its partial uncontrollability. The world opens itself in new ways, and we develop unexpected relationships with it. This is the non-human agency in play – it is how the world speaks to us.

Sometimes the world sweeps us up and transports us into play. At other times, the world is not very inviting and seems to exclude us from play. Someone who often does Sudoku puzzles will grant that some puzzles are more enjoyable or more play-invoking than others. This is due to play’s uncertainty. Even though I do daily Sudoku puzzles because it is *often* play for me, it does

not follow that it will *always* be play for me. Nor does it follow that it is always play of the same quality. Sudoku puzzles are qualitatively different for me on each particular occasion because of both internal and external factors. Sometimes I have a hard time focusing because there are other things I should be doing with my time. Sometimes the puzzle is too hard, sometimes it is too easy, and sometimes it is just right.

Many authors have raised this point about play. Peirce speaks to the futility of any toil or effort to produce play when he explains that one needs “the breath of heaven to swell your sails.”²¹⁸ Play is uncertain in that no one knows exactly when or to what extent our “sails” will be “swelled.” Kretchmar also explains this aspect of play by stating that there must be “a sufficiently persuasive play-invitation from the world” in order for play to occur.²¹⁹ This invitation shows play’s uncertainty because we cannot be absolutely sure when or in what capacity it will be there.

This uncertainty helps to explain play’s meaning in our lives. I can begin to understand myself, play, and the game of basketball for example, based on the meaning that comes from the uncertainty of my play. Is there a particular location at which I “play” better? Do I “play” well with particular individuals? Are there external factors that enhance my “play” (such as success, spectators, or energy drinks)? I can go to the same basketball court everyday but I never know what kind of experience it will be. Will I become bored quickly? Will my opponents be too good? Will I shoot well? Will I have moments of play? These questions may or may not be on my mind everyday as I approach the court, but the answers will come forth nevertheless. And we are never sure of those answers before the fact. The best I can do is open myself up to the play spirit, search for play, and see if basketball cooperates on that particular day. I will not fully know until I experience it. Play is uncertain, then, because the world can speak to us in voices that are at any given time seductive, repelling, or any point in between.

Attributes of Games

Far fewer scholars have written on the nature of games than on the characteristics of play, but many of those who have done so have made significant contributions to our understanding of them. Some of these authors described games with phrases such as activities that involve uncertainty, require inefficiencies, have arbitrary stipulations, are unnecessarily difficult, present challenging obstacles, require a formal logic with respect to means and ends, are rule-bound, are contested, are orderly, and many more. Suits, as noted previously, has written most extensively about games. Indeed, most philosophical analyses of games cite his work and many scholars understand games based on his characterization. As already mentioned, he defines games as activities that include goals, means, rules, and the lusory attitude on the part of the participants. As noted in Chapter Two, although he is highly regarded as a philosopher of games, his writings have also been criticized on many grounds. One of the foremost concerns raised by his critics is that he is too formalistic. That is, his definition of games or game playing is essentially too rigid, fixed, and strict. By identifying a game's necessary and sufficient conditions, he has defined them in a very essentialistic way. My own description that focuses on three core elements of games is sympathetic to these concerns. While I look for defining features of this distinctive human enterprise, I also leave open the possibility that other characteristics could be added to my own, or even that my own characterizations might be amended or otherwise improved.

In the following, I attempt to characterize games in a way that is less formalistic than Suits' rigid definition. While doing so, I also attempt to make sense of the numerous other terms that have been used to describe or define games. I will describe three features that point to the most central and most important aspects of games – namely, the challenge or problem, a game's gratuitous logic, and games as conventions.

Games as Challenges or Problems – The Generic Character of Games

Games present an obstacle, challenge, or problem to overcome. Accordingly, a game participant is one who tries to solve the problem or overcome the challenge. A marathon, for example, has three fundamental challenges – that of simply running 26.2 miles, achieving a particular finishing time, and beating other contestants. A card game like War has the challenge of trying to end up with all the cards, and the game's rules make this difficult to do. Rules prevent me from reaching the marathon finish line on a moped, and rules prevent me from wresting the cards away from my younger and weaker sibling in War.

Kretchmar argues that challenges in competitive games have two sources: the test and the contest. Every game is grounded in a basic test. In basketball it is trying to score baskets against a defense and trying to keep the other team from scoring baskets. In chess it is trying to put one's men in position to trap or capture the opposing king while also protecting one's own king. If one cannot solve or partially solve a game test, then it has proven "impregnable;" and, according to Kretchmar, it is not genuinely a (human) test. On the other hand, if one succeeds too easily in solving the test, then the test shows itself as "vulnerable" and, once again, is not encountered as a test.²²⁰ Tests, therefore present problems with their possible-but-difficult opportunities for solutions.

A contest, on the other hand, requires "finding someone with whom one can share a test."²²¹ Many game challenges, problems, or tests become enhanced when they are contested because this adds to the inherent testing challenge of the game. When we participate in the games of basketball and chess as contests, we are not only taking the test offered by those games, but taking the test against an opponent who is taking the same kind of test. This means that games as contests present two challenges: challenges provided by the test and challenges presented by the need to outperform others on that test.

The challenges or problems that are central to games can have varying degrees of quality and differences in durability. Kretchmar discussed the quality of a game as he described game tests. An “impregnable” test is of low quality because it is too difficult. A “vulnerable” test is of low quality because it is too easy. In the middle are games of high quality because they seem to be just right in terms of their difficulty. Fraleigh praises the site where we experience inherent uncertainty in these just right tests as “sweet tension.”²²²

Based on this thinking, we could create a continuum that would speak to the quality of the tests. Some of our games are not very challenging at all, others are too challenging, and still others seem to be somewhere in the middle. It is this latter group of games that are of the highest quality. The former two groups – games that are not challenging and those that are too challenging – include games that do not fit us because of their inflexibility or poor fit. The challenge has to be appropriate and adaptable for a game to be high quality. For some games we are either too young or too old. Adults realize this when participating in tag, and small children discover this when they try to play regulation-height basketball. Therefore we give adults more complex chasing games to play and lower the rims for young children.

In some games we have unevenly matched opponents – as it will not be challenging for an Olympic champion sprinter to run against a recreational jogger. Therefore we alter the rules to have competitive balance, or we search for more appropriate opponents. For other games, the logic is too simple or too complex. Tic-tac-toe loses its appeal as soon as two participants understand the game well enough to force a tie every time, and swim races across the Pacific Ocean would lose their appeal before anyone ever finished. Therefore we choose tests and contests that have attainable but challenging ends and inefficient but not impossible means – making appropriate and worthwhile challenges or problems.

The quality of game challenges or tests can be affected by features such as aesthetics or cultural fit. That is, some games are more beautiful than others and some games are more

appropriate for particular cultures than others. Chess seems to be more aesthetically-interesting than checkers because there are diverse pieces and more movement options. Downhill skiing is a good fit for cultures in mountainous regions that receive a great deal of snowfall. Automobile racing is not a good fit for poor cultures because it requires time, money, technology, and natural resources.

Games also have differing degrees of durability. Will the challenge last? Will participants be called back to this activity again and again? Games must have some ability to draw us in and keep us interested. Our best games are the ones we can encounter over and over again and in which the outcome of the test continues to be uncertain. If I solve a game problem well (say, get a 74 in golf), does that game still present a provocative problem or not? A game test shows durability if my ability to overcome it is in doubt even if I solved it before. A game with little durability, on the other hand, could provide sweet tension, but the problem is ruined once it has been solved. Such is the case with the Rubik's Cube. Although it is a very difficult game challenge, we might say it is "once solved, always solved." That is, by solving the problem it is no longer a problem for me (unless I originally came upon the solution by luck). If I understand how to complete the puzzle, then I can do so whenever I come upon that game test. The only challenge, then, is how fast I can do it or if I can beat others in a race to complete it.

The challenge or test that is inherent in games promotes a deeper engagement with the world in the sense that it reveals our character and abilities. It has been said that one's "true colors" are revealed when one is put to the test. This seems to be the case with games – especially durable or high quality games. They reveal who we are because they push us, stretch us, and challenge us to do everything in our power to succeed.

Games stretch us in multiple ways – through ethical, psychological, and physical challenges. Ethical challenges test our willingness to persist and follow the rules to reach the goal. When pushed to use anything and everything at our disposal to solve a problem, we make

decisions that show our character. Some of us shine when put to the test, showing self-discipline and responsibility; others resort to illicit tactics and poor behavior. The psychological or physical challenges of games test our strength, speed, endurance, wit, or reasoning skills, to name a few. In short, they reveal our physical and mental abilities. How high can I jump? Can I run faster than the next person? How accurate is my memory recall? Some of us are able to overcome game tests more efficiently than others, and this may be due to technique, training, or superlative genetics. Through the ethical and psychological/physical challenges in games, we reveal a great deal about ourselves and how we relate to the world.

Games as Gratuitous – The Unique Character of Games

There is an element of game participation that is unlike the way we engage in everyday, instrumental activities. This is due to a game's gratuitous nature. In games, we artificially create problems in the face of which (to a certain extent) harder is better and uncertainty is valued more than certainty.²²³ However, in our day-to-day lives, making our tasks harder and more uncertain would be counterproductive and, for that reason, absurd. Typically, we want to be as efficient as possible in our work duties and household chores. We often want to finish them as quickly as possible.

Games are different. In baseball, we allow the pitcher to throw from an elevated mound. This makes hitting harder for the batter because gravity augments the velocity of the pitches. There is no reason for us to elevate the pitching mounds apart from wanting to experience baseball's hitting problems. We made baseball this way, we like it as such, and we want to continue with it in this fashion. If we ever find that baseball becomes too easy for either the pitcher or batter, we will change the height of the mound or some other variable until we have a

relationship that fits us better. Such is the process of gamewrighting, of inventing, modifying, and preserving gratuitous problems.

Similarly, it seems arbitrary to have a basketball hoop placed ten feet above the floor. But this is a height that fosters a healthy degree of difficulty in our shooting. No one has perfected shooting to the extent that it has become too easy.²²⁴ On the flip side of the coin, most everyone has the physical capacity to get the ball above the rim and has a chance to make some of their shots. This is part of the uncertainty that makes basketball a durably attractive problem. We have found a degree of difficulty that seems just right. We preserve that difficulty for gratuitous reasons – that is, just so we can go back to basketball and experience the problem it presents once again.

