

The Pennsylvania State University

The Graduate School

Department of Kinesiology

REINVENTING THE WHEEL: ON GAMES AND THE GOOD LIFE

A Dissertation in

Kinesiology

by

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

December 2008

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ABSTRACT

In *The Grasshopper: Games, Life, and Utopia*, Bernard Suits makes two significant contributions to the field of philosophy. The more recognized contribution is his analysis of games. Suits' definition of games has become the gold standard in sport philosophy literature. The less recognized contribution is his elucidation of the relationship of games to the good life. Indeed, Suits makes a bold assertion. He claims that game playing is the central activity of the good life. Not only does this Utopian thesis have profound implications for sport philosophy but also for considerations of daily living. Yet, for the most part, it has been neglected. It will be the purpose of this study to examine the credibility and significance of Suits' Utopian thesis.

Because it has generally been neglected, the primacy of Suits' Utopian thesis will be established. In order to elucidate the thesis, Suits' accounts of games and Utopia will be elaborated respectively before identifying how Suits' tethered these concepts in his vision of the ideal of existence. After considering the merits of his critics, a significant feature of games will be addressed. Suits identified the lusory attitude as the linchpin of his definition of games. Not only does it identify why games are meaningful human constructs but also explains why games play a central role in Utopian existence. Two features—gratuitous logic and lusory experience--will be presented in order to appreciate the role of the lusory attitude in determining the life most worth living. It is through our lusory experience, formalized in gratuitous logic, that we identify “just-right” challenges; a particular form of intrinsically valued problem-solving that makes life most worth living. The implications of the lusory attitude for our pursuit of Utopia existence are

applied to our everyday existence by assessing how lusory education should inform educational practices in order to promote the good life.

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Introduction

On Games and the Good Life

In *The Grasshopper: Games, Life, and Utopia*, Bernard Suits makes two significant contributions to the field of philosophy.¹ The more recognized contribution is his analysis of games. Suits' definition of games has become the gold standard in sport philosophy literature. The less recognized contribution is his elucidation of the relationship of games to the good life. Indeed, Suits makes the bold assertion that game-playing is the central activity of the good life. This thesis has profound implications not only for sport philosophy, but also for considerations of daily living. Yet, for the most part, it has been neglected. It will be the purpose of this study to examine the credibility and significance of Suits' neglected Utopian thesis. Throughout the dissertation, the phrase "Utopian thesis" refers to Suits' claim "that Utopian existence is fundamentally concerned with game-playing."²

The dissertation is organized in a way that fosters an evaluation of this claim. In chapter 1, I identify evidence from *The Grasshopper* that supports the significance of the thesis. Additionally, I speculate that two factors most directly contributed to the neglect of this thesis. The first is that sport philosophers have failed to embrace its importance, in part, because they are preoccupied with his definition of games. In addition, the Utopian thesis is counter-intuitive to general social perceptions about the good life.

¹ Bernard Suits, *The Grasshopper: Games, Life and Utopia*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978).

² *Ibid.*, ix.

Three modern stories are presented to illustrate how difficult it is to accept the Utopian thesis. Specifically, these stories identify how games are often thought to be antithetical to the good life because a life of game-playing amounts to an unintelligible existence (“Speaking in tongues”), an inauthentic life (“With all due respect”), or a trivial existence (“Reinventing the wheel”). While philosophers and the general public have neglected Suits’ thesis, and while a far lesser number have criticized it, I argue that this neglect and criticism rest largely on misinformation. Therefore, I suggest, it would be premature to dismiss Suits’ Utopian thesis until his accounts of games and Utopia are thoroughly examined and fully understood.

In chapter 2, I attempt to clarify Suits’ Utopian thesis. In order to accomplish this, I must first examine Suits’ definitions of games and Utopia. This is necessary because his claims about the good life depend on the scope and significance of games, on the one hand, and his understanding of Utopia, on the other.

In constructing his definition, Suits identifies four elements as the necessary and sufficient conditions of games. Of critical importance is Suits’ account of one of these elements—namely, the lusory attitude. This attitude indicates the manner by which means-limiting rules are accepted in games. In Suits’ own words, game rules are “accepted just for the sake of the activity they make possible.”³ The lusory attitude provides an explanation for why people would freely accept restricted means in attempting to achieve a goal. It serves as the linchpin of Suits’ definition by unifying the

³ Ibid., 30.

other three elements of the definition and by distinguishing games from other forms of means-limited and rule-governed activities.

It is also important to discern Suits' account of Utopia. I argue that Suits' conception of Utopia is different from that of many previous philosophers and some of Suits' critics. In particular, I suggest that he takes seriously the nature of humanity and importance of human needs and interests into his vision of Utopian living. The first chapter concludes with a general defense of Suits' Utopian thesis. I emphasize the fact that this thesis requires a unique understanding of games and an appreciation of our human interest in meeting certain kinds of challenges.

Chapter 3 is devoted to addressing the critics of Suits' Utopian thesis. Mirroring chapter 2, I address the critics' assessment of the concepts "games" and "Utopia" before considering their assessment of Suits' Utopian thesis. I note that the primary criticism of Suits' account of games has to do with the scope of the definition. I attempt to show that this criticism rests on a mistaken account of the nature and significance of the elements of games—particularly an overvaluation of the role of rules and goals and a comparable undervaluation of the role of lusory means and the lusory attitude.

I show that criticisms of Suits' account of Utopia have generally taken two different forms. The first challenge (that Suits' stipulated his account of Utopia) proves to be inaccurate in at least one important sense. Specifically, Suits' conclusions about the nature of Utopia are substantially different than the first stipulated account he presents. The second challenge (that the concept of Utopia is incoherent) also seems to miss its mark. Even though his critics identify how the concept of Utopia may be incoherent, I argue that Suits' unique account of Utopia is immune to this charge.

I conclude chapter 3 by acknowledging the fact that, even if the challenges to games and Utopia do not stick, the critics may have valid concerns about Suits' Utopian thesis itself. Some critics argue that game-playing cannot be the central activity of Utopia because games and Utopia are incompatible. The logic of Utopia rules out the possibility of games because games entail features such as pain, suffering and contentiousness that are incompatible with Utopia. In addition, critics express concern over the scope of action in Utopia. They believe that Suits overstates the importance of games. Some think that play provides a more inclusive and accurate characterization of activity in Utopia. I address these criticisms and examine their strengths and weaknesses.

In chapter 4, I address perhaps the most important omission of Suits' analyses—namely his failure in *The Grasshopper* to make explicit the role of the lusory attitude in the move from games to the good life. This lack of analysis is exacerbated by the general absence of critical attention paid to the lusory attitude by subsequent philosophers. I emphasize the fact that the lusory attitude is underappreciated both as the linchpin that holds the other elements of games together and as a central factor in the promotion of good living. In order to make explicit the relationship of games to the good life, I examine the lusory attitude by outlining its two moments--gratuitous logic and lusory experience. I then attempt to defend the life of the Grasshopper. I use the insights of other scholars who have written on the life of the Grasshopper to corroborate Suits' conclusions about Utopian existence. Additionally, I retell the stories from the first chapter, this time from a perspective informed by the lusory attitude. Instead of negatively portraying Suits' Utopian thesis, the stories now show how the life of the Grasshopper is intelligible, authentic, and meaningful.

Finally, in chapter 5, I examine how the lusory attitude and the life of the Grasshopper inform our everyday life by showing how they apply to a practical setting. This chapter, which will be published as a chapter of a book on childhood sport, includes some repetition of ideas and a slight shift in focus.⁴ But it is consistent in content with the previous chapters, despite a turn from a theoretical to an applied perspective. It begins with an account of the lusory attitude, including a detailed descriptive account of lusory experience. After identifying certain sport pedagogies that fail to take seriously the lusory attitude, I present a consideration of what a lusory curriculum should entail. The essay concludes with an exploration of what insights can be gleaned from a lusory education

⁴ Douglas W McLaughlin, “La educación de la Cigarra: sobre el significado de la actitud lúdica en el deporte juvenil” [A Grasshopper Education: On the Significance of the Lusory Attitude for Youth Sport], *Niñez, deporte y actividad física: reflexiones filosóficas sobre una relación compleja* [Childhood, Sport, and Physical Activity: Philosophical Reflections on a Complex Relationship] (Buenos Aires: Miño y Dávila Editores, in press).

Chapter 1

Games in Utopia: On the *Grasshopper's* Neglected Thesis

While Bernard Suits' *The Grasshopper: Games, Life, and Utopia* is often regarded as a treatise on the definition of games, it contains a more fundamental thesis that has a broader significance.⁵ Even though much of the text is devoted to understanding the nature of games *The Grasshopper* is primarily an essay on the nature of the good life.

In the preface, Suits asserts that the goal of the book is not just to “attempt to discover and formulate a definition” but also “to follow the implications of that discovery.”⁶ If the Grasshopper was not an exemplification of the life most worth living and game playing was not the fundamental concern of Utopian existence, then Suits would probably not have been so interested in defining games.⁷ Rather, he is primarily interested in the Grasshopper and games because they inform his greater concerns pertaining to the good life. And so, a clear articulation of games is a prerequisite to a full elucidation of “the life most worth living.”⁸ *The Grasshopper* consequently must be understood not merely as a book on the definition of games, but also as a text devoted to elucidating Utopian existence.

⁵ Bernard Suits, *The Grasshopper: Games, Life and Utopia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978).

⁶ *Ibid.*, ix.

⁷ For the purposes of this chapter, Utopian existence, the good life and the life most worth living are used interchangeably. A detailed analysis of Suits' account of Utopia and Utopian existence will be developed in chapter 2.

⁸ *Ibid.*, ix.

Such an undertaking is not an effort to denigrate considerations of games. Rather it is an effort to show that, as Suits so repeatedly and clearly argued, games are central to an understanding of the good life. But such a claim presents many challenges. One of them stems from the general lack of awareness of the Utopian implications of game playing. Suits is breaking new ground. A second challenge is found in what seems to be an unlikely relationship between the formal structures of games and the good life. Games, in other words, would probably not be the first activity to come to mind when considering idyllic living.

Suits would argue, however, that anyone concerned with the good life must recognize the role of game playing in it. But for the most part, not only do game-players and practicing-Utopians fail to recognize that they are cut from the same cloth, but as already noted, common sense would suggest that Suits' Utopian thesis is implausible. Thus, an awareness of Suits' thesis has important implications that may "lead us in surprising, and disconcerting, directions," and considerable work needs to be done for it to garner due attention and support.⁹

In this chapter, a preliminary look into the possibility of game playing as the central activity of the good life will be undertaken. First, a detailed account of the neglected thesis will be presented in an attempt to show its significance in Suits' work. This will be followed by two sections examining the reasons for this neglect, one from the perspective of sport philosophy and the other a more general social perspective. The

⁹ Ibid., ix.

chapter will conclude with a call to reconsider Suits' Utopian thesis and examine its central elements in greater depth.

Identifying the Neglected Thesis

As clearly stated in the preface, the purpose of *The Grasshopper* is twofold—elucidating Utopian existence and formulating a theory of games. Even so, most chapters of the text focus on formulating and defending a definition of games.¹⁰ This could lead readers to the conclusion that providing a definition of games is the more significant purpose of the book. But several clues in the text suggest the opposite—namely, that Utopian existence is the topic of greater importance. Indeed, a number of signs in Suits' carefully crafted text indicate that this is the case.

In the preface, Suits introduces the Grasshopper as protagonist of the book. In contrast to the famous fable “The Grasshopper and the Ants” in which Aesop advocates for the prudential life of the Ants as opposed to the imprudence of the Grasshopper, Suits states that the Grasshopper is an “exemplification... of the life most worth living”.¹¹ Suits did not describe the Grasshopper as an exemplification of game playing, but rather of the life most worth living.

The Grasshopper is a working Utopian in the sense that he is trying to live an ideal existence. But he is also a speculative Utopian. This means that he is both interested in defending his ideal of Utopian existence and thinks that he is able to do so.

¹⁰ Chapters 1, 2, 14 and 15 of *The Grasshopper* focus on the role of games in Utopia while chapters 3 through 12 focus on the definition of game playing.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, ix.

Suits makes this clear. “Central to that defence [of the Grasshopper’s ideal] is the Grasshopper’s claim that Utopian existence is fundamentally concerned with game playing, and so the book is largely devoted to formulating a theory of games.”¹²

This is important for two reasons. First, if Utopian existence did not consist primarily of game playing, then neither the Grasshopper nor Suits would be so concerned with games. But because Utopian existence and game playing are thusly connected, a definition of games is unavoidable. While the effort to formulate a definition of games takes up a significant portion of the text, it should not be forgotten that such work serves a larger purpose.

A second significant point is that, even if Suits understood and appreciated the relationship of games to the good life, he did not need to take up that relationship. But Suits clearly wrote a compelling and interesting book about games that did take up that relationship. He was interested precisely in the connection between games and the good life. If this were not the case, he very well could have excluded the first two and the last two chapters of the text. Obviously he chose not to do that either.

I will elaborate the importance of chapters 1, 2, 14, and 15 from *The Grasshopper* in the next chapter. But it is important to note that these chapters include Suits’ conception of Utopia and the Grasshopper’s vision and dream. While these chapters provide an interesting framework for the definition of games, they do not serve simply as a literary device. Rather, they indicate that an understanding of games is a precondition for fully understanding the good life. In short, it is significant that the first and last

¹² Ibid., ix.

thoughts of the book address the good life as opposed to specifically addressing the nature of games.

This point is further supported when Suits states that the philosophical orientation of the book “is the attempt to discover and formulate a definition, and to follow the implications of that discovery even when they lead in surprising, and sometimes disconcerting, directions.”¹³ In light of the above description, it could be argued that even if Suits began with the intended purpose of defining games exclusive of other concerns, that pursuit led to a much greater discovery. Even if Suits set out to consider games or Utopian existence independent of the other, in the end it their relationship and his conclusions about good living that is of the greatest importance. Certainly, as he suggested, such a relationship is in many ways surprising and even disconcerting; but for any reader of *The Grasshopper* who takes “a longer and more penetrating look at games,” and who decides to really “look and see” as Suits suggests we do, the centrality of Utopian existence to *The Grasshopper* and games should be evident.¹⁴

This claim is further supported by examining the title of the book. Four substantive elements are found there—the Grasshopper, games, life, and Utopia. If Utopia were not a significant element of the book, why not exclude the term from the title altogether? Or if games were really the most important element of the volume, why not entitle the book *Games: A Grasshopper’s Life in Utopia*? While certain stylistic concerns might support the selection of one particular title over another, the choice of

¹³ Ibid., ix.

¹⁴ Ibid., x.

The Grasshopper carries an important message. After all, it is in the life of the Grasshopper that the possible gap between games and Utopia is bridged.

That the Grasshopper, identified as the exemplar of the good life, is the focal element of the title further supports the significance of Utopian existence. By not employing a title such as *Utopia: A Grasshopper's Life of Games*, Suits is not diminishing the significance of Utopia. Rather, Suits may want to present his Utopian thesis in a fashion that moves readers away from their preconceived notions of Utopia. In chapter 3, the importance of properly interpreting Suits' account of Utopia will become evident. Many of Suits' critics, in fact, did not appreciate his overall thesis on the good life because they stumbled on conceptual problems related to Utopia.

Additionally, Suits is more concerned with game playing than with a purely analytic account of games, a distinction that should not be ignored. Indeed, his oft-quoted definition does not begin "a game is..." but rather "to play a game..." This is perhaps a subtle, but not an unimportant, distinction. Furthermore, Suits does not suggest that Utopia is some place or even an ideal place, but rather a particular way of being in the world. His notion of Utopia will be analyzed in the next chapter.

If the preface and the title do not provide sufficient evidence for the importance of the good life in a book largely devoted to defining games, other clues exist. As already noted, the first two chapters pertain to the life of the Grasshopper exemplified in game playing and the last two chapters focus on the Grasshopper's claims about the good life. In other words, the first and last considerations of the text are about the life most worth living. The contents of these framing chapters illuminate the importance of the good life

and put the effort to define games into the appropriate context. At the end of chapter two, a very explicit and convincing piece of text supports these claims.

Just before “the construction of a definition” takes place in chapter three, Skepticus and Prudence, disciples of the Grasshopper, anguish over a riddle that the Grasshopper left them upon his death. Before reconstructing the general theory of games in order to find clues to solve the riddle, it occurs to them that perhaps the Grasshopper was playing a game with them.¹⁵ Skepticus wavers on whether he is ready to call the task of solving the riddle and becoming clear about the Grasshopper’s message a game, but he does identify it as “an enterprise which aims at nothing less than the elucidation of Grasshopper logic, an examination of Grasshopper ideals, and an interpretation of Grasshopper dreams.”¹⁶ From the perspective of a Grasshopperian philosophy however, this passage unmistakably demonstrates that *The Grasshopper* is not merely a treatise on games, but does indeed have a twofold purpose.

Further evidence can be found in Suits’ self-described “sequel” to *The Grasshopper*, an article entitled “Games and Utopia.”¹⁷ In this essay, Suits notes that the Grasshopper “advances a definition of games, and he argues that the ideal of human existence—that is, Utopia—must consist fundamentally, if not exclusively, in the playing of games.”¹⁸ While Suits reiterates his definition of games at the beginning of the article,

¹⁵ Note that it is not suggested that the Grasshopper was playing a trick on them. There seems to be a genuine sincerity on the part of all participants in the venture that is being undertaken.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁷ Bernard Suits, “Games and Utopia: Posthumous Reflections,” *Simulation and Games* 15 1 (1984): 5-24.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

he spends the rest of the essay clarifying his notion of Utopia and defending the thesis that games are the fundamental activity of Utopia. This only confirms the importance of elucidating Utopian existence in his original text.¹⁹

For this reason, and for the others already cited, Suits seems far more interested in forwarding a vision of the good life than in defending any particular definition of games. However, if this is an accurate account of the purpose of Suits' text, why has his Utopian thesis been so neglected? In the following two sections, two different reasons for this neglect will be identified. The first section examines why the most likely interpreters—sport philosophers—have neglected Suits' Utopian thesis. This will be followed by a section examining general perceptions about the implausibility of Suits' Utopian thesis.

Sport Philosophers' Neglect of the Second Thesis

The Grasshopper is a seminal text in the sport philosophy literature. Suits' definition of games is referenced time and again and has become the gold standard for any such efforts. While specific details of the definition have been called into question, the basic structure of the definition has stood the test of time.²⁰ Indeed, it would be

¹⁹ That this sequel is necessary can be interpreted in at least the following two ways. The sequel is perhaps an acknowledgment by Suits that he was unclear about the second thesis in his original text. Or the sequel may just be an amplification of a thesis of the text that did not receive as much consideration as Suits felt it deserved.

²⁰ While *The Grasshopper* was originally published in 1978, much of the substantive work on the definition of games that makes up chapter three appeared in articles as early as 1967, including the following. Bernard Suits, "What is a Game?," *Philosophy of Science* 34 (June 1967): 148-156. Bernard Suits, "Is Life a Game We Are Playing?," *Ethics* 77 3 (Apr 1967): 209-213.

unusual if anyone were to discuss the nature of games without some reference to Suits' definition.

Just five years prior to the publication of *The Grasshopper*, the International Association of the Philosophy of Sport (IAPS) was organized. In 1973, IAPS was organized with the purpose to “stimulate, encourage, and promote study, research, and writing in the philosophy of sporting (and related) activity.”²¹ Among the primary concerns during the early years were questions regarding the metaphysics of sport, games, and play. While Suits' work is central to the debates on the nature of sport, games, and play, many other sport philosophers weighed in, including most notably R. Scott Kretchmar and Klaus Meier.²² The definitional effort to clarify these philosophical concepts produced numerous articles and generated significant debates—both in the journal and at international meetings—for over two decades.

Some philosophers, Frank McBride for example, argued that sport cannot be defined because it is an imprecise concept. McBride criticized Suits' definition of games in *The Grasshopper* for just this reason.²³ But while this debate unfolded, and while

²¹ IAPS Constitution (2004). The organization was originally named the Philosophical Society for the Study of Sport.

²² See in particular: R. Scott Kretchmar, “From Test to Contest: An Analysis of Two Kinds of Counterpoint,” *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* 2 (1975): 23-30. R. Scott Kretchmar, “On Beautiful Games,” *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* 16 (1989): 34-43. Klaus V. Meier, “An Affair of Flutes: An Appreciation of Play,” *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* 7 (1980): 24-45. Klaus V. Meier, “Triad Trickery: Playing With Sport and Games,” *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* 15 (1988): 11-30.

²³ Frank McBride, “Toward a Non-Definition of Sport,” *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* 2 (1975): 4-11. Frank McBride, “A Critique of Mr. Suits' Definition of Game Playing,” *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* 5 (1979): 59-65.

necessary conceptual and metaphysical groundwork was laid, little attention was given to Suits' Utopian thesis.

This may be due, in part, to the generally held belief that metaphysics precedes axiology.²⁴ Still, no one who endorses the definitional enterprise has successfully offered a substantive account of games that has seriously challenged Suits' definition of game playing. Moreover, *The Grasshopper* has become known first and foremost for the highly reputable definition of games that it provides.

But Suits also makes an axiological claim in his text that most sport philosophers simply ignored. Some philosophers have recently attended to the second thesis, but they have done so on a summary and cursory basis. Robert J. Paddick's formal review of *The Grasshopper* focuses almost exclusively on the definitional aspect of the book.²⁵ Keith Thompson, the first sport philosopher to address Suits' account of Utopia in a sustained manner, rejects it outright.²⁶ Thomas Hurka, in his introduction to the recently reprinted version of *The Grasshopper*, provides a qualified rejection of Suits' Utopian thesis.²⁷ While Hurka believes Suits compellingly argued that "playing in games is the paradigm expression of modern values," he dismisses the plausibility of Suits' strong claim that

²⁴ R. Scott Kretchmar, "Soft Metaphysics: a precursor to good ethics," in *Ethics and Sport*, eds. M. J. McNamee and S. J. Parry (London: Routledge, 1998), 19-34. Metaphysics precedes axiological concerns for similar reasons to those outlined in Kretchmar's article about ethics.

²⁵ Robert J. Paddick, "Review Essay: *The Grasshopper: Games, Life and Utopia*," *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* 6 (1979): 73-79.

²⁶ Keith Thompson, "Sport and Utopia." *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* 31 1 (2004): 60-63.

²⁷ Suits, *The Grasshopper*.

game playing is the central activity of the good life.²⁸ While the claims of these critics will be addressed in greater detail in chapter 3, it is worth noting that the minimal attention that has recently been paid to Suits' Utopian thesis amounts to little more than continued neglect.

Several reasons may account for the continued disregard of Suits' Utopian thesis of *The Grasshopper*. First, it may be that many sport philosophers, unlike Suits, are interested in games themselves without concern for the deeper significance that game playing may have for the good life.²⁹ That is, sport philosophers may not be unaware of the Utopian claims in Suits' text, but they are simply more interested in the definition of games. Or, the disregard may be due to the development of sport philosophy as a discipline and the perceived need to situate it within the field of philosophy as well as kinesiology. Sport philosophers who reside in philosophy departments may be interested in broad theories on the good life and the nature of things generally, but many are not as interested in the fine details of games and play. Sport philosophers who reside in kinesiology departments, on the other hand, may be interested in concrete details of games, but are not as interested in his speculations about the good life. Exceptions exist, and Suits was one of them, but the combination of "the good life" and "games" makes for odd academic bedfellows. In short, neglect may have been partly a byproduct of the

²⁸ Thomas Hurka, "Introduction," in *The Grasshopper: Games, Life and Utopia* (Toronto, ON: Broadview Press, 2005), 19.

²⁹ This is in fact not an uncommon practice among sport philosophers. Examples include the (mis)appropriation of MacIntyrean practices, Huizinga's definition of play, and Searlean rules, while neglecting the larger projects from which these considerations are harvested.

times, including the traditions and politics of the academy during the last half of the 20th century.

Another theory about neglect may be viable. It could be due to a deep concern about the implication of Suits' analyses. The suggestion that people are "grasshoppers in disguise" is not a very flattering picture of humanity. The identification of people as game-players, whether such participation is intentional or unwitting, is perhaps too difficult to swallow. Thus, while there may be truth in the Utopian thesis, the costs of pursuing that truth are perceived to be too high. Just as research concerning race or gender can be a delicate issue, so too can research that grounds our humanity in game playing. Even Suits identifies the Grasshopper as the expositor of a premature ideal. Perhaps, in time, the conclusions of Suits' Utopian thesis will be more easily reconciled with social concerns; but until then, it may remain a somewhat unsavory, even if important, element on our research agendas.

While the above are all viable, and to varying degrees may provide partial answers to the question about neglect, another factor cannot be overlooked. Suits may have contributed to this neglect himself by failing to provide readers with much guidance or clarity for his Utopian thesis. This is so in absolute terms, because only parts of four short chapters were directly dedicated to this issue. But it is even more so in comparative terms, as Suits devoted considerable energy to his rich and detailed definition of games. He even constructs the definition by "two different routes."³⁰ In point of fact, Suits uses eleven of the book's fifteen chapters to present and then defend his definition of games.

³⁰ Suits, *The Grasshopper*, 22.

To be even more precise, in the third chapter, he presents a concise description of the necessary and sufficient conditions for game playing. Then in chapters four through thirteen, he defends this definition against charges that it is incoherent, too broad, or too narrow.

In the first two and last two chapters, Suits is not nearly as methodical or clear. How are the riddles, dreams, visions, and resurrections to be kept straight, much less interpreted? Is Utopia a coherent concept or not? Why is it that intrinsically satisfying non-game activities are not more popular in Utopia? How can people be duped into thinking that they are working when they are really playing games? Suits does not carefully nail down answers to these and other questions about his larger thesis.

Thus, while a clear and carefully defended definition of games can be taken away from *The Grasshopper*, an equally clear and well-developed account of Utopian existence remains elusive. While Suits' work in defining games is conclusive, his analysis of games and the good life is more introductory and suggestive. Had Suits spent ten chapters elucidating the relationship between game playing and the good life, the content of the sport philosophy literature might look vastly different today.

The Improbability of the Second Thesis

If Suits' thesis about the role of game playing in Utopia is underappreciated by sport philosophers, it may be less appreciated by the general public. The pursuit of happiness is a deep and abiding concern of virtually all cultures. But games, at least in the Suitsian sense, are not present or at least not emphasized in most conceptions of the good life.

Evidence for interest in the good life is not difficult to provide. It includes, among other things, numerous books recently published on happiness, the pervasive commercial use of good life narratives, and even the frequent mention on the cover of *The Economist* in the last half of 2006.³¹ Indeed, in the United States the American Dream still has purchase in our national consciousness even if it may be somewhat tarnished and less likely than ever to be realized.