Gratuity is what separates game behavior from other activities that involve means and ends, in general, and other activities where the means are non-optimal, in particular. Many things we do in life involve processes and products, but games are the only ones that are artificially and arbitrarily contrived to be challenging and uncertain. In other words, the gratuity in games does not just separate games from utilitarian means-ends relationships, but also from utilitarian relationships where the means are suboptimal. Suits explains this point as he says, “the decision to draw an arbitrary line with respect to permissible means need not itself be an arbitrary decision ... For both *that* the lines are drawn and also *where* they are drawn have important consequences not only for the type, but also for the quality, of the game to be played.”²²⁵ In golf, each player must use golf clubs to hit a ball in the hole. This gratuitous element has helped make golf a good game. This is harder than we have to make it – for we could throw the ball into the hole much more accurately, and could make each green much closer to the tee box. The unnecessary difficulty in golf is to a degree that makes the outcome uncertain. Hitting the ball with a club is neither necessary nor maximally efficient, but has been stipulated as a necessary means because it

creates an optimal means-ends relationship, thereby making the difficulty of the golfing problem just right.

Gratuity accounts for much of the attraction we find in games. I could have listed countless examples of the deployment of gratuitous logic aside from those mentioned above because they are replete in our favorite games. We love solving problems or attempting to overcome challenges that are harder than they have to be and, consequently, have outcomes that are not pre-determined. It would be foolish to participate in harder or more uncertain activities under normal or everyday circumstances because, as Suits has argued, they aim at external utility. But we seem to enjoy the difficulties and attendant uncertainties we encounter in games. Why would we choose to swim across pools, lakes, or channels when boats and rafts are readily available? Why would we prohibit the use of hands in soccer when it is much easier to put the ball in the goal with them? The answer is that in our games we have created problems to solve that are attractive and challenging. We enjoy the drama of uncertain outcomes. We do not know if we can overcome game obstacles or not but it is often satisfying and otherwise meaningful to try.

Gratuity demonstrates that games are a deeper engagement with the world because it fulfills our human nature as problem solvers. When we encounter problems, we try to solve them. In the absence of problems, we create new ones. Such is the case with the invention of games. They expand our domain of problems. We have created games for our participation, and we have created them in ways that fit our needs. Games do not have to be the way they are but, as their inventors and sustainers, we like them that way. They allow us to exercise our capabilities more readily. In other words, we have made them practical and accessible. Since we are runners, jumpers, throwers, and thinkers, we have created gratuitous problems that allow us to run, jump, throw, and think. If our everyday lives come up short on natural problems that require running, jumping, throwing, and thinking, we add to them.

Games as Conventions – The Elements of Culture in Games

Games, like languages, are conventional. In languages we stipulate relationships between words and certain things those words represent. The letters c, a, and t, spoken in that order, make a specific sound and refer to little furry creatures that say, “Meow.”²²⁶ In games we stipulate relationships between things through the identification of ends, means, permissible and impermissible actions. In football, for instance, there are a set of prescribed means by which one team tries to get the ball into the other team’s “end zone.” When a team successfully moves the ball into the “end zone” while maintaining possession of it, we have stipulated that that event is worth six points. When a team kicks the ball through the goalposts at the back of the other team’s “end zone,” the kicking team receives either three points or one point, depending on the context. Throughout all games there must be some convention that establishes a specific means-ends relationship. That is, games must have some conventions between means and ends if they are to be understood by each participant or shared with others.

Many of our most popular games create very clear and formal conventions. When we watch a professional soccer game or a quiz show on television, we know exactly what to expect or at least recognize that the participants fully understand the convention in which they are involved. This is because the means and ends of elite level soccer and television game shows have been codified and clearly articulated so as to leave little doubt about “what counts” and “what does not count.”²²⁷ In this sense, these are games in which we know what means are allowed, required, or not allowed.

However, I believe that there are other game conventions that are not so clearly articulated but should still be considered full-fledged games. Small-sided, recreational soccer games, for example, are often played without strict boundaries or penalties and generally end when one or more players need to take a water break or get back to work, family, or friends.

Some of the means and ends are loosely agreed upon. Often in this type of game no one keeps explicit tabs on the score and the rules are amorphous depending on the situation.

Nevertheless, there is some structure present from which we know that the participants are playing a game – soccer. In any game, no matter how formal or low-key, there is a convention that tells us “what counts” and how we are allowed to pursue it. However, the convention does not always have static ends or explicitly specifiable means. “What counts” might be more tacitly understood. The convention, or “what counts,” is the foundation of the activity, and we add our own individual or group identity to Game A soccer (two-on-two in the backyard, for instance) as opposed to Game B soccer (the World Cup Finals, say). These two games still have many of the same core elements (e.g., skillful kicking, provocatively small vertical goal, and no use of hands) even though some of their other elements are different.

The conventions of games provide a deeper engagement with the world because they help us navigate through culture more fluently. William James explains that customs or conventions are those things in society that teach us how to become a part of that particular society. Language provides one of the most frequently-cited examples of a convention or custom that facilitates cultural fluency. Languages are created by people within cultures as a means of having a deeper connection with each other. Languages are also infused with cultural meaning. To know and understand a language is to know and understand a culture, at least to some extent. The same can be said of games. Their conventions help us understand the cultures in which they have been formed and sustained. The conventions of games allow us to have a deeper connection with each other because they are ways in which we communicate. Those of us who have been influenced in some way by the conventions of football, for example, understand similar meanings, share common experiences, and, in a sense, speak the same language. We can communicate fluently and deeply through football about effort, value, improvement, teamwork, success, and trust, even

if we have only little else in common. In this sense, games and their conventions have great social significance.

Bridge to Deeper Engagement

In summary, the core dimensions of play are that it is autotelic, fragile, voluntary, and uncertain; while games present challenges or problems, gratuity, and conventions. With these central features, I have taken an epistemological middle path between essentialism and family resemblances or signposts. I attempted to describe “core features” that provide a foundation for distinguishing these phenomena both from one another and from other things. Indeed, I think they capture much of our lived experience of the two phenomena without abstracting or idealizing them, on one hand, or underplaying their distinctiveness, on the other.

With a better vision of what play and games are and how we experience them, we are now in a position to incorporate axiological ideas that arise from the metaphysical analysis – namely, how we should value play and games. My metaphysical conceptualization of play and games directly informs this issue, and I think it does so in ways that differ from previous analyses. I alluded to the value of play and games as I described each particular metaphysical feature. However, in the following section I will elaborate on some of the sources of value in play and games. I will argue that play and games provide a much deeper engagement with the world than we normally believe.

Deeper Engagement

The axiological issue that I discuss in the following includes a re-conceptualization of some of the ideas from previous authors on play and games. Many of the authors, including

Huizinga, Caillois, Fink, and Schmitz, have argued that when we are playing or playing games we are moving into an altogether different mode of existence than the one that characterizes our normal lives. These authors use metaphors to describe this duality of play and non-play. They say that play is an “island” in the sea of instrumentality or an “oasis” in the desert of our normal lives. They also say that it is “separate from” or a “suspension of” ordinary living.²²⁸ What they are saying may have some truth in that there are differences between play or games, on one hand, and our ordinary lives, on the other. However, I do not think their descriptions capture the full value of these phenomena. The views of previous authors seem to be that play or games are different *kinds* of experiences than our normal existence. I want to argue for a lesser divide between play and games and the rest of our lives. I think we can more accurately understand the value of play and games in our lives when we see them not as different *kinds* of experiences in the world but as deeper engagements with a world of which we are always a part.²²⁹

If we look at play and games as means by which we deeply engagements with the world, we can better appreciate their value. Therefore this section will seem much like a tribute to these two phenomena. I will argue that play and games are not separate or distinct from the ordinary world but that they are better or deeper ways of engaging with the real world than normal. In everyday life we are engaged with the world. Some of the charms and values of playing and gaming experiences are available there, too. But they are intensified in play and games.

I will explain three characteristics of the deeper engagement with the world that play and games constitute. I have touched upon these characteristics in earlier sections. I will argue that play and games provide more intimate, more meaningful, and more personally and collectively revealing experiences with the world than our normal, everyday interactions. After these descriptions, I will give five examples of how play and games constitute a deeper engagement with the world. This will include sections on play and nature; phenomenology and playgrounds; games, symbolism, and metaphor; games and myth; and games and clarity in society.

Before getting into the characteristics or examples of play and games as a deeper engagement with the world, it is important to note that the claims I have made in the previous chapters figure prominently into my arguments in this chapter, as well. Most notably, I see play and games as two distinct but related phenomena. Although at times I refer to play and games together in my axiological analysis that will follow, I still see them as two different human projects. I often speak of them together in the following because I believe that they both constitute a deeper engagement with the world, and, as I have argued, play and games are often found together. That being said, I will still clarify which one I am talking about in each respective analysis when differences are important.

Characteristics of a Deeper Engagement with the World

More Intimate

When we are playing and participating in games, we are experiencing the world in a more intimate way. We are closely attuned to the world and are listening to what it has to say. In normal existence, on the other hand, we are often focused on outside consequences or other things we would rather be doing or are trying to achieve. This is due to play's autotelicity and, in a related way, its fragility. We engage in a particular play activity with intrinsic motivations because we want to have that experience. We relish our experiences when we are engaging with the world autotelically, in large part, perhaps, because we know that it is temporary. Autotelic experiences often occur only intermittently in our adult lives.²³⁰ We enjoy these experiences and savor them, knowing that our intrinsic motivation can be overpowered, suppressed quickly and easily, or otherwise lost.

While engaged in play, we cultivate intimate relationships with particular activities that we enjoy. We focus on the experience of the particular activity and we respond appropriately and to the best of our ability in attempts to continue doing that which presents itself as self-sufficient to us. Because play is worthwhile in its own right, we focus our efforts on engaging in the elements of the experience while it lasts. In doing so, we have a qualitatively deeper engagement than in our non-play experiences. In play, we are able to forget about our responsibilities or duties and give ourselves fully to the activity. We play cards until all hours of the night even though we need sleep; and we spend all afternoon frivolously playing in a swimming pool on a sunny day even though we get badly sunburned. We do these things because we are intimately, often exclusively, focused on our experiences. They are times when the world ropes us into an activity in such a way that we cannot help but focus fully on it.