Despite this broad interest in the good life, commonly held perceptions regarding both the nature of games and the good life would make Suits' neglected thesis seem untenable. Given common assumptions about games (e.g. they are trivial endeavors and/or potentially harmful, zero-sum affairs), it seems problematic identifying games as the central activity of the good life. Indeed, contemporary accounts of game playing and the good life would likely lead one to suspect Suits of narrative dysfunction. While some might agree that he has written an entertaining story, many would warn readers of the morals it contains. His recommendations on playing games, they might suggest, would more likely impede rather than facilitate good living.

Reasons for such skepticism about Suits' Utopian thesis can be clarified by examining three modern day stories. Aesop's cautionary tale "The Grasshopper and the Ants," warning against living an imprudent life, hardly resonates with a contemporary worldview. In order for cautionary tales to speak to a modern listener, they must be written in a modern language. The stories below identify common negative assumptions

³¹ The lead cover stories from *The Economist* were "Happiness (and how to measure it)" in the December 23rd-January 5th issue and "Inequality and the American Dream" in the June 17th-23rd issue. The July 1st-7th cover included a headline on "The American Pursuit of Happiness."

about the life of the Grasshopper and represent significant hurdles that must be overcome if Suits' Utopian thesis is to be favorably recognized.

Speaking in tongues

The Grasshopper is always talking a good game, literally. Not only does he devote a large portion of his life to playing games, but every life situation provides an opportunity to make some allusion to game playing. It seems as though, even when discussing the most important matters, the Grasshopper makes references to games. This is infuriating to those he encounters, in large measure because they cannot understand how the Grasshopper can associate major life events with mere games. Surely pushing for a promotion at work is not like trying to "dig out an extra base hit" in baseball. And how could the Grasshopper's significant other take him seriously when he equates sexual success with achievements in games? His reference to both their own sexual intimacy and the dramatic unfolding of sporting contests as forms of 'sweet tension' would seem to her not just an appalling conflation but also a personal insult. By always using games to interpret and elucidate life, the Grasshopper seems to be speaking in tongues—communicating in a language that is nonsensical and unintelligible. Those who take the time to listen to the Grasshopper find his utterances strange and discomforting if not entirely incoherent. They simply cannot see how the Grasshopper could place game playing at the center of a life most worth living. If such a claim is not incomprehensible, it is, at the very least, offensive.

As with speaking in tongues, games are often looked upon with a great deal of skepticism and uncertainty. Despite having formal structure, their "logic" is decidedly

different than the logic of most common forms of interaction and communication. The logic of games can even seem undecipherable or absurd to the uninitiated. The Grasshopper's use of game playing metaphors in describing his most significant life events is so awkward and disconcerting that it warrants a comparison to speaking in tongues.

With all due respect

The Grasshopper spends a significant amount of his time engaged in game playing, even to the extent that it seems to adversely affect his chances for long-term success in other aspects of his life. Friends cannot understand why he turns down a promotion at work just because it would interfere with his leisure pursuits. Neither can they understand why the Grasshopper most vigorously pursues games when wrapped up in the midst of life's greatest trials and tribulations, the very moments that they would reduce the amount of time spent playing games in order to attend to more serious matters. Considering such behavior to be irrational, the Grasshopper's family, friends, and colleagues find it necessary to express their concern. "With all due respect..." is how these conversations usually begin. And they usually end with the question: "Don't you think you are taking this game playing just a little too seriously?" It seems to them that the Grasshopper is not only living an insincere life by attending to lesser pursuits, but also an inauthentic life by not focusing on the most important ones. If the Grasshopper is really concerned about a life most worth living, then, with all due respect, he would devote less time to playing games.

The Grasshopper, by devoting his life to game playing, challenges contemporary values. Received wisdom in the form of the Puritan sensibilities and the Protestant work ethic has shaped modern ideas about work and leisure and the superior value of the former over the later.³² Our deepest concerns are related to work and family as opposed to games and play. By recommending that we allocate our resources of energy and time to game playing, the Grasshopper shows a lack of respect to what are perceived as the more important values of life.

The life of the Grasshopper, in being devoted to game playing, can be dismissed as being both insincere and inauthentic. It represents a failure to respect life's most important values in favor of lesser ones. In Aesop's account of the life and death of the Grasshopper, the Grasshopper asks the Ants for food in winter.³³ It is from this perspective that the Ant's response to the Grasshopper is most forceful. If the Grasshopper truly believes he can argue for a life of game playing, then he can not sincerely ask the Ant for help in winter. Such a request amounts to a refutation of his claims. In turn, a game playing life is an inauthentic existence because the values the Grasshopper lived for in summer are not sustainable into the winter. With all due respect, the Grasshopper must find a different account of a life most worth living, for a life devoted to game playing will eventually lead to the Grasshopper's demise.

³² For an extended development of this argument, see: Klaus V. Meier, "An Affair of Flutes," *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* 7 (1980), 24-45.

³³ Aesop, *Aesop's Fables* (New York: Barnes & Noble Classics, 2003).

Reinventing the wheel

Even if the Grasshopper were to keep game playing in the proper perspective or lived in a Utopia in which there were no winters to guard against, there still seems to be a problem with the Grasshopper's devotion to game playing. For each and every day, the Grasshopper returns to his familiar and most cherished forms of game playing. Day in and day out he spends time playing the same games, doing the same things over and over again. But how can it make sense to be devoted to one trivial behavior for such a long time? Set up. Play the game to its resolution. Pack up. Repeat. In order to interrupt this cyclical existence that goes nowhere, it seems the Grasshopper should strive for some concrete improvements, achievements, or final answers. Without a final resolution that allows for the game to be packed up for good and the Grasshopper to move on to other activities, a life devoted to game playing seems somewhat meaningless. If there is no final purpose to all this game playing, then the Grasshopper is just reinventing the wheel each time he plays. His life appears to be an absurd life rather than a meaningful one.

After a while, the repetition of playing the same game must wear thin or wear out. A sense of "been there, done that" must arise as trivial game problems become exhausted. Rather than returning to the same game, new challenges must be sought. To really live the good life, challenges that are more sophisticated and more important than game problems are required.

A life that fails to seek out new challenges is untenable in two ways. First, by returning again and again to the same problem, the "sweet tension" that often characterizes game playing fades. The tension that makes a game problem a seemingly coherent problem at some point must unravel when it is recognized that there is no final

end. It is just a matter of reinventing the wheel. But it is also the case that a life devoted to game playing is untenable because purposeless game playing cannot be reconciled with a purposeful life. A life devoted to game playing is as trivial as being devoted to reinventing the wheel precisely because it fails to engage people in purposeful and meaningful matters.

Reconsidering Suits' Utopian Thesis

These three modern stories present serious challenges to Suits' thesis. In order to determine the merits of these concerns, a careful discussion of Suits' seemingly radical recommendation will be needed. The neglect of Suits' Utopian thesis is unfortunate, given that serious efforts to understand the good life are valuable for their own sake. Just as importantly, these endeavors have a long and valued history in philosophy departments. Kinesiology, while a newer academic discipline, has also concerned itself with the good life. Unlikely as it seems at the outset, Suits' Utopian thesis provides a beneficial ground for the efforts of sport philosophers of both departments to examine the good life. If Suits' claims about the good life have merit, then it seems that his claims deserve further examination for what they might bring to light.³⁴ While Suits may not have been as explicit or straight forward in making the case for his Utopian thesis, he has certainly provided the reader with enough direction and guidance to reap some benefit from a consideration of his speculations.

³⁴ Even if Suits is wrong about the good life, it could be helpful to understand how and why he is wrong. In such a case, those pursuing an understanding of the good life could avoid unnecessary detours through philosophical terrain already ruled unfruitful by Suits' errant efforts.

In *The Grasshopper*, Skepticus and Prudence wonder as they begin to unravel the riddle of the Grasshopper's dream if he was not playing a game with them.³⁵ Upon the Grasshopper's resurrection, all three wonder not only if the author is playing a game, but also why and with whom.³⁶ In both cases, the issue of whether a game is being played is not resolved, but rather the importance of the text's thesis is reaffirmed. In the first case, what is at issue is "an enterprise which aims at nothing less than the elucidation of Grasshopper logic, an examination of Grasshopper ideals, and an interpretation of Grasshopper dreams."³⁷ In the second case, at issue is a determination of the "meaning of the dream" that the Grasshopper had bequeathed them upon his passing.³⁸ In both cases, even if Suits is playing a game, it seems that it is a game worth playing. In the following chapters, I will attempt to determine the validity and implications of Suits' Utopian thesis. In chapter 2, I will present a detailed elucidation of Suits' definitions of games and Utopia as well as his Utopian thesis.

³⁵ Suits, *The Grasshopper*, 18.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 158-160.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 18.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 160.

Chapter 2

On Games, Utopia and the Life Most Worth Living

As argued in the previous chapter, Bernard Suits is not just forwarding a definition of games in *The Grasshopper*, but is also presenting an account of the life most worth living or, as it is frequently described, the good life. He situates the context for the good life within a constrained notion of Utopia and claims that game playing is the central activity of Utopian living. Suits' argument that the good life consists of game playing is challenging on several grounds, and many critics have taken Suits to task for failing to adequately defend such a strong claim. Unfortunately, many of these same critics have failed to fully comprehend Suits' understanding of games, Utopia, or both. In this chapter I will spell out Suits' Utopian thesis before turning to the critics' claims in chapter 3.

In order to assess Suits' claims about the life most worth living, several questions must be considered. First, how does Suits define games? This is important because Suits' definition has an important bearing on the validity of his claims about the good life. Second, how does Suits describe Utopia? Again, this has an important bearing on the significance of games in the life most worth living. Finally, how does Suits relate the concepts of games and Utopia? Suits' thesis is not complete until he can show why Utopian living is dedicated to playing games.

The Nature of Games

Before the Grasshopper's death, he leaves Skepticus and Prudence with a complex riddle. One element of this riddle is posed in the form of a question. "Why were the creatures in the Grasshopper's dream playing games instead of the trombone?"³⁹ More to the point, why are they playing games and not just playing in general? In order to solve this riddle, the two set out to recount from the previous summer their conversations with the Grasshopper.

In the process of constructing and defending a definition of games, the Grasshopper emphasizes the importance of something he calls the lusory attitude. Not just one among several necessary elements of games, the lusory attitude plays an important role in establishing game playing as the central element of Utopian existence. While the role of the lusory attitude will not be fully discussed until the last section of this chapter, it is important here to recognize an element of metaphysics (a feature of games) that has important implications for axiology (intrinsic satisfactions in the good life). Once again, this shows that Suits' definition of games is intimately related to his thesis about the good life.

The most frequently cited passage of *The Grasshopper* is likely the one in which Suits summarizes his definition of games. "To play a game is to engage in activity directed towards bringing about a specific state of affairs, using only means permitted by rules, where the rules prohibit more efficient in favor of less efficient means, and where

³⁹ Bernard Suits, *The Grasshopper: Games, Life and Utopia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978), 15.

such rules are accepted just because they make possible such activity.”⁴⁰ But in order to understand the full significance on this definition, it is important to understand how Suits arrived at these necessary and sufficient conditions.

In setting out to define games, the Grasshopper begins with an important methodological stipulation. “The quest for knowledge obliges us to proceed from what is more obvious to what is less obvious.”⁴¹ And so, Suits begins with a commonplace assumption that games are different than work. He postulates that the distinction between games and work is that games require the selection of inefficient means. In work situations, on the other hand, people are likely to use the most efficient means available. The hypothesis that emerges from these reflections is that game-players attempt to achieve their goals inefficiently, and it is precisely this that distinguishes game playing from work.

Upon further reflection, however, Suits rejects this conclusion and argues that game players, at least good game players much like workers, use the most efficient means available to them. While acceptable means are limited in order to create a game problem, good game players try to be as efficient as possible given the game restrictions. So, “attempting to act inefficiently” does not accurately describe game playing. Suits therefore moves on to a second hypothesis about the distinguishing features between games and work.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 34.

⁴¹ Ibid., 22.

Perhaps in games, unlike in work, there is an inseparability of rules and ends. Certainly, in game playing it is not just the achievement of a goal that counts, but how one achieves it. To reach the finish line first is unremarkable if one fails to run around the track but rather crosses the infield. So in order for the achievement of a goal to be meaningful in a game, it must be gained in accordance with the rules of the game. In this sense, rules and ends are inseparable in games.

In work, of course, no such relationship is required. Any number of means can be used to achieve work ends. Good workers, in fact, are encouraged to be creative and find more efficient ways to complete a given task. The inseparability of rules and ends, in short, is a distinguishing characteristic of games.

However, Suits quickly realizes that, while “inseparability” is a characteristic feature of game playing and while it helps to distinguish games from work, this feature is not unique to games. Other forms of human behavior, e.g., morally defensible behavior, entail an inseparability of rules and ends. So Suits, concluding that inseparability is a necessary but not a sufficient condition of games, continues the search for a distinguishing characteristic of games.

In order to distinguish games from morality, the Grasshopper then raises the possibility that game rules, in contrast to the dictates of ethics, are not ultimately binding. That is, the guidelines of morality need to be taken seriously, but those of game playing do not.

This hypothesis, however, fails to drive a wedge between games and morality because it is possible (even if inadvisable) to be supremely dedicated to game rules. Suits puts it this way. While extreme devotion to a game and its rules tells “us a good deal

about such players of games... it tells us nothing about the games they play.”⁴² In short, while people cannot excuse themselves from moral rules, they can take a range of attitudes toward game rules—from serious and fanatical to casual and recreational. Thus, taking rules as “ultimately binding” does not (necessarily) distinguish games from morality. Just as people cease to be moral agents when disregarding moral rules, they cease to be game players when disregarding game rules.

If it is not rules that mark the crucial limitation, Suits argues that there is “a crucial limitation” to games. Rather than limiting the seriousness of the rules, it seems that the limitation attaches to the means for solving game problems. Suits therefore suggests that “the means which rules permit must fall short of ultimate utilities.”⁴³

This proves to be an important qualification, for it is with this additional characterization that game problems begin to come into focus. It is not simply that means are stipulated by rules, but rather where and to what degree the limitations of means are made. In fact, it is the kind and quality of means limitation that determine the merits of the game. If the means allow for an easy resolution of the game problem, then the game will be dull. If the means are too limiting, then the game problem becomes too difficult. Thus the process of limiting means needs to be negotiated carefully. Means need to be restricted, but not restricted too much. Thus, Suits concludes, “Means permitted by the rules are narrower in range than they would be in the absence of the rules.”⁴⁴ This added

⁴² Ibid., 29.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 30.

qualification points to an important feature of games. Games are tethered to the manipulation of available means, not to the importance or unimportance of the rules that would stipulate such restrictions.

In order to understand the intelligibility of game rules, specifically how they function as a rule to limit lusory means, it is necessary to account for why there are even rules at all. As the Grasshopper explains, “since, as we shall see, the rules of games make up a rather special kind of rule, it will be necessary to take account of one more element, namely, the attitudes of game players *qua* game players.”⁴⁵ This attitude “without which it is not possible to play a game” he calls “the *lusory* (form the Latin *ludus*, game) attitude.”⁴⁶

For Suits, this element serves as the linchpin of his definition of games. “My task will be to persuade you that what I have called the lusory attitude is the element which unifies the other elements into a single formula which successfully states the necessary and sufficient conditions for any activity to be an instance of game playing.”⁴⁷ In an inquiry that moves from the more obvious to the less obvious, the lusory attitude represents the furthest reaches in the quest for knowledge about games.

Human activity, in all its various forms, is generally goal-directed, rule-governed, as well as means limited. That is to say that human activity is generally ordered, logical and constrained. But although human activity is subject to rational strictures, it does not

⁴⁵ Ibid., 35.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

mean that all human activity is subject to the same logical order. This is readily apparent in looking at human experience at several different levels. Attempting to solve a mathematical problem requires different goals and rules than attempting to solve a psychological problem. Attempting to play the cello is different than attempting to fix a car. The organization and logic of our judicial laws is much different than the organization and logic of spoken and written languages. The administration of our country is different than the administration of our daily personal affairs. Certainly, there may be points of convergence, but there are also important differences in the form and substance of these respective behaviors.

On this line of reasoning, in order to understand games, it is necessary to understand the logic by which games are undertaken. Suits argues that what matters for games is the attitude one has towards goals and means. For other types of behavior, one's attitude toward the goals and means may seem of little or no importance. One's attitude might influence one's distaste or enjoyment of solving mathematical problems, but is irrelevant to the fact that it is a math problem. One's attitude might influence how well or how poorly one plays the cello, but does not dictate what it means to play the cello. But in games, the lusory attitude not only makes the activity intelligible, it makes the activity.

The lusory attitude must be elaborated in order to understand the underlying logic of games or what has also been called gratuitous logic.⁴⁸ "The attitude of the game

⁴⁸ At this point, only a preliminary account of the lusory attitude will be forwarded to show its importance to the meaning of games and the good life. In chapter 4, the lusory or gratuitous element will be given a thorough rendering.

player must be an element in game playing because there has to be an explanation of that curious state of affairs wherein one adopts rules which require one to employ worse rather than better means for reaching an end.”⁴⁹ This is a clue as to why games are often considered trivial endeavors.

As discussed earlier, a distinctive feature of games is that more efficient means are ruled out in favor of less efficient means. From a perspective not informed by the lusory attitude, games can seem absurd because accepting a restriction of means seems a decidedly foolish thing to do. But from a perspective informed by the lusory attitude, people willingly forego the most efficient means in favor of restricted options because of the valued challenge this restriction creates.

At this point, Suits can easily be misinterpreted. The Grasshopper argues that “foot racers do not refrain from cutting across the infield because the infield holds dangers for them, as would be the case if, for example, infields were frequently sown with land mines. Cutting across the infield is shunned solely because there is a rule against it.”⁵⁰ But this is not quite right, because the inseparability of goals and rules is a necessary but not a sufficient characteristic of games. By carefully crafting the rules, the acceptable means to achieve the goal creates an interesting and engaging problem that is neither too hard nor too easy. To argue that refraining from cutting across the infield is a matter of obedience to rules is, in a sense, begging the question. An inquisitive observer watching a running race for the first time might ask: why are those runners running

⁴⁹ Ibid., 38.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 39.

around the track when it would be quicker to cut across the infield to reach the finish line? A ludicrously informed spectator answers that there is a rule against taking such a shortcut. Surely the observer would find this answer insufficient and ask why such a rule against shortcuts existed in the first place.

For those unfamiliar with running races, this apparently odd behavior requires a justification, and informing them that there is a rule requiring it is not sufficient. Obviously, it is not solely the existence of a rule against cutting across the infield that explains why running races is a game or why it is different from other forms of human behavior. To understand this, a more complete explanation is needed. This explanation addresses why it is that game-players choose to follow rules that make the resultant tasks harder.

It is for this reason that Suits makes a very crucial distinction between a bureaucratic and a lusus imposition of rules. Via the Grasshopper, Suits argues that rules in games are accepted just because they are there. The runner's decision to not run across the infield is not based on prudential, purely instrumental, or moral restrictions, but rather on a rule prohibiting such action. But why does such a rule exist in the first place? Without any justification, such a rule is merely a bureaucratic restriction which in ordinary life "is usually—and rightly—regarded as the worst possible kind of justification one could give for avoiding a course of action. The justification for prohibiting a course of action that there is simply a rule against it may be called the *bureaucratic* justification; that is, no justification at all."⁵¹ Therefore any definition of

⁵¹ Ibid.

games, based on an account of rules, must have a very qualified definition of rules because, if it does not operate within the framework of a specific understanding of rules, it will not distinguish games from other types of rule-governed activities. It is therefore necessary, according to Suits, to distinguish how and why:

...in anything but a game the gratuitous introduction of unnecessary obstacles to the achievement of an end is regarded as a decidedly irrational thing to do. This fact about games has led some observers to conclude that there is something inherently absurd about games... This kind of view seems to me to be mistaken. The mistake consists in applying the same standard to games that is applied to means-ends activities that are not games. If playing a game is regarded as not essentially different from going to the office or writing a cheque, then there is certainly something absurd or paradoxical or, more plausibly, simply something stupid about game playing. But games are, I believe, essentially different from the ordinary activities of life.⁵²

For Suits, rules in games function neither as prudential nor as irrational restrictions. Then what justification can be given for developing and following such rules?

The answer is found in the lusory attitude. As noted, it is this element that unifies the other elements of games and justifies game rules. In order to appreciate this justification, it is helpful to understand not only the term “lusory attitude” but also the significance of this term. Being clear about what the lusory attitude does and does not do will help ensure a proper understanding of games as well as the role of games in Utopia.

The first step in elucidating the lusory attitude is to determine what Suits means by lusory. He identifies the term lusory as coming “from the Latin *ludus*, game.”⁵³ Not only does this tell us very little, it could be looked upon as a weak argument. As the

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid., 35.

move from the most obvious to the least obvious becomes more difficult, has Suits found the philosophical journey too arduous to continue? Rather than elucidating the least obvious elements of games, does he merely throw out a term that essentially brings us back to the beginning? If the linchpin to his definition of games is a “game attitude,” his argument would appear to rest on circular reasoning.

Suits, however, does not end his discussion of the lusory attitude there. He argues that this attitude explains why people behave in a certain manner, that is, why they would accept rules and limitations in pursuing a goal that would not otherwise make sense. In accounting for games, he sees that a specific stance, interest, or orientation explains what differentiates games from other activities; and for this reason labels it the lusory attitude.

The lusory attitude is a problem-seeking and problem-appreciating stance that one takes in or toward the world. It is an approach toward solving problems found and created in one’s environment. It is a particular manner of reckoning and interpreting challenges, one that differs from the stance exhibited by the ants. It provides the basis for a rational account of games as well as the logic of addressing unnecessary problems.⁵⁴

Given this qualification of the term “lusory attitude,” it is now possible to identify its significance. Suits provides two similar descriptions of lusory attitude. In one account, he says that “rules are accepted for the sake of the activity they make possible.”⁵⁵ In the other, he indicates that “rules are accepted just because they make

⁵⁴ The nature and significance of ludic rationality and gratuitous logic will be examined in chapter 4.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 30.

possible such activity.”⁵⁶ Unfortunately these descriptions of the lusory attitude are not straight forward and can be misleading.

Perhaps the most significant problem with these accounts is the significance they seem to give to the role of rules. Rules are seemingly given primacy because they “make the activity possible,” but this is not what Suits meant in describing the lusory attitude. It is not rules, but rather the means, that are accepted and rejected based upon the quality of the problematic experiences they make possible. After carefully selecting inefficient means so that the activity is neither too easy nor too difficult but appropriately challenging, the rules are established to verify these lived distinctions. Rules do not make the action, but rather formalize the game problem and facilitate sharing it with others. Although rules are an important element in defining games, they must be understood in Suits’ qualified context. Because rules alone are not sufficient to account for games, too much significance should not be read into how their acceptance “makes the activity possible.” Even if, in one sense, rules make the activity possible, it is the lusory attitude that grounds the activity and makes it distinctively a game.

Lusory distinctions are formalized by rules, but the rules do not determine where the line regarding permissible and impermissible means should be drawn. Rather, it is by experientially negotiating what are acceptable and unacceptable means for achieving an end that one determines how rules are established. In experiencing meaningful distinctions, people can identify activities on a range between too easy and too hard that form the basis for determining the limitation of means. Once determinations are made,

⁵⁶ Ibid., 35.

the codification of the prescribed and prohibited means is undertaken through the establishment of rules. But while the rules become the common parlance for communicating what a game is and how it is played, the game itself rests on a deeper foundation of adjudicated difficulty. Rules gain intelligibility and credibility through the selection of the right means.

Perhaps part of the reason why rules have held sway over the account of games is that they resonate with the language we are used to speaking, a voice with which we are familiar. The nature and use of rules, for instance, is important in the study of ethics, economics, linguistics, and politics. It may be concluded that drawing from these rich sources validates analyses of game rules by association and thus informs the field of sport philosophy. But perhaps it is necessary to speak in a new voice in order to both validate and enlighten the field of sport philosophy.

If Suits is right, the rational, analytic framework of games is different from those of other fields. To transpose the logic of one field onto another can readily lead to misunderstanding. For example, any simplistic exchange of ideas between game theory in economics and game studies in kinesiology could cause difficulties for both fields. At best, such comparisons of rule-related theories would require a filter that would distinguish between the instrumental framework of the former and the intrinsic framework of the latter. Because rules are justified and serve different purposes depending on the type of activity, a theory of rules based on how they function in one type of activity may not correlate to how rules function in another activity.

It is in this sense that rules, just as goals, can be prelusory or lusory in nature. While there is debate in the literature over the validity of Suits' account of the prelusory

goal, in at least one important sense the distinction seems valid.⁵⁷ This is the case because goals can be experienced in lusory or prelusory ways.⁵⁸ It is not important what the specific goal is, for any conceivable state of affairs could fall under either category. Rather, what is important is how one regards that goal—for instance, as a work objective, an achievement in a game, or as an unintended outcome in the course of daily living.

The same holds true for rules. No matter what type of rule is at issue (e.g., constitutive, regulative, auxiliary), what is significant is how that rule functions in delimiting the means-goal relationship. What is at issue is how rules, and for that matter the means, are understood as either lusory or non-lusory in nature. In short, the prelusory—lusory distinction tells us that goals, means, and rules per se cannot account for the distinction between games and other types of activity. No amount of research into the nature of rules would fully elucidate the nature of games. It is rather one's attitude towards the inseparability of these elements, in delimiting an interesting problem, that makes the difference and shows the lusory attitude to be the linchpin of gamewrighting and game playing.

Much more could be said about the lusory attitude. Indeed, Suits could have said more on this topic, but did not. A more elaborate account of the lusory attitude and its

⁵⁷ Angela J. Schneider and Robert B. Butcher, "Pre-Lusory Goals for Games: A Gambit Declined," *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* 24 (1997): 38-46.

⁵⁸ Confusion may arise from the use of the term prelusory. Perhaps nonlusory would have been a better description, but from the perspective of the Grasshopper, who is anticipating the coming of Utopia, all goals, rules, and means will become lusory in Utopia. Just as the Grasshopper sees people as Grasshoppers in disguise (pre-Grasshoppers), it could be argued that the Grasshopper also sees all goals, rules, and means as lusory in disguise (prelusory).

significance will be presented in chapter 4. But it is necessary in the present discussion to turn to Suits' account of Utopia.

The Nature of Utopia

A common interpretation of Utopia suggests that it is a place in which people are free from all worldly cares and troubles. While Suits seems aware of such a conception, he does not rely on it. Indeed, a failure to recognize his redescription of Utopia reduces the cogency of his Utopian thesis.