In games we must negotiate our way through the nuances of the means-ends conventions. In order to master, or simply succeed as part of a pitcher-batter convention that is central to baseball or the conventional relationships among chess pieces, one must thoughtfully and repeatedly engage the relationships between means and ends in the particular games. Understanding these complex relationships and how to use them to one's advantage involves time and effort. Game participants must be focused and attentive in order to navigate through the conventions that produce good problems in games. If one is not able to do this, then either the game is faulty or the participant is merely trifling. Games, or at least good games, require an intimacy of contact that goes beyond a normal engagement because of the inherent draw of the problem.

We have many conventional activities in our normal, everyday lives. Our engagement with these cultural constructs is often cursory. We usually engage with them deeply only when they do not work. Games are different than this. Our engagement with games is usually more than just casual or automatic. We dig in to the conventional logic because games present

gratuitous challenges or problems and we are problem solving creatures. We continuously engage deeply in the game conventions so we can increase our proficiency and rate of success in the game tests. In doing so, we engage deeply with the means and ends of the activities.

More Meaningful

Play and games as more meaningful experiences speaks to their ability to connect to our personal narratives. Some of our experiences of play and games tend to be among the most memorable. Others are delightful but forgettable interludes scattered among our workaday lives. Many of our play and game experiences help us organize our personal narratives. Kretchmar says that a meaningful life is one that “is reasonably consistent, has poignancy, has a goal, and is recognizably ours.”²³¹ I take two things from this statement. The first deals with play and the second with games.

First, play’s poignancy has to do with its serendipity or charm. Play has an element of surprise and delight to it that makes it meaningful – I have called this play’s uncertainty or its ambiguous agency and, associatively, its autotelicity. We spend time searching for play in the places we enjoy the most – baseball fields, bingo halls, recreation rooms, and so on – but we are never certain we will find play there. Further, we are usually not sure whether we are in control of our play experiences or they are in control of us. Am I playing basketball or being played by a basketball experience that is, at least partly, out of my control?

The uncertainty is meaningful to us in that it is different from our normal engagement with the world. Usually in our work-a-day worlds we understand whether we are in control or not. These experiences offer us little in terms of serendipity, surprise, and adventure. We calculate costs and benefits. We “put in our time” and usually get what we expect. Play, on the other hand, is a realm in which manipulation is less useful and control is less certain. We open

ourselves up and are swept up into a world that speaks to us in very personal, significant, and sometimes memorable ways. Play, then, is meaningful because it moves us and touches us emotionally.

Second, games are meaningful because they offer consistent challenges. Game activities present the same or at least similar challenges or opportunities each time we participate in them. I have referred to this as the convention of a game, or the means-ends relationships that create the fundamental challenge or problem of a game. The *test* of hockey or blackjack tells me “what counts” in each of those games, and it is the same every time I participate in it. Even though the *contest* – offered by my opponents – may change and present challenges of differing qualities, I still need to try to put the puck in the net or get as close to 21 as possible without going over. As I repeatedly expose myself to these activities, I develop consistency and meaning in my personal life story. Repetition aids in my identification as a hockey player or a card shark. Through repeated encounters with these gratuitous and challenging activities, I *become* a hockey player or a blackjack player – identities that may well have great meaning for me.

Games are built around excellences that are developed in relationship to recurring kinds of problems or challenges. It is arguably more difficult to develop an identity or personal story around short-term or disconnected tasks. For example, fixing a kitchen faucet may carry some personal meaning, but it does not have the staying power of one’s identity in games. Being a good blackjack player or hockey player is similar, then, to other repetitive, consistent, and challenging projects such as being a good father or being a good professor. These challenges are meaningful in that they are continuously there with us. I repeatedly verify my status as a good father or a good professor in the same way that I have to prove my worth every time I sit at the blackjack table or enter the hockey rink. These challenges are often at or near the center of my personal narrative because of their recurring nature.

More Revealing

Play and games are revealing experiences in two ways – they tell us about ourselves individually and collectively. That is, through the deep engagement of play and games we are able to learn a great deal about people and cultures. Play and games have distinct ways of revealing characteristics of individuals, and they reveal our collective nature in similar ways.

Individually, play is revealing through its nature as a voluntary activity. I can choose the activity in which to play (or at least try to find play in activities of my choosing). However, that does not separate play from work as I can also choose my vocation. Play is more revealing than work, though, because I can choose, to an extent, when to open myself up to play. Play is voluntary and work is not. Work needs to be done at certain times for me to survive or at least continue to contribute to society, but play is different than that. The necessity of work pushes us in the direction of conformity or sameness. The freedom of play opens doors to an infinite variety of personal playgrounds. In this sense, I have a different type of control over play than work. I have the ability to choose, to an extent, what to play, where to play, and when to play, and my decisions reveal much about my identity as both a player and overall person.

Individually, games reveal the parameters of our abilities. The game of sprinting reveals how quickly I can run from point A to point B and whether or not I can beat others in doing so. The game of Monopoly reveals how well I can handle money in a simulated yet cutthroat real estate world. This is the challenge or problem that I described as a core feature of games. In games, there is no hiding what I can and cannot do. I expose myself in games. I either succeed at the test or fail. While I can try to hide among teammates, coaches, poor equipment, or external hindrances, games reveal my capabilities in human-constructed, gratuitous, and intriguing experiences in the world.

Collectively, play and games reveal cultural texts. The play and game activities of cultures around the world reveal particular beliefs and attitudes of those cultures. In other words,

the autotelic activities that we choose and the conventions that are prominent in different cultures both describe and feed off the characteristics of the cultures in which they exist. Some of these are region-specific. Many cultures value expression – creative and free-spirited play and games. Many cultures value competition – fair and meritorious play and games with pronounced winners and losers. Many cultures value cooperation – unifying and productive play and games. These differences reveal characteristics of particular cultures.

Some play and game activities have become popular across the globe. However, they are often played differently in different regions. Dance is a common form of play around the world, but it is also done differently in different regions. Universally transcendent games also show this variability. Soccer and basketball, two of the world's most popular games, are played differently in Europe than they are in South America, for instance. These differences reveal further characteristics about various cultures such as the importance of winning or the value of aesthetically pleasing movement.

The openness of play and conventionality of games enhances the plasticity of these activities for good activity-culture fit. Work too has some openness and variability from one culture to another, but there are more constraints in work. We have to plant the seeds *and* weed the garden. We have to show up to our jobs *every* Monday through Friday. Play and games are different. We can opt out of play or massage game conventions if they are not to our liking. As evidenced above, many cultures have done these exact things – and we have learned a great deal about these people and their values from those decisions.

Ways in Which Play and Games Constitute a Deeper Engagement

Play and Nature

Play allows us to connect more deeply with the natural or physical world. To explain this concept I will use Aristotelian ideas to describe the connection between play and the potentiality or actualization of our nature as humans. The most fundamental precept here is that nature is motion. “Nature is the origin and ordering of being-moved,” Aristotle states, claiming that nature is a source of motion.²³² Motion, in this sense, is more than just movement – it is change understood in a broad sense as including generation, destruction, growth, and locomotion. Aristotle says that everything “has within itself a principle of motion and of stationariness (in respect of place, or of growth and decrease, or by way of alteration).”²³³ Nature, then, is the broadly understood motion of objects in the world. Transport, growth, decline, and alteration are all ways in which things of the world become what they potentially can be.

Aristotle explains the potentiality of things in this world in relationship to their energization. Potentiality, in this context, is not necessarily just what could happen, but is that which is imminent or in the process of occurring. Energization is a type of motion that helps a potentiality come into actuality. It refers to a change or an alteration in which a particular potentiality comes to be actualized. The type of motion that has to do with energization is often different from other forms of motion. For instance, an object can grow, decrease, or change its physical location. We can see these types of motion. Energization, on the other hand, is not always visible motion. The potentiality-energization relationship is at work in all ways of moving and being moved, but sometimes it cannot be seen. At times, energization has to do with a change of an object’s thing-ness or its very nature. I will explain these concepts in the following and show how they relate to play.

Woodbridge states that motion or nature is what makes the world intelligible, “What nature really is, is mind or intelligence in operation.”²³⁴ He says that Aristotle’s “theory of nature is a theory of motion.”²³⁵ The world is ever-changing, or in motion, and the motion of each thing in the world is its particular “business.” Woodbridge describes one’s business as “the important thing ... which calls [people or things] to their journeys.”²³⁶ It is not just a factual description of what one is doing but instead is an explanation of the reason or purpose behind one’s motion or nature. It is, in a sense, the nature of one’s motion. The earth’s business is that as it orbits around the sun it separates light from darkness, one season from another, and wakes people up to go about their daily routines.

Each person’s nature or motion is a part of his or her business, too. At times, a person’s nature or business is play. The important thing that calls children to their journeys is experiencing the world in explorative and uninhibited movement. Adults allow them and encourage them to freely experience the world of toys that stimulate their senses. Their days are filled with this type of “business.” Children are being children when at play. The nature of their activity is to play, and they become “players” as they continually do so. We can also determine times when the business of adults is play. The reason that a man goes to a large expanse of tightly shorn grass, pockets of sand, and lines of trees is to play golf. The man’s business or the most important aspect of what he is doing when he goes there involves play or participating in a game.

Kosman takes a different approach when explaining this idea. While understanding that nature is motion, he attempts to delineate the specific being of motion. In essence, he tries to determine what motion is. To do so, he explains Aristotle’s notions of potentiality and actuality. He states that wood and stone, for instance, can potentially become a house. That is, wood and stone have within their nature the ability to become a house. When wood and stone have been put together to make a house, they are a house in actuality. As wood and stone are in the process

of being put together as a house, they are in a precarious position in that they are potentiality and actuality at the same time. When this occurs, they are in motion. Aristotle says that “motion is the actualization of what potentially is.”²³⁷ The wood and stone are in motion in that they are actualizing their potential to become a house.