In "Games and Utopia", Suits restates and clarifies the account of Utopia that was originally advanced in *The Grasshopper*:

The Utopia toward which all of us are—and always have been—striving is that state of affairs where there is no need for what the Grasshopper calls instrumental actions—that is actions whose value lies not in themselves but solely in their further purposes.... The Grasshopper outlines a picture of the indicated Utopia—a state of existence where all activities are valued solely for themselves, where no striving of any kind is required, where...anything anyone could ever desire is immediately available without effort.⁵⁹

Several important ideas need to be teased out of this account. First, in Utopia instrumental activities are rendered unnecessary. People need not strive or exert effort and they need not work or want for anything. Rather this ideal of existence is, in effect, "a life devoted to play"—a life devoted to intrinsically valued activities. While this sounds much like the common interpretation of Utopia, Suits takes these ideas in a new and potentially surprising direction.

⁵⁹ Bernard Suits, "Games and Utopia: Posthumous Reflections," *Simulation and Games* 15 1 (1984): 8-9.

In Suits' account of Utopia, the ideal of existence is comprised of activities “whose only justification is that they justify everything else; or, as Aristotle put it, those things for the sake of which we do other things, but which are not themselves done for the sake of anything else.”⁶⁰ By “representing the ideal of existence as though it were already instituted as a social reality,” Suits claims that it can be used as a device in order to discern “a Utopia which embodies that ideal—that is, a state of affairs where people are engaged in those activities which they value intrinsically.”⁶¹

Two important points must be emphasized. First, Suits is not merely making claims about some idealized world that may never exist. Rather, he is using a thought experiment, just like Plato, to bring to light certain aspects of what he is investigating. Or, in a phenomenological sense, he is bracketing an intrinsically valued activity to determine how it is best understood. While Suits starts with an account of an idealized or hypothetical Utopia, it is important to recognize that he does not conclude with one. His account of Utopia has real implications for the life most living in our everyday existence as experienced here and now. Just as he did with his account of games, Suits begins with an overly simplistic account of Utopia. Suits wants us to start by considering a life in which pure play dominates our existence. But he does not want us to stop there and, accordingly, adds qualifications to his account.

Indeed, the Grasshopper worries that his disciples may conflate his claims about the ideal of existence with a life devoted to play because his position is actually a very

⁶⁰ Suits, *The Grasshopper*, 166.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 166-167.

different one. The Grasshopper's position, as Suits put it, "requires a modification or interpretation of that claim. This position can be expressed by two related contentions. The first is that play is necessary but not sufficient to account adequately for the ideal of existence. The second is that game playing performs a crucial role in delineating that ideal."⁶² It is therefore necessary to understand the move from a play-filled Utopia to a game playing Utopia to understand what Suits means by the life most worth living. It is worth noting that the conditions of Utopia do not guarantee a Utopian existence, as will be discussed in the following section.

If the ideal of existence consists of activities that are valued intrinsically, then it becomes apparent that many of the activities with which we are familiar would not exist in Utopia, for "all of the instrumental activities of human beings have been eliminated."⁶³ Because of advances in computers and technology that make Utopia possible, economic problems such as securing food, housing and other necessities of life, no longer exist. In turn, there is no longer a need for governance and administration, at least as currently conceived, for they consist of institutions concerned with instrumental problems. Likewise, psychological and interpersonal problems are taken care of in Utopia. Advances in "socio- or psycho-therapy or in pharmacology" results in "cures for all psychic disturbances."⁶⁴ In Utopia, morality will also become irrelevant, for questions of moral goodness are critical only prior to the realization of the ideal of existence.

⁶² Ibid., 166.

⁶³ Ibid., 167. The role of instrumental activity in Utopia will be elaborated later in the chapter. However, it is important to note that instrumental activity is not eliminated, but rather deemed unnecessary.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 167.

Additionally, the arts and intellectual inquiry would also not be part of Utopia.⁶⁵ Even love, friendship, and sex would not have a place in Utopia.⁶⁶ At this point, Suits concludes that we are “left with game playing as the only remaining candidate for Utopian occupation, and therefore the only possible remaining constituent of the ideal of existence.”⁶⁷ While this may seem a startling conclusion, it is not an indefensible one.

The Grasshopper’s claim “that Utopian existence is fundamentally concerned with game playing” can be challenged, as was his definition of games.⁶⁸ Objections to his account can be presented as “counter-examples which reveal the definition to be inadequate in either of two respects in which definitions can be inadequate,” as being either too broad or too narrow.⁶⁹ In this case, Suits’ definition of Utopia is too broad if it erroneously includes things which do not belong to Utopia and it is too narrow if it erroneously excludes things which do belong to Utopia. Just as Suits defends his definition of games in *The Grasshopper* against charges of undue inclusion or exclusion in chapter 4 through 13, he defends Utopia against similar criticisms in chapters 14 and 15.

An important challenge to Suits’ account of Utopia is that it is too narrow because it excludes too many activities. Specifically, play may be considered a sufficient

⁶⁵ Ibid., 169-170.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 170-171.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 171.

⁶⁸ Ibid., ix.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 41.

condition for determining Utopia. But Suits began with an account of Utopia that consisted of a life devoted to play and ultimately found it to be insufficient.

The Grasshopper “believes that Utopia must consist in game playing because unless people play games in Utopia there will be nothing whatever to do, and everyone will die—or go mad—of boredom.”⁷⁰ In one sense, this conclusion seems incorrect. Play does offer us something to do. But games have particularly compelling intrinsic qualities that are not found in non-game forms of play. In a Utopia where all desires are immediately fulfilled, it is necessary to counteract the tedium of having no challenges or no meaningful stories to live out by reinstating the possibility of overcoming problems. But the nature of these problems is unique because “what is instrumental is inseparably combined with what is intrinsically valuable, and where the activity is not itself an instrument for some further end.”⁷¹ While a Utopia of pure play can account for a life devoted to intrinsically valued activity, it does not provide those “just right” problems that people need in order to have something meaningful and interesting to do.

In order to stave off the boredom experienced from a generic play-oriented Utopia, people encounter provocative problems made possible by the imposition of unnecessary obstacles. “For in games we must have obstacles which we can strive to overcome *just so that* we can possess the activity as a whole, namely, playing the game.

⁷⁰ Suits, “Games and Utopia,” 8.

⁷¹ Suits, *The Grasshopper*, 171.

Game playing makes it possible to retain enough effort in Utopia to make life worth living.”⁷²

This represents a significant shift from many common notions of Utopia and Utopian existence. Rather than a place free from all problems, Utopia is identified as a place where gratuitous natural and artificial problems are freely chosen. And Utopian existence is not a life of frolic, leisure, and sensuousity, but an existence of game-focused play.

For some, this may be an unsatisfying response. Perhaps a life of mere pleasure provides an adequate account of Utopia. Perhaps the desire to overcome unnecessary obstacles will be eradicated by the same technology that thwarts the contingencies of winter and remedies the psychological and social problems of society. Or it may be the case that while the unnecessary obstacles that games present will be available in Utopia, they will not be the only or fundamental activity of Utopia. This raises the possibility that Suits’ account of Utopia is too restrictive. It is too restrictive because it reduces the full gamut of intrinsically-valued behavior by focusing on the values of problem-solving activities.

An examination of human nature, however, might support Suits’ contentions. It might suggest that we would grow dissatisfied with a steady diet of activities that lacked challenges. Suits’ case is supported, for instance, by the anthropological philosophy of R. Scott Kretchmar. In “The Intelligibility of Suits’ Utopia,” he argues that “we find significance in negotiating problems, and we cannot live happily without the meaning

⁷² Ibid.

that is thereby derived.”⁷³ Because “contemporary human beings are literally the product of millions of years of successful problem solving,” their consciousness and intentionality “is problem conditioned through and through.”⁷⁴ Problem solving is baked into the fabric of our being and an idealized account of human existence that ignored this evolutionary truth would be problematic.

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi’s work on the psychology of optimal experience also supports Suits’ claims about the good life.⁷⁵ Using the term “flow” to descriptively account for optimal experience, Csikszentmihalyi identifies the importance of our skills matching our challenges. While he identifies several distinctive characteristics of optimal experience, they are related to our engagement with an appropriate challenge. In other words, problem solving is central to optimal experience and good living.

It is for this reason, as Suits provocatively argues, that a Utopia without problems would be no Utopia at all. The very problems that allow for human flourishing and meaning (many of them natural and serious problems) can be reintroduced into Utopia as artificial problems. Utopians voluntarily attempt to solve unnecessary problems, which is to say that they are playing games. Problem solving in the form of game playing makes life worth living. It is for this reason that Suits does not believe that his account of

⁷³ R. Scott Kretchmar, “The Intelligibility of Suits’ Utopia: The View from Anthropological Philosophy,” *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* 33 1 (May 2006): 73.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 72, 73.

⁷⁵ Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1990).

Utopia is too narrow, for a description of Utopia as just play or intrinsically valued activity is insufficient at best and a recipe for Dystopia at worst.

This claim is supported by Josef Pieper in *Leisure: The Basis of Culture*.⁷⁶ While leisure may often commonly be considered in more general terms, Pieper qualifies his account of leisure so that it entails features beyond mere intrinsically valued activity. Leisure requires an engagement of the individual. As discussed in chapter 4 in relation to lusory experience, Pieper's leisure requires a doing and an undergoing. Rather than merely undergoing, an individual must invest himself in the leisure activity. This, in itself, represents a minimal challenge.

If not too narrow, perhaps Suits' account of Utopia is too broad. Despite Suits' arguments to the contrary, his account of Utopia might in fact be a logical impossibility. Having eliminated so many activities of our common experience from Utopia, why should games not also be eliminated? After all, much participation in pre-Utopian games is for instrumental reasons. In this sense, games seem no better a candidate for protection than many of the other useful activities that the Grasshopper excluded from Utopia.

But it must be remembered that it is an account of the ideal of existence that is the point of departure for Suits' account of Utopia. Utopia represents the embodiment or actualization of that ideal; and Suits' argument about a life devoted to intrinsically valued activity is a strong claim about pre-Utopian existence in anticipation of Utopia. Debate over what scope and content of the ideal of existence, or the probability of its achievement, does not rule out the possibility of Utopia as Suits defines it.

⁷⁶ Josef Pieper, *Leisure: The Basis of Culture* (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine Press, 1998).

Additionally, Suits' claims that "game playing performs a crucial role in delineating that ideal—a role that cannot be performed by any other activity, and without which an account of the ideal is either incomplete or impossible."⁷⁷ Such a qualification raises one concern. How is it that an "activity which is, from one point of view, instrumentally valuable can, from another point of view, be intrinsically valuable?"⁷⁸ This supposed problem, however, is corrected by a simple qualification Suits appended to his account of Utopia:

Let us continue to think of the moral ideal of man as an actual Utopian community, then, but where, instead of supposing that all... *objectively* instrumental activities have been banished... what has been banished is simply all activity which is not *valued* intrinsically, thus leaving it open to any Utopian to enjoy the exertions of productive endeavour.⁷⁹

If it were impossible to value something both intrinsically and instrumentally, then a game playing Utopian would perhaps be logically impossible. But Suits' clearly refutes such an account in his discussion of radical autotelism. Radical autotelism claims that intrinsic reasons, and only intrinsic reasons, can be the reasons for performing an activity. But claiming that a Utopian activity must be undertaken for intrinsic reasons does not suggest that there can be no other reasons, only that "there *need* be no other reason" for doing it.⁸⁰ This ensures that the introduction or inclusion of instrumental actions in game playing does not entail a contradiction. Instrumental and intrinsic values are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, they are "inseparably combined" in game playing;

⁷⁷ Suits, *The Grasshopper*, 166.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 172-173.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 173.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 144.

which is why game playing is the fundamental element of Utopian existence. So whether Utopian existence is comprised of playing in general or game playing in particular, Utopia is neither problematic nor contradictory.

Game Playing as the Central Activity of the Good Life

In Utopia, as defined by the Grasshopper, game playing is the central activity of the good life. But why must the life most worth living be devoted to game playing? The Grasshopper's disciple Skepticus ponders that "even knowing what a game is—or at least knowing what the Grasshopper believes a game to be—seems to have no bearing whatever on the Grasshopper's apparent conviction that the life of the Grasshopper must be a life devoted to game playing rather than to trombone playing."⁸¹ In order to understand Suits' strong claim regarding the role of game playing in Utopia, it is necessary to understand how the recurring dream and two visions of the Grasshopper support his claim.

In the Grasshopper's dream everyone is identified as "an unconscious player."⁸²

Everyone alive is in fact engaged in playing elaborate games, while at the same time believing themselves to be going about their ordinary affairs. Carpenters, believing themselves to be merely pursuing their trade, are really playing a game, and similarly with politicians, philosophers, lovers, murderers, thieves, and saints. Whatever occupation or activity you can think of, it is in reality a game. This

⁸¹ Ibid., 156.

⁸² Ibid., 160.

revelation is, of course, astonishing. The sequel is terrifying. For in the dream I then go about persuading everyone I find of the great truth which has been revealed to me.... But precisely at the point when each is persuaded—and this is the ghastly part—each ceases to exist.⁸³

The dream raises an interesting concern—could people really be unwittingly playing games? Why it is that they are playing games, instead of some other intrinsically valued activity? And why would such a realization cause people to cease to exist? The Grasshopper “was thinking of a grasshopper in disguise as being identical with someone playing a game without knowing that he was playing a game, and that he therefore believed *game* playing, and not merely playing in general, to be the essential life of the grasshopper.”⁸⁴ The solution to the questions raised by the dream “lies in the nature of games” as well as the Grasshopper’s visions.⁸⁵

The first vision is triggered by the suggestion that not everyone is enthusiastic about a life of game playing. “People like to be building houses, or running large corporations, or doing scientific research to some purpose, you know, not just for the hell of it.”⁸⁶ This “vision” portrays the downfall of Utopia.

I saw time passing in Utopia, and I saw the Strivers and the Seekers coming to the conclusion that if their lives were merely games, then those lives were scarcely worth living.... Games were once again relegated to the role of mere pastimes useful for bridging the gaps in our serious endeavors. And if it had been possible to convince these people that they were in fact playing games, they would have

⁸³ Ibid., 10.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 16.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 18.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 177.

felt that their whole lives had been as nothing—a mere stage play or empty dream.⁸⁷

This vision solves the mystery of the dream by identifying how “life for most people will not be worth living if they cannot believe that they are doing *something* useful, whether it is providing for their families or formulating a theory of relativity.”⁸⁸ People will “cease to exist” when recognizing themselves as grasshoppers in disguise because it steals the ontological ground on which they base their very existence. While meaning is not necessarily predicated on doing *something* useful, if useful activities are the primary foundation on which people attribute worth to their lives, then any argument that discredits one’s most cherished beliefs would induce ontological insecurity.⁸⁹

This vision is significant because it challenges the Grasshopper’s strong claim about game playing in Utopia. The Grasshopper worries if his repressed fears were “about the fate of mankind, or were they about the cogency of my thesis?”⁹⁰

In the article “Games and Utopia,” the Grasshopper provides an answer. After being resurrected yet again, the Grasshopper states that “it must be the possible fate of mankind that occasioned the anxieties manifested in my dream.”⁹¹ Suits claims that the Strivers and Seekers, who view life as barely worth living if they are not doing something truly useful, are suffering from a misunderstanding. The Strivers and Seekers find

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 178.

⁸⁹ In this case “useful” refers to instrumentally valued activity

⁹⁰ Ibid., 178.

⁹¹ Suits, “Games and Utopia,” 14.

meaning in instrumentally or externally valued activity as opposed to the Grasshopper who derives meaning from intrinsically valued activity.

Suits addresses the Strivers and Seekers challenges by qualifying certain types of activities, specifically games, that he deems have greater significance for the good life. Games involve instrumentality that is grounded upon the intrinsically valued challenge. How would the Strivers and Seekers respond? They may question how deeply meaningful Grasshopper's unnecessary, but highly attractive, problems can be. But perhaps the more serious concern pertains to how to guarantee that challenges are meaningful in the first place. Unlike the Strivers and Seekers, Suits recognizes that it is not an either/or but a both/and. That is why his Utopian thesis locks in both intrinsicality (play) and instrumentality (overcoming obstacles, albeit unnecessary ones).

In an effort to support his claim and reveal the significance of a game playing Utopia, the Grasshopper responds to a series of challenges presented by Skepticus regarding strong claims about the role of games in Utopia. The first challenge concerns the scope of action in Utopia. Skepticus claims that there is a greater scope of activity in non-Utopia. The Grasshopper responds that in Utopia the scope of action is exchanged for intrinsicality. What is of importance is not what scope of activities is available, but rather our attitude toward those activities that exist. Skepticus argues that "scarcely anyone... would be eager to trade off the richness of this life, despite its shortcomings, for a Utopia confined to checkers, tiddly-winks, and tic-tac-toe." Therefore, Skepticus claims, the search for Utopia is best abandoned.⁹² If the Grasshopper's Utopia consists

⁹² Ibid., 14.

of a life of mere games, then “the best Utopia there can be already exists in our back yards.”⁹³ The Grasshopper responds that such a critique is based upon a false premise because it suggests that “we have a choice in the matter. The Utopia I envisage is not a state of affairs that is ideally desirable; it is simply a state of affairs that is logically inevitable.”⁹⁴

The Grasshopper does not explain why his notion of Utopia has a more limited scope of action than currently available. But it does not seem the least bit surprising given that several types of activities, specifically bureaucratic activities, can be the bane of existence. At its very core, Suits’ Utopian thesis excludes instrumental activities that lack any intrinsically redeeming significance. While other Utopian visions might rely on different qualifications, there is presumably some factor that would limit the scope of action in any Utopian vision⁹⁵. What is directly at issue is not a limited scope of action per se, but rather how the scope of action is limited. What is at issue is the valid justification for the elimination of certain types of action.

It is for this reason that Skepticus argues that a life of mere games is insufficient because some people want activity that is instrumentally significant. The Strivers and Seekers “weren’t engaged in *really* instrumental— that is to say, useful—activities at

⁹³ Ibid., 15.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ There must be some limiting factor that serves as a corrective in the move from the non-Utopian to Utopian existence. While the move may consist of a expanding or shifting the scope of action, it is plausible that there would be some qualification that limits the non-Utopian actions.

all.”⁹⁶ Skepticus offers an alternative version of Utopia in which “everybody will work, or seek knowledge, or whatever it might be, but they will *really* be doing these things.... Everyone really works, but things are so arranged that everyone derives intrinsic value from the thing he works at.”⁹⁷ This melding of intrinsic and instrumental values, coined the Happy Hooker Principle, challenges the Grasshopper’s claim that Utopian existence is “achievable only by playing games.”⁹⁸ But while the Happy Hooker Principle may be good for the likes of philosophers and prostitutes, the Grasshopper is quick to point out that it would “build all kinds of evils into your Utopia, or else professions like medicine and the law will cease to exist.”⁹⁹

In order to preserve real instrumentality, “lawyers will get heart disease so doctors have something to do and doctors will commit serious crimes so lawyers have something to do.”¹⁰⁰ In this sense, preserving *real* instrumentality would make for an absurd Utopia. It would require persons to not merely play a role for the sake of another, but *really* suffer from diseases and *really* commit horrendous crimes for the sake of doctors and lawyers, respectively. It is for this reason that the Grasshopper has grave concerns about such a Utopia. Generating the problems they most desire (i.e. doctors diagnosing diseases, lawyers litigating legal problems) may not be difficult in Utopia. But when

⁹⁶ Ibid., 17.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 16.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 17.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 17.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

fulfilling roles that facilitate other's Utopian desires, people may fall "off in their zeal in the roles" or, absent this, just pretend to have problems.¹⁰¹ But if this came to pass, then "the activities of Utopians would have a tendency to become very much like *games*."¹⁰²

Skepticus has a rejoinder. He argues that because it is his Utopia, then it would be insisted upon that people have real problems. But if this were to be the case, as the Grasshopper rightly points out, "society is in fact nothing but a series—indeed, a network—of interlocking games" because "all are engaged in bringing about the existence of obstacles just so such obstacles can be overcome."¹⁰³ Even discounting the horrors of such a Utopia, the Grasshopper objects to this alternative Utopia precisely because Skepticus was "proposing a *non-game* Utopia as an alternative to my Utopia of game playing, but it has turned out, upon examination, to be a game Utopia after all."¹⁰⁴

Skepticus rallies a response by suggesting that Utopia be delayed, and puts it this way: "In order to retain the richness of our non-Utopian existence, all we need do is delay the arrival of the relatively empty Utopia you envisage, and, with sufficient effort and ingenuity, delay it indefinitely."¹⁰⁵ Such an effort however, as the Grasshopper claims, would require that we all become "ludic Luddites... in order to escape the

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 18.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 19.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 20.

dreariness and despair of Utopian game rooms.”¹⁰⁶ Because Skepticus believes that Utopia would lead to a “Zero Zeal condition... whose residents are deprived of any genuine reason for significant endeavor,” an effort must be made to indefinitely postpone the coming of Utopia.¹⁰⁷ But by not removing obstacles that would “make all the tasks of life quite unnecessary” and leave us with nothing to do, “everyone is engaged in the voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles. In other words, the attempt to postpone Utopia indefinitely is to make a game of life.”¹⁰⁸ Rather than avoiding what the Grasshopper claims is an historical inevitability, Skepticus’ solution is “a *construction* of it right now.”¹⁰⁹

At this point in the argument, Skepticus suggests that we should just “give thanks that a game playing Utopia will not arrive in our lifetime, relax, and hope for the best.”¹¹⁰ The Grasshopper points out that this turns life into a game as well, for just as inventing the interlocking activities of lawyers and doctors or preventing the removal of obstacles in order to delay Utopia turns life into a game, so does “simply rejoicing in the fact that... improvements have not yet been made.”¹¹¹ Rather than be satisfied, like the ants, by engaging in real problems with vigor irrespective of their intrinsic merit, we can adopt a

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 21.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 22.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 23.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

lusory attitude of freely engaging in these natural problems and even preserving some of them for the sake of challenge they present. While this convinces Skepticus “that the future of mankind is irremediably bleak,” it leads the Grasshopper to another vision that helps solidify why it is that games are the central activity of the good life.¹¹²

While the first vision presents the possible downfall of Utopia, the second vision presents the fulfillment of Utopia. At stake in this second vision, rather than the fate of the Grasshopper (and humans as grasshoppers-in-disguise), is the fate of the ant. The Grasshopper “and a multitude of other Grasshoppers [are] engaged in playing the most elaborate, subtle, and challenging games” in Utopia when they are all of the sudden interrupted.

It is an ant, and I see that it is the same ant who turned me away from his door in the autumn of my life. ‘Please, Grasshopper,’ he begs, ‘Give me something to do.’ ‘Why, Ant, what on earth do you mean?’ I reply. ‘How can an Ant be in need of something to do? Get about your business of storing up food for winter, splitting firewood, and so on.’ ‘But,’ continues the Ant more mournfully than ever, ‘I can’t do that. The technology that our ant-industry has produced is now so advanced that we can obtain food for winter, and all the other necessities of life as well, merely by activating computers. So there is nothing at *all* left for us to do. But you Grasshoppers seem to find plenty to do.’¹¹³

The Grasshopper invites all the ants into Utopia and those who “are able to learn and enjoy our games survive as happy Utopians, and their metamorphosis from the ants into grasshoppers is a beautiful sight to behold. But those who cannot change must go back outside, where the whole race of ants, cold, bored, perplexed, and futile, dies out

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid., 24.

forever.”¹¹⁴ The Grasshopper leaves us with this final vision, but much work remains if the significance of this vision is to be understood.

Suits’ Utopian thesis is more clearly fleshed out in the article “Games and Utopia: Posthumous Reflections on Utopia” and presents a significant advancement on his analysis in *The Grasshopper: Games, Life and Utopia*. A review of the key developments of the article will provide the necessary context for interpreting the final vision.

The Grasshopper’s response to Skepticus’ critique, that the scope of action is too narrow in Utopia, is significant. At issue is whether games are sufficient in scope to provide enough activity in Utopia to make life worthwhile. The Grasshopper actually addresses this point at the beginning of *The Grasshopper* when he suggests that the life of the ant is self-defeating because it is prudential. “The ideal of prudence, therefore, like the ideal of preventive medicine, is its own extinction.”¹¹⁵ People, given certain conditions, may find certain activities deeply satisfying, but that does not mean that they can logically hope for those activities to be a part of the life most worth living. The preservation of certain activities would amount to a dystopian world requiring other people to suffer illness for the sake of surgeons and legal hardships for the sake of lawyers. It is a failure of imagination and logic to require this type of suffering. In order to achieve a life most worth living, it is necessary to imagine a life beyond prudential and

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Suits, *The Grasshopper*, 8.

instrumental thinking. An appreciation of how our intrinsic and instrumental values are tethered in games provides a rationale for Utopia's limited scope of action.

After defending a limited scope of action, the Grasshopper makes a very significant claim in regards to Skepticus' desire to have *really* instrumental activity in Utopia. The Grasshopper clearly rejects some forms of instrumental activity, but recognizes the necessity of at least some forms of instrumental activity for life to be worthwhile. This is perhaps the most important claim in the defense of a game playing Utopia. That is, there is no absolute restriction against instrumental activity in general. Indeed, the very reason why Utopia consists of game playing activity is due to how games tether the instrumental to the intrinsic.

Whether games are natural, artificial, or artificially-fortified natural problems, they also rely on instrumental actions. Games focus on instrumentality because game players appreciate "the bringing about of obstacles just so that such obstacles can be overcome. Tennis is not a game, after all, by virtue of the players *pretending* they have a net."¹¹⁶ Achievement in such genuinely instrumental activities of tennis may not compare to that of surgery or litigation in non-Utopian life, but it does not mean that there is no real instrumentality at hand. To argue for the preservation of non-Utopian life for the sake of some instrumentality at the expense of intrinsic activity is to fail to comprehend the possible relationship between instrumental and intrinsic activity. When taking seriously the Grasshopper's arguments about the limited scope of action in Utopia

¹¹⁶ Suits, "Games and Utopia," 19.

and the *really* instrumental elements of game playing, Skepticus' challenges to the Grasshopper's account of a game playing Utopia lose much of their force.

Finally, the Grasshopper argues that Skepticus' attempt to delay the onset of Utopia merely relegates people to the status of unwitting game-players. The voluntary attempt to delay Utopia through the avoidance of technological aids and/or the construction of barriers is, according to Suits, a voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles. To try to delay Utopia is, in other words, to play a game. While serious attempts to solve real-world problems need not take the form of game playing, attempts to voluntarily avoid those solutions, for the sake of preserving a pre-Utopian existence, amounts to a perverse form of game playing.