However, Kosman realizes that if this is true, motion is by definition self-defeating. “Motion itself,” he says, “is an incomplete actuality” because it ends once the thing that is in motion reaches its actuality.²³⁸ If the wood and stone are only in motion while they are being formed into a house, then motion is a state of incompleteness. The wood and stone are only a means to actualizing what is potentially there, and they are only in motion to reach some other state – namely, as a house. Understanding motion as an indication of how we are incomplete, though, seems contrary to Woodbridge’s claim that motion or nature is the business or the important aspect of what each object is doing. Could our business or our nature possibly be just a description of how we are incomplete or striving toward something else?

Kosman argues that motion can be more than just incomplete potentiality, saying that “while motion is aimed at a fulfillment which lies outside itself and brings about its destruction, the fulfillment of a disposition preserves and often enriches [motion].”²³⁹ In this context, Aristotle distinguishes between motion and action. Motion is when the goal or end of the behavior is outside of itself while action is when the end is a part of the experience.²⁴⁰ If one builds a house to have a roof over one’s head as shelter from the elements, then the motion of forming wood and stone into a house is incomplete. It has its end – shelter – outside itself. Once we have reached the desired end (having a house) we have then reached our goal. The motion of building the house leads to the end. Aristotle calls this *techne* (making or artificially creating) and it is extrinsically valuable motion because it is in the process of reaching some other state.²⁴¹ Yet if one builds a house because one enjoys or finds satisfaction in building houses, then that motion is complete because the end is the disposition in which one finds oneself when building

houses. This is what Aristotle refers to as action, in which the end is the doing or the experience of building the house. The difference is the reason for the motion – it can be a means to an end or an end in itself. When it is an end in itself, it is what Schmid refers to as autotelic or intrinsically motivated motion. Aristotle uses the terms *praxis* (activity) or *theoria* (contemplation) to indicate the type of motion that is complete in itself.²⁴² I have alluded to Aristotle's use of these terms in Chapter One as describing complete or fulfilling motion.

When it comes to play, we are engaged in behavior that is an end in itself. Although there may be external ends effected by our play behavior, they are incidental. Such activity is play for us because we are not focused on the extrinsic ends. Instead, we are engaged in intrinsically motivated behavior. This is not just motion, it is the type of complete motion that Aristotle refers to as action. It is motion that is itself an actuality – it is our nature or business. When we are playing with wood and stone to build a house, we are intimately engaged in the experience of creating something with these entities that functions as a house as opposed to focusing only on producing something safe and protective as efficiently as possible.

When at play, we are intimately engaged with the physical objects of the world, and we interact with them freely and openly. A person building houses just for the sake of building houses is much more open to experiencing the wood and stone in free and creative ways while still building a functional house than a professional builder who focuses on functionality, efficiency, and profit. When not focused on getting a house built to have shelter or any other extrinsic goal, one can enjoy the activity of house building and more fully and deeply experience the possibilities that come from the nature of the wood and stone.

Play, then, constitutes a deeper engagement with the natural or physical world. When at play, we are more intimately engaged with the physical objects and forces of the world. A child playing in the sand is into that activity in a way that promotes learning about sand and the effective forces of the natural world without being aware of this utility. Water and wind affect

the sand, and it has a certain texture and connection to human skin that make it different from other substances. A child experiences all this very intimately when at play in the sand, but this is not the reason that the child plays in the sand. Even though the child grows and develops while playing in the sand, the child does so to reach and experience a playful disposition. The child has intrinsic motivation for sitting in the sandbox or on the beach – it is autotelic behavior. Stories of building castles in the sand or digging deep holes demonstrate the meaning that is inherent in play. These tales help us understand what distinguishes mechanical or means-related movements from meaning-infused movement, and this is what Woodbridge referred to as one's business, important movement, or nature.

When I am participating in a game of volleyball in the sand, I am learning about the effects sand has on me. I am learning about physical forces acting on the ball and on the other participants. However, I am not learning in the traditional sense of attaining knowledge. I am not focused on attaining a cognitive knowledge of these physical effects through the traditional reading, writing, and memorizing. Instead, I am learning in an embodied manner. I am discovering how to adapt my behavior to the physical forces at play in beach volleyball, but I am often not conscious of these discoveries. Yet my body is growing more accustomed to its interactions with these forces and is intelligently responding to the best of my ability.

Like the child building sandcastles, I usually do not participate in beach volleyball because I learn things – whether embodied or brain-based knowledge. I participate in it because I am likely to experience a playful and enjoyable disposition through it. I voluntarily give myself to beach volleyball. When it is play it is complete motion, or action, because my focus is on the experience. I am playing beach volleyball to have the experience of playing beach volleyball and it is an intimate engagement. If my experience of it was extrinsically valuable, Aristotle's *techne*, then my intentionality would be different. Volleyball action can be instrumental and not play – like appeasing volleyball-loving parents or allaying boredom while trying to get a sun tan – but

then I am not engaging deeply with the world that beach volleyball presents because I am striving for something else (parental approval or sun-tanned skin). This is incomplete motion.

As I play beach volleyball more often, I continually develop my capacity to interact with the world through that activity. I become a beach volleyball player through my autotelic involvement in it. This development, or generation, is part of what Aristotle means when he describes motion as nature. The capacity to develop into a beach volleyball player is a part of my nature. As I mentioned above, motion is not just bodily transport but change. By playing beach volleyball I change, generate, or morph as a person in my capacities to engage with the world. My business, at times, becomes playing beach volleyball – a complete motion or action that is a way of deeply engaging with the world because it has its end in itself.

Play and Phenomenology

Another way to show how play is a deeper engagement with the world has to do with phenomenological notions of self and the world. In this section I will rely on the ideas of three authors to argue my point. Sheets-Johnstone describes the relationship between self and world as one that originates with explorative and voluntary movement. Merleau-Ponty depicts an embodied relationship between self and world. Lastly, Kretchmar goes a step further and explains that phenomenological playgrounds provide ways in which we cultivate relationships between ourselves and our world.

The ideas of these three authors focus on locomotion, movement-oriented play, or even games. The examples I give perpetuate this practice. However, I do not see motor-active behaviors as the only types of play and games. Play or participating in a game can be sedentary, such as having a deep conversation or solving a crossword puzzle, and I believe that this subset of play and games fits with the following analysis. However, the connections may not be explicit.

That is, the descriptions of Sheets-Johnstone, Merleau-Ponty, and Kretchmar work for all instances of play even though they focus on motor-active play.

According to Sheets-Johnstone, knowing and moving are closely associated. She claims that movement is the “originating ground” of perception.²⁴³ In other words, all that we know is based on our movement and movement-related experiences. She explains that infants experience “I move” and “I do” before they can comprehend the more abstract conceptual realization of “I can do.”²⁴⁴ Accordingly, she says that “it is clear that movement is absolutely foundational ... to perceptual-cognitive realizations of ourselves as ... animate organisms.”²⁴⁵ That is, movement is the primary mode by which we understand our world. Sheets-Johnstone describes this connection between movement and knowing by saying that “it is in and through movement that the life of every creature ... ‘acquires reality’.”²⁴⁶ Our knowledge of the world comes from purposeful actions or movements. For infants, knowledge of the world comes from reaching, chewing, or grasping. They do this, at least in part, through intrinsically-motivated or process-oriented behavior. They move and explore their surroundings autotelically. They act purposefully to be acting purposefully. They crawl to be crawling. They walk to be walking. As we grow, knowledge of the world continues to come from explorative actions or movements such as when a toddler sees how high he can stack toy blocks or a pre-teenager sees how far she can throw a softball.

Children are intuitively focused on movement. They move without being told or taught to move. Sheets-Johnstone says that “in the beginning ... we do not *try* to move, *think* about movement possibilities, or put ourselves to *the task* of moving. We come straightaway moving into the world.”²⁴⁷ For children, movement and sensory experience is the dominant mode of living, and it is a very primal experience. They go through stages of movement, but at the beginning many of the most basic movement skills cannot be taught. Grasping, releasing, crawling, and walking are examples of movements that occur before a child has the ability to

comprehend language, rendering futile any attempts to verbally teach them these skills.

Grasping, releasing, crawling, and walking are ways of experiencing the world and acquiring a sense of self and world.

These purposeful movements are very revealing because they shape us and help us understand ourselves. Sheets-Johnstone says, “In discovering ourselves in movement and in turn expanding our kinetic repertoire of ‘I cans,’ we embark on a lifelong journey of sense-making.”²⁴⁸ When she says that movement is, “the mother of all cognition,” she means that it is epistemologically the basis and center of human life.²⁴⁹ I understand this type of movement to be broad in nature, much like Aristotle’s motion. It is not just bodily transport from one location to another but is any change regarding one’s body. It could, at times, also be described as autotelic behavior.

When we move, we learn things about ourselves and our world. A child learns about cause and effect when she drops her pacifier out of her crib. An adult learns that certain motions will give him greater success in shooting a basketball. When we have these types of experiences, we are discovering our bodies as our own and as our vehicles for making sense of the world.

Merleau-Ponty underscores this idea in the way he discusses embodiment. For him, our understanding of the world is intimately related to our bodies and our habits. He explains that a person does not have a body, but a person is his or her body. We have lived bodies that transport us in the world. “The body is our general medium for having a world,” he argues.²⁵⁰ My body is the potential of a certain world for me. My body is dynamically related to the world. When I interact with the world, I change and the world around me changes. My body is not just another object in the world but it inhabits and interacts with the world. Objects in the world call out to me and I respond. “It is never our objective body that we move,” Merleau-Ponty says, “but our phenomenal body ... [which] surges towards objects to be grasped and perceives them.”²⁵¹ A tree with long, thick branches and soft leaves issues invitations to me as a capable tree climber. This

points to the non-human agency – what I have called uncertainty – in play. I respond to that by climbing the tree – the human agency in play, or what I have referred to as voluntary – and then my world changes. The tree is *climbed* by me and I am *tree-climbed*. When I return to climb trees, my world continues to change. I become more and more tree-climbed (or baseballed or poked or kite-flown, for example) and I have a more intimate, meaningful, and revealing engagement with the tree-inhabited world.

This example demonstrates Kretchmar’s idea of a phenomenological playground. A playground develops when “your relationship with a movement practice becomes intimate and intense.”²⁵² He says that “rich play relationships develop” in which “the player and playground may spend time together, eventually transforming one another during their lives together.”²⁵³ There may be a mutual cultivation of me and tree-climbing as I continually climb trees, for example. But this process does not occur suddenly or immediately. Instead it takes time. I need to be “play-grounded” by touching the playground, “play-skilled” by developing capabilities, “play-motivated” by understanding the continuous challenges and “play-valued” by caring deeply about my achievements.²⁵⁴ I evolve into a deeper relationship with tree climbing and tree climbing becomes a different activity to me – it is more meaningful and becomes a more significant part of my life.

When a playground develops, Kretchmar calls engagement with it deep play. This type of experience “is personal. It becomes part of who we are and ... who we are becoming,” he explains.²⁵⁵ We cultivate playgrounds in deep play that affect our understanding of ourselves. This is the point of contact between the human agency and the non-human agency in play. I volunteer myself to particular activities as I drive toward autotelic behavior or the play spirit, but the world responds in its own way that cannot be dictated or otherwise forced by me. When I first come in contact with crossword puzzles, they do not say much to me. As I spend more time with them, though, we begin to develop a relationship. “Players change constantly as skills,

attitudes, and values grow little by little,” Kretchmar claims.²⁵⁶ I slowly gain command of the clues and the words and am able to complete continually harder puzzles. Over time they become a part of me. The puzzles speak to me, luring me to fill them out. Through this playground, I am able to interact with the world differently because I am a “crossword puzzler.” My world has changed. Crossword puzzles (or, for example, tree climbing or kite flying) and I have a much more intimate relationship. In this sense, playgrounds, as Kretchmar argues, are not so much found as grown. And playground specific players are not so much born as developed.

If my phenomenological playground is basketball, then my sense of self and others is altered by that sport. I know that my body has changed because of basketball – I have better hand-eye coordination and spatial awareness and I can move vertically and laterally with more efficiency – but there is much more to it than that. I have changed in that my body is the condition by which I have a world. I have changed because I see the world in much more of a basketball way – that is, through basketball eyes, limbs, attitudes, and values. I notice more about the kinetic and potential energy an object (the ball) has while bouncing and the ways in which people move through three-dimensional space toward a goal (the basket). Moreover, I am more attracted to basketball. The sport has a certain allure that is difficult for me to pass up. I long to play when I have not done so in a while, I spend all day thinking about the game I have in the evening, and sometimes choose to play instead of being more prudent with my time.

Phenomenological playgrounds, then, are dangerous because they can consume our valuable time and expend energies that might be put to more useful purposes.

This phenomenological world of play is also a way in which we can deeply understand the world of others. It is among the deepest ways in which the world reveals itself to us. We can assume that the ways in which play shapes us holds true for others as well. I understand the pull on one’s time and energy that a playground has on others because I am play-grounded myself. I can also learn a lot about others based on how they experience the same playground I do. Quite

obviously, I am able to tell the relative skill level and experience of someone playing basketball if basketball is my playground, but it goes beyond that. I can learn a lot about someone just by seeing one jump shot or one drive to the basket. A person tells me a great deal about himself as he plays a game or shoots hoops. Through his body language and his movements on the court, he expresses a great deal about himself because I understand that playground. If I did not, much of what he could be revealing through basketball would be unintelligible.

The deeper engagement of play from this analysis rests on the basic argument that we learn by doing things. Movement is our primal way of learning or knowing ourselves and our world. The way we move and learn things is ordinarily product-driven, extrinsic, or is attached to consequences that demand our attention. In play, on the other hand, we move and learn through autotelic behavior. We act creatively to enjoy the process of our actions. Even though there may be consequences to our autotelic behavior that bear on our intentionality, what makes them play is that the experience is our reward. In play, we change and develop in creative and exploratory ways that allow us to focus on the doing and, in turn, become more intimately, meaningfully, and revealingly engaged with our experiences.

Games, Symbolism, and Metaphor

Games also express a deeper engagement with the world. While deep play and their respective playgrounds provide ways in which we are immersed in the world around us, games may provide an even better avenue for a deep engagement with the world. In this section I will describe how games promote a deeper engagement with the world through symbolic and metaphorical meaning. In doing so, I will build on the ideas of Polanyi.

Games conventionalize our play experiences, and they facilitate play. They are the result of our continued interest in returning to our play experiences. Since we enjoy jumping, we have

built artificial challenges or problems around it. We have conventions called the high jump, long jump, basketball, and volleyball. If we did not have these games, our play times related to jumping would be less frequent and less socially acceptable as we grow older.

These conventionalized activities often symbolize our natural play experiences. Baseball and football are two examples of game activities that are laden with symbolic meaning and power in that the meaning of the movements in these games transcends the literal significance they have in the game. We enjoy spending time on warm summer days playing in grassy fields, for example, and this type of behavior becomes much more accessible and lasting when we “game it up” by creating the grassy conventions that have become baseball. Through the creation of baseball we now have a context in which the game action symbolizes the traditional appeal of spending a day at the park (through baseball’s increased popularity, we now spend days at the “ball-park”). The conventions of the game of football symbolize and contextualize our inherent attraction to feats of strength and power. Football also has traditionally symbolized war as the teams line up in formation to attack, consider separate but related offensive and defensive tactics, and relay information about these tactics through a hierarchy of command (coach/commander to quarterback/field general to players/troops).

Symbols allow us to more tangibly make sense of our experiences and develop meaning. Polanyi explains that symbols are those things that are not valuable in themselves but point toward things that are valuable. In this sense, the symbol itself has no intrinsic interest for us. With the American flag, for instance, we are really interested in the freedoms and values that it stands for as opposed to the actual red, white, and blue fabric waving in the wind.²⁵⁷ Games are like this to an extent. They stand for certain things and give us tangible evidence of the meaning in our experiences. A mere hockey match between the United States and the Soviet Union in 1980 symbolizes so much more. It is not just about a black disc going into a net. It is about the triumph of democracy over socialism.

Yet Polanyi speaks of a meaning structure that is more complex and valuable than symbolism – namely, metaphorical meaning. Whereas symbolic meaning is based on intrinsic interest in our experiences that relate to an otherwise insignificant symbol, metaphorical meaning includes intrinsic interest in both the experience that points to the symbol and the actual symbol. So the experience of meaning in a game as metaphor is complex. Through the development of meaningful, interesting, and intriguing means-ends conventions, games not only point toward basic pleasurable experiences – symbols for freedom, achievement, fair pursuit of success, playing in the park, etc. – they also have their own intrinsic interest, as metaphors, to which we reflect as both participants and spectators.

We can see how the game of hockey can be a metaphor if we flesh out the example of the 1980 U.S.-U.S.S.R. Olympic hockey game. Hockey certainly serves as a symbol in this context – the two competing teams were symbols for competing political ideologies. However, the meaning is greater than that, for it is also true that the two competing ideologies enhanced the competition between the two teams. Both hockey and politics are interesting in their own right, and in this context politics informed hockey (one team represented democracy and the other represented socialism) and hockey informed politics (the victory for “Team Democracy” proved that it was a superior ideology to socialism).

Part of the process of developing meaning through symbols and metaphors is integrating the diffuse parts of our experiences into focus. Both Neal and Slusher imply that games, through their symbolism and their intrinsic interest, have metaphorical meaning as Polanyi described. Neal speaks of two diffuse parts of sport as the symbolic meaning of the event (such as the triumph of democracy over communism in Lake Placid in the winter of 1980) of which we are often not conscious at the time, and the actual performance (such as the Olympic semi-final hockey game between the United States and the Soviet Union) which has its own intrinsic interest – especially to hockey fans and patriotic Americans or Russians.²⁵⁸

Slusher characterizes the two meaning-producing mechanisms using different terminology. He points toward sport's two diffuse elements as the subject and the object. He says that "man [frequently] becomes confused by what *is* and what *appears*."²⁵⁹ By what *is* he means the actual game or game equipment, and by what *appears* he means the "vitalized reality" of the event through the significance that participants or spectators have infused into the activity.²⁶⁰ A football game can be intrinsically interesting to a football player or a football fan (that which *is* – the object), and it often symbolizes a time to exhibit manliness, courage, and strength for the player and a time to drink beer and act rowdy on a fall weekend for the fan (that which *appears* – the subject).

As we integrate the diffuse parts of our experiences into joint meaning, we "call upon our imaginative powers."²⁶¹ Polanyi gives the example of going to the theater and watching a play in which a murder takes place. We know that the murder is not real, but we are drawn in by the actors' performances and react in a way that is similar to but not identical with our reaction to it if there actually was a murder. There are two ways of understanding this type of experience and incorporating it into a meaning structure: through the artificial frame and through the factual events. The artificial frame of the play is that a character which we have come to know in the story has been murdered. The factual events are that one person pretended to kill another person, but the actor/murderer is not a real murderer nor is the actor/victim dead. The meaning involved with this type of convention is such that if we "call upon our imaginative powers," the artificial frame has the ability to move us very deeply. This symbolic, metaphorical, and artificial setting, because it has developed its own context and meaning structure, has the power to move us in a way that is more powerful than the literal events of an acted-out murder on a New York stage. We are moved by the story as if it were real.

In the same way, as we "call upon our imaginative powers" to develop symbolic and metaphorical meaning in our games, we are creating a deeper engagement with the world. The

factual events in a basketball game may be that the team from Los Angeles beat the team from Boston by a wide margin. Through the factual events, this occurrence does little to tangibly affect either of these cities or their citizens. The artificial frame, though, is that Los Angeles (the team, the city, and all of its fans worldwide) slaughtered Boston (and its team, city, and worldwide followers). Those who “call upon their imaginative powers” to make sense of the symbolism in this event will be deeply affected by this for doing so. Those who claim to be a part of “Los Angeles” will rejoice while those who have meaningfully vested their fandom with “Boston” may take weeks or longer to recover.