Given the logic of the case, it makes sense that people would prefer to be intentional rather than unwitting game players. Unfortunately, people often unwittingly play games, inferior and defective games at that, to their own detriment. And if people are game players, then it would make sense that the moves they make should help bring about, rather than delay, Utopian possibilities. It is necessary to become conscious game-players in order to take part in the most compelling and satisfying games. This makes the interpretation of the Grasshopper's final vision all the more important.

In the vision, the Grasshopper addresses several concerns about a game playing Utopia. The first has to do with the games themselves. While Skepticus worries about a Utopia of mere games such as checkers and tiddly-winks, the Grasshopper suggests that Utopia would be filled with much more sophisticated games. The Grasshopper suggests that Utopia will consist of "*really* magnificent games; games so subtle, complex, and

challenging that their inventors will be seen as the ludic Einsteins of the future.”¹¹⁷ This is counter to Skepticus’ fear that there would be nothing to do in Utopia, or perhaps best expressed as nothing *worthwhile* to do in Utopia. But Suits argues a fear over the lack of worthwhile activity in Utopia is unwarranted in light of the development of “*really* magnificent games.”¹¹⁸

The second concern of the vision addresses Skepticus’ concern over the fate of humankind. The Grasshopper states that for “those who are able to learn and enjoy our games” the metamorphosis from ant to grasshopper will be complete and the less adaptable ants will “die out forever.”¹¹⁹ This parallels the conclusion of the dream in which everyone ceases to exist once each is convinced he or she is a game-player. It also corresponds with the Grasshopper’s claim about dying in winter. If the Grasshopper stops playing games to live a prudential life in order to survive the winter, then he ceases to be a grasshopper. Whether due to winter or prudential living, the Grasshopper’s death, whether literal or figurative, is certain by summer’s end.¹²⁰ In the absence of prudential concerns, is there still a possibility for meaningful existence? Perhaps for the ant there is cause for ontological angst; but for grasshoppers and game playing humans, the future looks much brighter.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 23.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 24.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Suits, *The Grasshopper*, 9.

This leads to the final concern about the emphasis and value Suits places on intrinsic and instrumental activity. Ants are devoted foremost to instrumental concerns while the Grasshopper is devoted foremost to intrinsically satisfying living. Which life provides a better model for humanity? The ants could claim that their instrumental concerns are for the sake of intrinsic concerns. This, however, is a dubious claim on several grounds. The ants have difficulty abandoning instrumentally valued activity when it is no longer intrinsically valued. To an extent, it seems that the ants suffer from the need to eternally delay gratification. But winter, so to speak, comes for us all and to be engaged full-time in instrumental affairs seems to leave people woefully unprepared for such an end, something the ants fail to consider. But even more significantly, if the ants were truly to endorse a claim about the relationship of instrumental and intrinsic concerns, then it seems that they may be unwittingly endorsing a life of game playing.

It might be worthwhile for the ant to reexamine Suits' article "Is Life a Game We Are Playing?"¹²¹ Suits argues that "practically nobody wants to believe that life is 'merely' a game. We believe that life is serious, or hard, or capable of nobility, or demanding of sacrifice. We believe it is significant. But we believe that there is something essentially trifling and insignificant about games."¹²² This unsound belief that games are trivial, non-serious, and insignificant has been addressed above. But what if, conversely, it were simply stipulated that "life is a game. Live accordingly."¹²³

¹²¹ Bernard Suits, "Is Life a Game We Are Playing?," *Ethics* 77 3 (1967): 209-213.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 210.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 213.

Suits argues that such a “philosophy might claim to provide benefits of its own.”¹²⁴ It is quite easy to assume a negative interpretation of games, especially given many contemporary examples of game playing. But what if people sincerely considered that life really is a game? Or rather, what if they took seriously the idea that the life most worth living is a life devoted to game playing? Suits welcomes such considerations. He argues that “the discovery that life is a game might disclose unimagined sources of human action and stimulate unexpected feats of human invention.”¹²⁵

The role of game playing in the life most worth living challenges received wisdom. But after Suits identifies what exactly he means by games and Utopia, the connection seems much more plausible. Suits even has the Grasshopper defend the Utopian thesis against challenges brought forward by Scepticus. It is easy to remain skeptical based on general misconceptions about games and Utopia, but it would perhaps be helpful not to get caught up in semantic considerations. Suits is making a strong claim not about games per se, but about human behavior and the role of intrinsic and instrumental activities in forging meaning.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

Chapter 3

Suits and His Critics on Games, Utopia and the Good Life

Since its publication in 1978, Bernard Suits' *The Grasshopper: Games, Life and Utopia* has attracted a number of critical commentaries. Most of the early reactions focused on his account of the nature of games. Recent critics, however, have shifted their attention to Suits' claim that the life most worth living is a life centrally devoted to game playing. This shift in focus has been accompanied by a change from mostly positive to largely negative evaluations. Suits' Utopian thesis, in other words, has not received the generally favorable reviews that followed his account of games. I will examine several of the most important criticisms of the Utopian thesis in the present chapter.

In the previous chapter, the specific details of Suits' accounts of games and Utopia were elucidated before addressing how Suits identified a strong connection between them. This procedure was followed because it is important to know how the respective concepts are defined before examining potential relationships between them. The same logic holds when evaluating the claims of Suits' critics. Claims about the good life, and thus relationships between games and Utopia, are dependent on what these phenomena are. This dependency, in the literature about *The Grasshopper*, runs in two directions.

On the one hand, a critique may begin by attempting to discredit Suits' account of games or Utopia. If successful, this would affect the strength of his Utopian thesis. On the other hand, a critique may begin with an attack on Suits' conclusions about the good life. But the validity of any such criticism rests in part on an accurate understanding of

Suits' notions of games and Utopia. Either way, the spotlight falls on the two key elements of Suits' recommendations—first, the nature, scope, and significance of games and second, the kinds of activities that make sense in Utopia. I will begin with those critics who focus on games.

On the Nature of Games

It is appropriate to start this analysis with games. If the scope of games is not appreciated, Suits' Utopian thesis makes little sense. As noted previously, privileging games over other intrinsically satisfying activities is one of the most controversial claims made in *The Grasshopper*. Consequently, critics who do not understand games—either their unique aspects that separate them from other life activities or their significant range and flexibility that would have them showing up in unlikely places—will undoubtedly be unimpressed by recommendations about playing games in Utopia.

Thomas Hurka and John Tasioulas are skeptical about Suits' recommendations for precisely these reasons. They do not think that games can do the work that Suits' requires of them. But their skepticism is based, at least in part, on a failure to grasp Suits' full and rich notion of games.

In his introduction to the Broadview Press edition of *The Grasshopper*, Thomas Hurka argues that Suits' definition of games is significant because it answers philosophical concerns related to “how a conceptual analysis can ever be informative. It's supposed to show what's really involved in a concept we already understand, and the

fact that we understand it explains why we can recognize it as correct when it is.”¹²⁶ The power of Suits’ conception of games, according to Hurka, is that “the analysis can make explicit to us what we previously knew only implicitly or without knowing we knew it.... We recognize that it captures what we really had in mind in talking about games... but couldn’t formulate explicitly ourselves.”¹²⁷ From this account it is evident that Hurka appreciates Suits’ conceptual analysis of games.

However, in spite of praising Suits’ work, Hurka does not accurately recount it. In summarizing Suits’ definition, Hurka identifies “three main elements... the prelusory goal, the constitutive rules of the game, and the lusory attitude,” but he also omits a critical element, the lusory means.¹²⁸ Without explaining this omission, Hurka implies that the lusory means can be accounted for and are determined by the constitutive rules.

But Suits’ elaboration of the lusory means specifically identifies them as a distinct element of games—a factor that serves an important function in illuminating the necessary and sufficient conditions of this phenomenon. By not recognizing the significance of the lusory means, Hurka misinterprets the significance of Suits’ other elements, namely goals and rules.

Hurka’s omission of the lusory means forces him to place an inordinate emphasis on the rules and goals in determining the definitive role of achievement in games. He correctly identifies the importance of striking “a balance between too much and too little

¹²⁶ Thomas Hurka, “Introduction,” in *The Grasshopper: Games, Life and Utopia* (Orchard Park, NY: Broadview Press Ltd., 2005), 7-20.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 9.

difficulty” in games, but fails to understand how that balance is achieved.¹²⁹ It is through the juxtaposition of the lusory means and goal, not the rules and goal, that an activity and its level of difficulty are determined. While the rules serve to formalize the relationship between a game’s lusory means and goal, it is the lusory means that serve a greater function in meaningfully determining the difficulty of a game. This distinction is important given the significance that Hurka places on achievement.

Understood as an intrinsic good of games that recognizes the complexity of the game problem and the skills of the player, achievement is a critical component of games. But does it play as central a role as Hurka claims? Achievement is certainly a necessary consideration in determining the intelligibility of testing possibilities. This is the case because tests require solutions; and solutions, at least where human agency is required, can be identified as achievements.

But Hurka’s account of achievement does not sufficiently differentiate games from other activities which also entail difficulty and achievement. Hurka seems to identify the rules and goal as the sufficient conditions for distinguishing a game problem because they determine the level of difficulty and significance of achievement. But according to Suits’ analysis, rules and a goal do not sufficiently distinguish games from other activities that present challenges. Rather, the lusory means and lusory attitude play a significant role in identifying a problem-based activity as a game and determining how achievement hangs in the balance. The distinctive nature of difficulty in games, in other words, requires an account of the lusory attitude.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 14.

Because Hurka overemphasizes the role of rules and goals, he identifies the lusory attitude as merely providing a derivative good of game playing.

If playing in a game involves this narrower lusory attitude, then it has a second kind of value. The elements that define this type of playing are now internally related: the prelusory goal and constitutive rules give it a feature, namely difficulty, and the lusory attitude chooses it because of this feature. More specifically, if difficulty is in itself good, the goal and rules give it a good-making feature and the lusory attitude chooses it because of that good.¹³⁰

However, based on the analysis from chapter 2, it is clear that Suits did not understand the lusory attitude in this way. Rather he identifies it as the linchpin of games because the lusory attitude *generates* the selection of goal and means. For Suits, the lusory attitude is what makes the adoption of rule-limited means to achieve a goal intelligible. In other words, the lusory attitude is primary.

Hurka gets it backwards when he identifies the lusory attitude as a derivative good. In short, Hurka overstates the significance of the rules and goals, omits the critical role of lusory means, and understates the significance of the lusory attitude. Due to this misinterpretation, Hurka exaggerates the role that achievement plays in the good life. His focus on achievement distorts the definition of games. Not all activities centrally concerned with achievement are games. And, some games do not fit Hurka's standards of achievement.

John Tasioulas' account of games addresses Hurka's over-reliance on achievement. He identifies how Hurka discounts "many games, for instance, rock-paper-scissors, as not 'good games' because they are not 'challenging' or 'reasonably

¹³⁰ Ibid., 16.

difficult.”¹³¹ While achievement is certainly important, he continues, it is not the only factor in determining the merit of a game. It is not because of achievement that games such as Snakes-and-Ladders are considered “perfectly good,” but rather the enjoyment of playing the game itself.¹³² Tasioulas recognizes that games must sometimes be developmentally appropriate and, even when lacking a significant degree of difficulty, can serve as a stepping stone to more complex and difficult games. While these games may be difficult for novice gamers, Tasioulas claims that Hurka does not value the relative achievements of these developmental games.

While Tasioulas argues that Hurka’s focus on achievement is too limiting, he criticizes Suits’ definition of games for being too inclusive. Tasioulas identifies several activities that are not commonly considered games, but seem to fit Suits’ definition of games, such as the justified infliction of punishment and a pilgrimage.

The inclusion of these examples, Tasioulas believes, is problematic for Suits’ definition for two reasons. On one hand, if certain activities fit the definition of games, it would be hard to situate games so centrally within Utopian experiences. On the other hand, the unique power attributed by Suits to distinctive activities called games would be lost if certain everyday activities can be considered or easily converted into games. In both cases, however, Tasioulas concerns are ameliorated when the role of the lusory attitude in distinguishing games from other activities is considered.

¹³¹ Ibid., 240.

¹³² Ibid. Snakes-and-ladders is the British precursor to Chutes-and-ladders.

Tasioulas presents a serious challenge to Suits' definition when he claims that activities such as "justified infliction of punishment" or "the waging of a lawful war" would be included under Suits' definition of games.¹³³ This charge of over-inclusiveness, if correct, could have serious consequences for Suits' definition of games as well as the validity of a game playing Utopia. Tasioulas' challenge, however, relies on Hurka's misinterpretation of Suits' definition. Namely, it overstates the role of goals and rules while it undervalues the role of lusory means and the lusory attitude.

Tasioulas correctly identifies how game rules prohibit more efficient in favor of less efficient means and argues successfully that justified punishment and lawful warfare have such limitations. For example, in war laws prohibit such "potentially efficient means as the torture of enemy soldiers and the terror bombing of civilians."¹³⁴ But Tasioulas does not identify the logic by which these limitations are adopted. Suits, on the other hand, identifies several non-lusory reasons for accepting inefficient means to achieve a goal—specifically, ethical, bureaucratic, and prudential rationales. The prohibition of torture, of course, is more likely predicated on ethical, bureaucratic, or prudential considerations (or some combination of the three) rather than on lusory motivations.¹³⁵

Tasioulas is aware that moral constraints not only limit the means available in the court room, but also on the football field. "Players," he notes, "often accept the rules of

¹³³ John Tasioulas, "Games and the Good," *Aristotelian Society: Supplementary Volume* 80 (2006), 238.