Polanyi identifies three ways in which we can identify how much games and game-like metaphors move us. The first is within our power. We have the ability to give ourselves to the meaning-laden symbol. Polanyi explains that we will have meaning to the extent that we surrender to the symbol or metaphor. “A metaphor ... moves us deeply as we surrender ourselves to it,” he says.²⁶² In theatrical play we must give ourselves to the character development and events even though we know that they are not real. Games are the same way. We must surrender to and get caught up in the Super Bowl, the backyard baseball game, or Monopoly in order to make these events meaningful. The more we give ourselves to these games the more meaning we will derive from them.

The second way in which symbols and metaphors have meaning is through the extent to which the action resembles that which it symbolizes. Polanyi gives the example of the Catholic ritual of crossing oneself.²⁶³ The action resembles a cross and the meaning is attached to that object. The ritual is done to communicate with Jesus Christ – whose living symbol is a cross. Likewise, murder in a play will have more meaning if it resembles a real murder (a high quality representational performance will evoke more meaning than a poor one). Game actions derive meaning in a similar way in that they resemble our ordinary work acts or life acts in so many ways – dealing with money, property, and governance in Monopoly just as we do in real life, or

playing in a field on a summer day in baseball by dealing with the variables of space, time, and force that baseball shares with other activities we can play in a park.

The third way in which symbols and metaphors have meaning is through the diffusion of the parts that we have to integrate. The more incompatible the integrated parts are, the more “exciting and moving” the experience can be.²⁶⁴ The fact that games and other conventions are very complex activities as compared to everyday instrumental activities explains why they can be so “exciting and moving.” Because their parts are often so incompatible and because it is so difficult to integrate incompatible parts, they can be very meaningful as symbols and metaphors.

Polanyi gives the example of music, saying that it “is a complex pattern of sounds constructed for the joy of understanding it.”²⁶⁵ The meaning in a metaphor such as music or a game comes from the joy we get when we are able to integrate the complex and incompatible patterns and parts of the experience. We take great meaning from the players who hit many long homeruns, frequently slam high-flying dunks, or often score seemingly impossible goals. These are the players that allow us to integrate our incompatible experiences because they make difficult feats look easy. In the same way, we find great meaning in watching a “Cinderella” basketball team systematically take down a perennial powerhouse or a world-class figure skater artistically and effortlessly navigate through a performance with difficult compulsory components. It is in these sporting moments that we can sometimes integrate incompatibles and see things that normally do not belong together, such as hard being easy, small being big, weak being strong, or impossible being possible.

As we integrate often incoherent subsidiary information in games, we are in search of specific meaning and fulfilling experiences. We are drawn toward the conventions that make up baseball and football, for instance, because of the deep meaning that forms as we become more acquainted with them. When the occurrence of these and other games have intrinsic interest and

when they symbolize something else that elicits interest, then games have great meaning to us and constitute a deeper engagement with the world.

Games and Myth

Games promote a deeper engagement with the world through myth and mythical potential. Polanyi's ideas will be a guide for this section much as they were in the previous one. He claims that we come to understand much of our world and its happenings through myth. Primitive societies developed myths about the world to make sense of that which they did not understand. Since they could not accurately predict or control the weather, they tried to appease the rain gods during droughts by performing ritual dances. Since they could not understand illness or injury, they propitiated the gods or elders of their tribes with offerings, incense, chants, or sacrifices. As our societies modernized we took a more scientific viewpoint to develop what seem to be more plausible explanations of the world. However, myth is still a part of our lives. To this day we create myths to help us understand the world, especially at the macro level – such as theories about the beginning of time and about the galaxy – and at the micro level – including ideas about human genetic make-up and molecular composition.

Polanyi explains myth as “an expansion of the mind.”²⁶⁶ It is, in essence, an idea about the nature of things that is yet unproven. Archaic myths, such as the unscientific ideas mentioned above, have value in that they “show the world to be full of great meaning” through the use of symbols and metaphors.²⁶⁷ Since myths are structured to help us understand things we do not know or cannot prove, Polanyi claims that they require imagination. It takes imagination to sense the truths that are embedded in performing a collective dance in the presence of elders to bring rainfall needed to grow crops; in Icarus' wax wings melting as he flew too close to the sun; and in the belief that our galaxy is one of many throughout the solar system. In a similar way, it takes

imagination to sense the truths that are embedded in Pheidippides' run from the Battle of Marathon to Athens in ancient Greece and collapsing to his death as he delivered a message of victory;²⁶⁸ in Bobby Thomson's "shot heard round the world" that won the 1951 National League baseball pennant for the New York Giants; and in Muhammad Ali "shocking the world" by knocking out Sonny Liston in 1964.

Learning about these myths and believing them to have embedded truths puts us into an intimate connection with what Polanyi calls the sacred world. By acknowledging myths, we come to play a part in their perpetuation as meaningful explanations of the way the world is. This is especially evident in the manifold creation myths that emerge in cultures around the globe. "He who recites or performs the origin myth is thereby steeped in the sacred atmosphere in which these miraculous events took place," Polanyi affirms in a quotation from Mircea Eliade.²⁶⁹ Eliade also explains that "man becomes contemporary with the exploits that the Gods [mythical characters] performed *in illo tempore*."²⁷⁰ Through myth, one is brought into intimate spiritual connection with the players of these sacred stories.

However, it seems that our imaginations are prone to a system of errors as far as myth is concerned.²⁷¹ Over the course of time we have come to reject some myths as erroneous, even laughable. So Polanyi says that myths are controlled by plausibility. He states that truth in myths "can only consist in their power to evoke in us an experience which we hold to be genuine."²⁷² As we recite the feats of Bobby Thomson or Muhammad Ali, we are implicitly expressing our belief that there are embedded truths to be found within these exaggerated or constructed stories. We want to find these truths because we know and believe in the power of games and of those particular sporting moments. As it is with symbols and metaphors, when we can integrate myths to our experiences – that is, when they fit with our particular worldviews – they become plausible and, hence, accepted. Even the most archaic and outdated myths, to Polanyi, had some

plausibility because they helped us understand and become more intimately acquainted with our experiences in some way.

The plausibility of myths depends largely on our ability to integrate them into our understanding of the world. Polanyi believes that our experiences with myth can be integrated in two ways: naturally and transnaturally.²⁷³ The former include our daily experiences of labor, tending to necessity, and instrumentality. They are natural because once we have integrated them, they work for us. We accept their plausibility without having to re-integrate them every time they occur. Transnatural integrations, on the other hand, include myths and non-instrumental phenomena such as games, art, and music. These integrations are transnatural because he claims that they detach us from our daily concerns.²⁷⁴ Many philosophers to whom I referred in Chapter Two have argued a similar point.²⁷⁵

In Polanyi's view, transnatural integrations help us detach from our daily concerns because of the rituals and ceremonies that surround them. These events often prepare us to experience myth and understand its meaning. In other words, rituals and ceremonies serve as ways for us to facilitate our detachment from the profane world and entrance into the sacred world. It seems as if this can also be the case for games. High school, college, and professional football games have a great deal of ritual and ceremony surrounding them every weekend in the fall. Pep rallies, scouting reports, mass media pre-game shows, marching bands, cheerleaders, team apparel, and tailgate parties all help us prepare to integrate our experiences of these mythical events on the gridiron.

Although Polanyi refers to a detachment from our daily concerns or a qualitative switch from the profane to the sacred world, I think that his ideas are compatible with my thesis of games offering a deeper engagement with the world. While Polanyi says that myths detach us through ritual and ceremony, I argue that the ritual and ceremony of myths and games prepare us for a deeper or more meaningful engagement with the world of which we are always a part.

Instead of taking us from one kind of world (the profane) to another (the sacred), it seems that rituals and ceremonies simply prepare us for experiences that are more meaningful and intimate than our normal experiences. Games point to the fact that mythical meaning can be imminent, at hand, or of this world, and not just transcendent or of the next world. Therefore, I refer to transnatural integrations (games, art, music, and others) not as part of another world, but as more deeply experienced parts of this world.

Games, as transnatural integrations, are connected to myth as a deeper engagement in the world at two levels of understanding. The first is that games are myths about human limits in the world. The second is that games have become, or have generated, their own myths.

As myths about human limits, games highlight the natural world. Our games are gratuitous activities in which we test or challenge the limits of humanity. Ancient wrestling tested the limits of human strength and might. We hear tales of cunning Odysseus wrestling the barrel-chested Ajax, of Hercules taking down a bull, and of Andre the Giant taking on all comers in the entertaining World Wrestling Federation. When we wrestle now, we are, in many ways, in the process of determining how strong we are in relation to these and other past wrestling feats. In doing so, we try to push the limits of human strength and power with regards to the lore of wrestling.

Games mythologize human limits in the world by fitting our abilities and our surroundings. By fitting our abilities, games are myths that display those actions of which we are capable. We have built games that are challenging and feature the use of our bodies – two arms, two legs, two lungs, elbow joints, hip joints, opposable thumbs, brains with human cognitive capabilities, and so on. These physical and mental characteristics give us certain abilities. Ancient people used their bodies and abilities prudently – that is, in ways that focused on survival and communication. They prepared and repaired their bodies to carry out work-related duties and develop conventional means of expressing themselves to each other. Ancient gamewrights, on

the other hand, utilized human bodies by presenting gratuitous challenges. They threw spears for distance instead of for food, ran for speed instead of away from predators, and wrestled for submission instead of for survival. These challenges allowed us to determine our individual abilities, how we stack up against others, and how we can interact with the world.

By fitting our surroundings, games are myths that display how we are tied to our location. We have built games that make use of natural phenomena such as open fields, water, wood, animals, and wind, to name a few. When we participate in games, we come to understand how to interact with these natural features. Ancient people made sense of bodies of water, mountains, and forests by treating them as powerful animate entities that could be dangerous if enraged and provide if revered or assuaged. Ancient gamewrights, on the other hand, made sense of water, mountains, and forests by presenting gratuitous challenges – arbitrarily or inefficiently racing across them, taking a more difficult route up them, and finding obstacles to overcome while trekking through them. Gamewrights created activities that mythologized human needs, abilities, and surroundings. If we did not have the abilities that we do and if we did not have the surroundings that we do, then we would have constructed different games that fit those other needs, abilities, and surroundings.

The second level of understanding by which games connect to myth is that they have become their own myths. As primitive running, swimming, throwing, and jumping challenges evolved into games with more complex conventions, these new activities took on an intrinsic interest of their own. That is, we created games with mythical potential. Our games not only perpetuate the myths of the limits of human powers, but gaming experiences have their own mythical possibilities. Now that our games are intrinsically interesting – as metaphors – we continually refer to our recent gaming experiences in terms of previous mythologized performances. Young baseball players dream of being able to “call their shot” like Babe Ruth. Recreational football players strive to replicate the “immaculate reception” of Franco Harris.

Basketball fans attend games hoping to see “the next Michael Jordan.” More recently, many people have come to revere the abilities of Takeru “Tsunami” Kobayashi, six-time champion of “Nathan’s World Hot Dog Eating Contest.” These myths draw us to the game activities that highlight the naturally occurring world and test human limits.

Games and Clarity in Society

The final way in which play and games constitute a deeper engagement with the world has to do with how games help clarify the social world. It is my contention that games provide a deeper engagement by clarifying the cultural world in two ways. The first is that games *mirror* the societies in which they reside. McLuhan and Metheny, among others, explain how games reflect everyday views on accountability, blame, and other social experiences. The second connection games and culture gives more credit and power to games. I argue that games play a part in *transforming* cultures. That is, games can provide clarity to our world because they not only have the ability to reflect the prevailing social views, but they can also lead to cultural change. I will look at American and British games to understand how they change the social landscape.

McLuhan explains that games are extensions of our social selves. That is, games mirror or clarify society in two different ways that relate to our social nature. He says, first, that games disclose a lot of information about the meaning in people’s lives. “Games are a sort of artificial paradise ... by which we interpret and complete the meaning of our daily lives,” he proclaims.²⁷⁶ In his view, games tell us about ourselves and what we value. McLuhan’s second insight is that games reveal a great deal about the collective identity of cultures. He argues that “the social practices of one generation tend to get codified in the ‘game’ of the next.”²⁷⁷ That is, we can determine a collective identity of a particular culture through its games. As the moral codes of a

society become the etiquette and rules of its games, they take on a higher level of meaning. The social codes of Victorian Britain are easy to understand through its cricket and the esprit de corps of inner-city America is clear through its playground basketball.

Metheny takes these ideas much further. She explains that we have developed games that help us understand ourselves and our world because they present the same tests that are taken over and over again. That is, they reveal who we are and how we are able to engage with the world. She argues that the actions and outcomes of our games “can be duplicated in every subsequent performance of the test,” thus allowing our scores or results to “be compared in meaningful ways.”²⁷⁸ Certainly we have the ability to do this in other aspects of our lives, as well. At work, for instance, we often perform the same tasks day by day and our performances are evaluated based on our own previous standards and those of others. The difference, according to Metheny, is that games are trivial, futile, and gratuitous while work-like tasks are not. Because of their gratuitous nature, games come with an inherent freedom. They are activities in which we are “free to focus all our attention on one well-defined task and bring all the energies of our being to bear on one whole-hearted attempt to perform that task effectively.”²⁷⁹ Feezell explains this same idea more poignantly as he says that, in games, “concerns become more focused, activities are invested with clear meanings, and central aspects of life shine forth with more clarity.”²⁸⁰

Metheny conceives of this clarity in a number of different forms. She says that there is clarity of success or failure in games that has to do with the inherent challenge or problem. “No man can attribute his successes or failures to any factor that lies beyond the boundaries of his own being,” she says of the ease with which we can declare winners and losers – those who succeeded and failed in game tests.²⁸¹ Games clarify our self-actualization. “As he stands up to bat, with the bases loaded and two strikes against him, his feelings reflect his own interpretation of himself in this critical situation,” she says of the way in which games reveal how we are, what we are, and how we act when we are at our utmost.²⁸² Games clarify cultural codes. “In the ethical codes of

sport, we may find the patterns of many religious codes or we may find the patterns of democracy,” she says of the way in which our games reflect social and ethical standards of conduct.²⁸³ And games clarify individual ability and human achievement. “We may see these ... as creative ventures into the still unknown and untried dimensions of human accomplishment and understanding,” she says of the way in which we are driven toward new levels of performance in games.²⁸⁴

Along with the differences among individuals that games reveal, they reflect the differences between cultures, as well. Many of our individual games emerged within monarchical forms of government. This perpetuated the idea that a rugged individualism showed power. As the king ruled and had individual power over all, individual game participants sought the same power for themselves over their surroundings and their opponents.²⁸⁵ Many of our team games emerged within the leisure time of peasants en masse. These large groups of people realized the value and joy of strength in numbers and brute force. Soccer, rugby, and football became popular as peasants gradually structured their chaotic, boisterous, and community-oriented traditional leisure experiences.²⁸⁶ Many of our so-called “gentlemen’s games” emerged within the upper class populations of their respective cultures. The upper class did not want to associate with the peasants. Whereas the peasants worked with their bodies and consequently played games that idealized physical attributes, the upper class worked with their bodies in finer ways and developed games that value mental acuity, gracefulness, and tactics over strength, speed, and agility. Tennis, croquet, and golf exemplify this class of games.²⁸⁷

In this sense, games display a clarity that reflects or mirrors those values and social codes that may be understood but less pure in other cultural institutions such as business, government, or religion. Just as participants in the ancient Olympic festivals believed that every participant “stands naked before his gods,” we can say the same about our games today.²⁸⁸ Games are transparent entities in which participant and spectator alike can clearly determine success, failure,

victory, defeat, personality, ability, and so much more. Games, in other words, leave us and our cultures with no excuses as they reflect our moral and social fibers.

Some authors seem to imply that games not only illuminate, mirror, or reflect culture but that they also have the power to transform culture.²⁸⁹ That is, games have the ability to change or determine the values of individuals and of societies. For example, American games have transformed American society and British games have transformed British society. Games are often on the cutting edge of cultural dynamics. Dyreson gives an example as he says that “American ideas about sport shaped the dialogue about the nature of the American republic.”²⁹⁰ He states that Americans of the Progressive Era “believed quite literally in an athletic . . . power to shape human environments.”²⁹¹ Using the early Modern Olympics as examples, he alludes to the attitudes of American “exceptionalism” and winning-at-all-costs that were shaped by sports. Americans played their games differently than the rest of the world. They towed the line between amateur and professional athletics by training harder and for longer periods of time and by prioritizing winning above all else.

This dedication to winning and being the best motivated Americans in other cultural arenas, as well. The American government at this time began expanding its empire throughout the world. Like the British before them, Americans began thinking that their lifestyle was better than that of others. This “exceptionalist” attitude led the United States to colonize islands in the South Pacific and Caribbean.²⁹² Because of unmatched American feats in track and field events at the Olympics (winning more of these medals than any other nation), Americans thought they were the best. So they set out with an air of superiority to colonize and enlighten “primitive” tribes and “exotic” peoples about the American culture and way of living – including politics, religion, education, games, and more.

American culture was distinct from the rest of the world including that of its political ancestors – the British. For example, when the British played cricket, the Americans played

baseball. However different the two sports are, they both showed transformative power in their respective cultures. In 1947, African American Jackie Robinson changed American culture by taking what many believe to be the single biggest step in American racial integration.²⁹³ By stepping onto a major league baseball field among white men and succeeding, he opened the door for integration in many other cultural realms. Similarly, in 1961, Frank Worrell was elected as the first black captain of the West Indies cricket team. While black men had always comprised numerous roster spots on the team, the local white-ruled colonial government never entrusted a black man with the captaincy. As Worrell led a successful Test match against host Australia (even though the West Indies lost), black West Indians began to realize the possibility of self-government. Shortly afterwards, they rid themselves of the shackles of British colonial rule.

While cricket and baseball show similar transformative powers, their differences reveal disparities between Great Britain and the United States. A comparison of the two games will show that, although they share similar conventional relationships (hitting a thrown ball and then running to a safe spot, catching a hit ball, and so on) the differences between the two games are largely cultural. Cricket, for instance, embodies and has transformed the British spirit. British historian C.L.R. James commented that “at any particular period [cricket] reflects tendencies in the national life.”²⁹⁴ Men dress in all white and play the game for hours (sometimes days) at a time in a relaxed setting that focuses on the intricate tactical and skillful battle between the bowler and batsman. Americans, on the other hand, came up with a similar game that embodies the American spirit. Baseball has less rigid moral standards, more attainable defensive objectives, and more fast-paced action. The tests, challenges, and problems of these two games reveal cultural differences. James noted that distinctions between these sports illuminated and influenced “differences of national character and outlook.”²⁹⁵

Cricket taught James about British customs, social values, and politics. “The cricket field was a stage on which selected individuals played representative roles which were charged with

social significance” he explains.²⁹⁶ The institution of cricket, much like that of stage plays, molded the collective thought of those under British rule. Cricket helped clarify racial codes because it was a stage on which the restrictions for non-white men became apparent. It helped clarify political codes in that one’s ability usually only mattered if the player also had an appropriate social pedigree. Yet through all of the cultural transparency, cricket remained an attractive game to those living under the British crown all over the world. It was a way in which different people of different races and languages could communicate. On the pitch, it became clear just what it meant to be British. James makes this view plain as he says, “the grandeur of a game [is that in] which, in lands far from that which it gave birth, could encompass so much of social reality and still remain a game.”²⁹⁷

Aside from cricket and baseball, there are plenty of other examples detailing how games constitute a deeper engagement by clarifying or revealing the social or cultural world. To participate in a game is to deeply engage with a culture. To participate in an American game in the United States is to deeply engage in the world of American culture, and the same holds true for Great Britain and any other culture around the world. The games of a culture, since they are products of its people, are among our best ways of deeply engaging with a particular society.

Conclusion

In this chapter I made both metaphysical and axiological claims about play and games. I discussed the attributes of play and games and how they provide a deeper engagement with the world. In the metaphysical section of this chapter, I described four features central to play as autotelic, fragile, voluntary, and uncertain. I also described three features that are central to games as the challenges or tests, gratuity, and conventions. I hope that these descriptions will

help our understanding of these two human projects. I also hope that they will spur on further research into the nature of play and games.

In the axiological section of this chapter, I essentially gave a tribute to play and games. I said that they are a deeper engagement with the world in five different ways. In fact, games seem to be at least a part of the crown jewel of humanity. They are one of the major ways in which we display our humanity. As such, I think that we are only at the cusp of our understandings of the evolution of games, game logic, and what they say about us as humans. Hopefully further research on this topic will lend credibility to my ideas and will help us better understand how powerful and wonderful our games can be. While I hope that I have shown why these claims have substance and credibility, I also hope that they can be a launch pad for further studies on related topics.²⁹⁸

²⁰³ “Auto” is the Greek word for self and “teloi” is the Greek word for ends.

²⁰⁴ Bernard Suits, “Words on Play,” in *Philosophic Inquiry in Sport*, ed. by William J. Morgan and Klaus V. Meier, (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 1988), p. 17.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

²⁰⁶ William J. Morgan, “Some Further Words on Suits on Play,” *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*, XXXV, 2008, p. 123.

²⁰⁷ Klaus V. Meier, “An Affair of Flutes: An Appreciation of Play,” in *Philosophic Inquiry in Sport*, 2nd Edition, ed. by William J. Morgan and Klaus V. Meier, (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 1995), p. 121.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁹ Stephen E. Schmid, “Reconsidering Autotelic Play,” *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*, XXXVI, 2009, p. 245.

²¹⁰ R. Scott Kretchmar, “The Normative Heights and Depths of Play,” *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*, 2007, XXXIV, pp. 1-12; Meier, “An Affair of Flutes,” p. 121; Morgan, “Some Further Words on Suits on Play,” pp. 120-141; Suits, “Words on Play,” pp. 17-29.

²¹¹ Friedrich von Schiller, *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*, translated by Reginald Snell, (New York: Dover Publications, 2004), p. 249.

²¹² Josef Pieper, *Leisure, The Basis of Culture*, translated by Alexander Dru, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1964), p. 5.

²¹³ Plato’s *Laws* 3:803c.

²¹⁴ Suits, “Words on Play,” p. 20.

²¹⁵ George Eisen, *Children and Play in the Holocaust: Games Among the Shadows*, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1990).

²¹⁶ Meier, “An Affair of Flutes,” p. 121.

²¹⁷ Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, (London: Continuum Books, 2004), p. 62.

²¹⁸ Charles Sander Peirce, “The Neglected Argument for the Reality of God,” in *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings: Volume 2 (1893-1913)*, ed. by the Peirce Edition Project, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1998), p. 437.

²¹⁹ R. Scott Kretchmar, “Qualitative Distinctions in Play,” in *The Relevance of the Philosophy of Sport*, ed. by Gunter Gebauer, (Academia Verlag), p. 5.

- ²²⁰ R. Scott Kretchmar, "From Test to Contest: An Analysis of Two Kinds of Counterpoint in Sport," in *Philosophic Inquiry in Sport, 2nd Edition*, ed. by William J. Morgan and Klaus V. Meier, (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 1995), p. 37.
- ²²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 39.
- ²²² Warren Fraleigh, "The Sports Contest and Value Priorities," *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*, VII, 1986, pp. 65-77.
- ²²³ Kretchmar, "The Normative Heights and Depths," p. 7.
- ²²⁴ It could be argued that dunking a basketball is a skill that drastically reduces the uncertainty of being able to put the ball in the basket. I agree that this is the case. In fact, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) banned dunking during much of the 1960s and 1970s because they thought it made the game too easy. For those who can dunk, I agree that it is the easiest shot in basketball, but I think it is only different by degree from other shots. The lay-up, for instance, is another very easy shot that has a low degree of uncertainty for trained players. As one moves away from the hoop, the degree of difficulty and, hence, uncertainty, increases.
- ²²⁵ Bernard Suits, *The Grasshopper: Games, Life and Utopia* (Boston: David R. Godine Publisher, 1990), p. 30.
- ²²⁶ Kretchmar, "The Normative Heights and Depths," p. 6.
- ²²⁷ In soccer, like many other sports, there is some gray area, but most of it has to do with the official's interpretation of the rules. When we watch these games, we are tacitly agreeing to their being mediated by fallible humans.
- ²²⁸ Eugen Fink, "The Ontology of Play," in *Philosophic Inquiry in Sport, 2nd Edition*, ed. by William J. Morgan and Klaus V. Meier, (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 1995); Kenneth L. Schmitz, "Sport and Play: Suspension of the Ordinary," in *Philosophic Inquiry in Sport*, ed. by William J. Morgan and Klaus V. Meier, (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 1988).
- ²²⁹ Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1950); Roger Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, translated by Meyer Barash, (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2001); Schmitz, "Sport and Play;" Eugen Fink, "The Ontology of Play," in *Philosophic Inquiry in Sport, 2nd Edition*, ed. by William J. Morgan and Klaus V. Meier, (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 1995).
- ²³⁰ Play is much more frequent and longer lasting in children than adults, but it is still temporary. Children, like adults, have to tend to necessity just like everyone else. Their non-play or necessary behavior may just be of a different fashion than that of adults.
- ²³¹ R. Scott Kretchmar, *Practical Philosophy of Sport and Physical Activity, 2nd Edition*, (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 2005), p. 227.
- ²³² Aristotle's *Physics* 200b12.
- ²³³ *Ibid.*, 192b14-15.
- ²³⁴ Frederick Woodbridge, *Aristotle's Vision of Nature*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), p. 61.
- ²³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 55.
- ²³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 64.
- ²³⁷ Aristotle's *Physics* 201a11.
- ²³⁸ L.A. Kosman, "Aristotle's Definition of Motion," *Phronesis*, 1969, 14, p. 57.
- ²³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 58. *Energeia* is the disposition that Aristotle is alluding to here. Aristotelian scholar Joseph Sachs translates *energeia* as "being-at-work," or the disposition which is reached by constant activity and development.
- ²⁴⁰ Aristotle's *Metaphysics* 1048b29-39.
- ²⁴¹ Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* 1139b14-16.
- ²⁴² *Ibid.*, 1139a30-b2.
- ²⁴³ Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, *The Primacy of Movement*, (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1999), p. 132.
- ²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 134.
- ²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 135.
- ²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*
- ²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 136.
- ²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

- ²⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 137.
- ²⁵⁰ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "The Spatiality of One's Own Body" from *The Phenomenology of Perception*, in *Basic Writings*, ed. by Thomas Baldwin, (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 123.
- ²⁵¹ Ibid., p. 109.
- ²⁵² Kretchmar, *Practical Philosophy*, p. 151.
- ²⁵³ Ibid., p. 154.
- ²⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 156.
- ²⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 151.
- ²⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 157.
- ²⁵⁷ Michael Polanyi and Harry Prosch, *Meaning*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), p. 75.
- ²⁵⁸ Patsy Neal, *Sport and Identity*, (Philadelphia: Dorrance & Company, 1972), p. 63
- ²⁵⁹ Slusher, *Man, Sport and Existence*, p. 98.
- ²⁶⁰ Ibid.
- ²⁶¹ Polanyi and Prosch, *Meaning*, p. 83.
- ²⁶² Ibid., p. 79.
- ²⁶³ Ibid., p. 117.
- ²⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 113.
- ²⁶⁵ Michael Polanyi, *The Study of Man: The Lindsay Memorial Lectures*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), p. 39.
- ²⁶⁶ Polanyi and Prosch, *Meaning*, p. 120.
- ²⁶⁷ Ibid., pp. 127-8.
- ²⁶⁸ The validity of this tale has been heavily criticized by many saying that either the run never occurred or credit has been given to the wrong man. Regardless, the point is that it is a tale that has developed a very meaningful symbolism.
- ²⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 123.
- ²⁷⁰ Ibid.
- ²⁷¹ Ibid., p. 122.
- ²⁷² Ibid., p. 145.
- ²⁷³ Ibid., p. 125.
- ²⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 124.
- ²⁷⁵ See notes 18 and 21.
- ²⁷⁶ Marshall McLuhan, "Games: The Extension of man," in *Sport and the Body: A Philosophical Symposium*, ed. by Ellen W. Gerber, (Philadelphia: Lea & Febiger, 1972), p. 72.
- ²⁷⁷ Ibid.
- ²⁷⁸ Eleanor Metheny, *Movement and Meaning*, (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1968), p. 62.
- ²⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 63.
- ²⁸⁰ Randolph Feezell, *Sport, Play, and Ethical Reflection*, (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2004), p. 47.
- ²⁸¹ Metheny, *Movement and Meaning*, p. 65.
- ²⁸² Ibid.
- ²⁸³ Ibid., p. 67.
- ²⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 74.
- ²⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 70.
- ²⁸⁶ Ibid., pp. 71-2.
- ²⁸⁷ Ibid., pp. 72-3.
- ²⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 65.
- ²⁸⁹ Please see Kenneth Blanchard, "Basketball and the Culture-Change Process: The Rimrock Navajo Case," *Council on Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, Vol. 5, No. 4, (Nov. 1974), pp. 8-13; Mark Dyreson, *Making the American Team: Sport, Culture, and the Olympic Experience*, (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1998); Grant Farred, *Phantom Calls: Race and the Globalization of the NBA*, (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2006); Clifford Geertz, "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight," in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays by Clifford Geertz*, (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1973); C.L.R. James, *Beyond a Boundary*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993); Walter LaFeber, *Michael Jordan and the New Global Capitalism* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999).

²⁹⁰ Dyreson, *Making the American Team*, p. 3.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*

²⁹² The term “exceptionalist” is one used by Dyreson, see *Ibid.*

²⁹³ This claim is arguable. Others might say that the “Little Rock Nine” who integrated Arkansas public schools or the “I Have a Dream” speech from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., among other notable events, rival Robinson’s achievement. It seems clear, though, that Robinson’s integration of baseball is among the most remembered and most transformative of integration events.

²⁹⁴ James, *Beyond a Boundary*, p. 214.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

²⁹⁸ A special thanks to my committee for all of their help throughout the writing process.

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