¹³⁴ *Ibid*, 238.

¹³⁵ The bureaucratic or prudential rationale for prohibiting torture includes complying with certain treaties and attempting to reduce the likelihood of becoming the victims of torture.

paradigmatic games for moral reasons, for example, rules disallowing dangerous tackles in football.”¹³⁶ But the context in which these moral rules arise is important, for they do not serve as definitive of the game action itself. Moral prescriptions in part distinguish the acceptable and unacceptable forms of tackling, but do not determine what tackling is or explain why it is a valued part of the game. In short, that games entail moral reasoning, as matters of crime and punishment, does not justify a conflation of torture with tackling. Being clear about such distinctions will prove insightful for appreciating the difference between moral reasoning and game logic.

What about waging lawful warfare? If someone were to adopt a limitation of means just for the sake of engaging in an interesting war, this would certainly offend most peoples’ sensibilities. But offending sensibilities, according to Suits, is not a criterion that has much to do with determining whether an activity is or is not a game. Suits identifies several examples of how game-players engage in offensive behavior, such as a race car driver running over a child to win a race or a golfer willfully neglecting his family to pursue his golfing habit. Suits claims that such behavior says more about individuals who play games than it does about the nature of games per se. It is not the games themselves but the manner in which the players engage them that is problematic.

But as with the above example, Tasioulas’ example of legal warfare is problematic because any restriction of means in warfare is likely due to moral and prudential reasons as opposed to lusory reasons. Suits points out that “calling war a

¹³⁶ Ibid., 238.

game... is not only jejune but also, perhaps, dangerously misleading.”¹³⁷ Tasioulas claims that Suits’ account of games is overly-inclusive. This conclusion is suspect because he does not properly account for the role that the lusory attitude plays in distinguishing games from other activities (like legal warfare) that employ limited means to achieve a goal.

The above activities do not fit Suits’ definition of games because the restriction of means is not a lusory restriction informed by the lusory attitude. But Tasioulas’ extends his criticisms to other activities. He raises concerns about less dramatic or combative behaviors that seem to fit the definition, but are not commonly considered games. But unlike the previous examples, these activities appear to be informed by the lusory attitude.

The first example is a pilgrimage which he describes as “a goal-involving ritual... that is to be achieved only by complying with certain rules (such as traveling on foot via a circuitous route) that make the accomplishment of the goal more difficult.”¹³⁸ While it is likely that a pilgrim has a spiritual rather than a lusory attitude, Tasioulas further stipulates that “the rules may be complied with for the sake of the activity they make possible, e.g. a pilgrimage.”¹³⁹ If this is the case, pilgrims with a spiritual attitude would likely frown on a person making a lusory pursuit (i.e. a game) out of a sacred pilgrimage.

¹³⁷ Bernard Suits, *The Grasshopper: Games, Life and Utopia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978), 152.

¹³⁸ Tasioulas, “Games and the Good,” 239.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

Suits, on the other hand, wants to hold open the possibility that virtually any activity, including pilgrimages, could be turned into a game. He might identify such lusory pilgrims as unwitting game-players and a pilgrimage thusly undertaken would not present a serious challenge to his definition of games. As identified by Tasioulas, the lusory pilgrims are accepting the restrictions of means as lusory means with a lusory attitude. Even if pilgrims are unaware of how they are “gaming up” a pilgrimage, their pilgrimage is still undertaken as a game.

A second example involves someone “who teaches himself Russian in his spare time” and then decides to take “the A level examination in the subject as a test of his competence.”¹⁴⁰ Tasioulas claims that “no game is being played as a result.”¹⁴¹ But if the person taking the language exam is voluntarily attempting to overcome an unnecessary obstacle, then playing a game is precisely what he is doing. This may seem discomfoting because virtually any activity can be “turned into” a game. This charge will be addressed in detail when analyzing the scope of action in Utopia.

In pilgrimages and language competency exams, Tasioulas identifies activities that are not typically thought of as games. Still, both activities can be pursued as games even if participants are not consciously aware of doing so. Suits identifies similar grasshoppers-in-disguise who are involved in activities such as carpentry, science, law and medicine that are not traditionally considered games. Whether or not individuals are comfortable calling such behavior “games” may have to do with their biases or

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 248.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

preconceptions about the value of solving artificial problems. Unfortunately, this unease may prevent people from taking seriously Suits' definition of games and the implications it has for understanding human behavior and the good life.

Tasioulas' concern about Suits' definition of games as too broad can be addressed by identifying the role of the lusory attitude and lusory means in generating games. In the first examples provided by Tasioulas, he incorrectly identifies activities as games when they, in fact, do not satisfy all of Suits' game criteria. This is the case because the means limitation of the activities he cites cannot be attributed to the lusory attitude. In the latter examples, Tasioulas does not recognize how certain activities, although not commonly considered to be or even pursued as games, can be converted into bona fide games when the lusory attitude is at work and when, therefore, limiting means are adopted for lusory reasons.

The upshot of Suits' analysis in relationship to Tasioulas' criticisms is important. To appreciate both the limitations and breadth of gaming, according to Suits, we should not focus exclusively on the external trappings of the activity but rather on how and why that activity came to be the way it is and how and why individuals are engaged in it.

In addition to his claim that Suits' definition of games is over-inclusive, Tasioulas raises another concern. This one pertains to the assumed triviality of games on Suits' definition. Tasioulas claims that the goals of games must necessarily be trivial. This is his point when he asks rhetorically: "Are the prelusory goals of poker (increasing one's money) or boxing (incapacitating or outpunching one's opponent) also trivial?"¹⁴²

¹⁴² Ibid., 238.

This attribution of triviality misrepresents the nature of games and their goals as understood by Suits. Describing goals as arbitrary, rather than trivial, may be more faithful to Suits' account. The goals of games are established in relationship to specific means in order to make the game problem meaningful. In an important sense, there is nothing trivial about a game's goal. The goal is determined (rationally decided upon) in order to create a compelling test and the possibility of a highly desirable outcome. While this goal may be arbitrary—e.g. shooting a basketball into a hoop could be exchanged for any number of other projects—it is not inherently trivial. In fact, if the goal were changed without rhyme or reason, this would likely jeopardize the lusory project. Once again, the goal and limiting means have to be modulated carefully to fit the participant in “just right” ways. If this process is successful, game players encounter their goals (and the achievements they represent) as anything but trivial.

But what if game players are wrong? What if, from some more objective standpoint, the goals of games are trivial in the sense of being insignificant or unimportant? From a broader cultural perspective, activities such as football games and running races seem more trivial than activities directed at fighting hunger or educating our youth. Yet even this claim can be contested when one observes the energy, imagination, and money that are lavished on many popular games. But regardless, the arrival of Utopia would eliminate this distinction between trivial and serious activities because utility disappears under these ideal conditions. All sustenance and educational needs will be met. In Suits' Utopia, *all* problems would be trivial given technological advancements that would allow for them to be solved by “automated machines which are

activated solely by mental telepathy.”¹⁴³ The merit of any problem in Utopia, therefore, is in part determined by the extent to which it is intrinsically valuable.

But does the charge of triviality have merit in our pre-Utopian existence? According to Suits, as suggested briefly above, games need not entail a trivial goal nor entail trivial activity. Suits argues that a culture that is based on plenty (rather than scarcity) would engage us in the “serious cultivation” of “wonderful games.”¹⁴⁴ He reiterates this argument in “Games and Utopia” when the Grasshopper claims that we “ought to be devising really magnificent games... games so subtle, complex, and challenging that their inventors will be seen as the ludic Einsteins of the future.”¹⁴⁵ Therefore, while games and their goals may be trivial in one sense, they need not be unimportant.

If the previous analysis is correct, Suits’ critics did not present concerns that successfully undermine his account of games. Nor do their analyses jeopardize his Utopian thesis, at least not by way of raising unanswerable questions about the scope and importance of games. In fact, their questionable assertions about games limit their ability to appreciate Suits’ Utopian thesis. Neither critic supports Suits’ conclusions about the role of games in Utopia. But they have not demonstrated, in their criticism of Suits’ account of games, how games themselves prove detrimental to his Utopian thesis. In fact, their skepticism can be traced directly to their inability to appreciate the scope and

¹⁴³ Suits, *The Grasshopper*, 167.

¹⁴⁴ Suits, *The Grasshopper*, 176.

¹⁴⁵ Bernard Suits, “Games and Utopia: Posthumous Reflections,” *Simulation and Games* 15 1 (March 1984), 23.

value of games. This will be addressed in further detail below, but first an assessment of the critics' analysis of Suits' account of Utopia will be presented.

On the Nature of Utopia

A failure to appreciate Suits' recommendations about the good life may also stem from an inadequate understanding of his account of Utopia. Games, as noted earlier, are both an antidote and a promise for any present or future Utopian existence. The antidote is for the problem of having "nothing to do" and staving off boredom. The promise is related to the fulfillment that is experienced in any intrinsically-oriented life. But if Suits' account of Utopia is not coherent or is not otherwise compelling, then the validity of his Utopian thesis is jeopardized. Recent critics, in fact, have challenged Suits' account of Utopia on two grounds. The first charge is that Suits merely stipulates his account of Utopia while the second charge is that the concept of Utopia is incoherent. If true, these claims would pose serious threats to Suits' Utopian thesis.

At first, Suits stipulates the nature of Utopia based on Aristotle's account of the ideal of existence "—that is, a state of affairs where people are engaged only in those activities which they value intrinsically."¹⁴⁶ Mark Holowchak objects to this stipulated account because "Suits used his imagination too freely and set up a Utopia where game playing has to be... the ideal of human existence."¹⁴⁷ Holowchak finds this problematic because "Suits's utopic vision asks us to imagine too much. He asks us to assume that all

¹⁴⁶ Suits, *The Grasshopper*, 166-167.

¹⁴⁷ M. Andrew Holowchak, "Games as Pastimes in Suits's Utopia: Meaningful Living and the 'Metaphysics of Leisure,'" *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* 34 1 (May 2007), 88.

forms of labor could be accomplished through pressing a button or by using telepathy, but even such things, however trivial, are forms of work.”¹⁴⁸ Holowchak is concerned that Suits did not adequately account for how the conditions of Utopia will be met.

If Suits’ claims about Utopia are merely stipulated, Holowchak’s concern might well be justified. But Suits’ account of Utopia is more sophisticated than that. As noted in the previous chapter, Suits identifies intrinsically valued activities as insufficient to account for Utopian existence. In order to stave off boredom and have something meaningful to do, Suits argues for the importance of challenges. It is this voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles that is not only definitive of games but also of Utopian existence. In short, Suits began with Aristotle and the value of intrinsic living, but he did not stop there.

Accordingly, Holowchak’s critique addresses Suits’ point of departure on Utopia rather than his conclusions. This would be analogous to a critique of Suits’ definition of games that focuses only on his first claim that games involve the selection of inefficient means. In both cases, Suits begins with a stipulated claim that he rejects, modifies and further develops through argumentation.

In addition to the concern that Suits’ definition of Utopia is merely stipulated, some critics believe that Suits’ account is implausible. Keith Thompson argues that Suits’ account of Utopia is incoherent because it is premised on “an ideal world.”¹⁴⁹ According to Thompson, this is a problem because “there is no such thing; or rather there

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 91.

¹⁴⁹ Keith Thompson, “Sport and Utopia,” *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* 31 (2004), 63.

can be no such thing” as an ideal world and it would be best to “concentrate on piecemeal improvement of the here and now.”¹⁵⁰ Holowchak concurs, claiming that “Suits’s Utopia is a conceptually confused scenario, because it is a conceptually impossible scenario.”¹⁵¹ Utopia is incoherent because the demands of an ideal world cannot be met in the real world.

Thompson also discredits Suits’ Utopian claims because even though “usage has moved from etymology and ‘utopia’ has come to mean ideal place, a land where all is perfect,” it means, etymologically speaking, “no place.”¹⁵² Instead, Thompson recommends an amendment. He says that Suits should “delete *utopia*; [and] insert *intrinsic*. This really is a land worth seeking and living in.”¹⁵³ But this alternative fails to account for the necessary conditions of the good life that Suits identified. *Intrinsic* actually coincides with Suits’ “stipulated” account of Utopia which he rejects because it does not sufficiently account for the life most worth living.

Thompson makes an even stronger challenge to Suits’ account of Utopia when he argues that “value pluralism... rules out utopia.”¹⁵⁴ How Suits’ identifies Utopia, or the very possibility of an ideal world, excludes some of the very activities that people most

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 63, 61. Piecemeal improvements may very well envision an ideal world. They at least identify how the world can become better, if only bit by bit. The basis of judging such improvements seems to entail at least some form of idealism.

¹⁵¹ Holowchak, “Games as Pastimes in Suits’s Utopia,” 88.

¹⁵² Thompson, “Sport and Utopia,” 60.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 63.

¹⁵⁴ Thompson, “Sport and Utopia,” 62.

value. By limiting Utopian existence to game playing, Suits defines Utopia too narrowly. But Thompson thinks it is impossible to identify a singular conception of Utopian existence that could possibly account for the vast array of activities that people value.

Despite Thompson's charges, Suits' account of Utopia is compatible with value pluralism. When Thompson argues that value pluralism makes the possibility of Utopia incoherent, he may rightly be arguing that no specific activity can fulfill that role. Suits' definition of games and Utopia does not make reference to any specific activity per se but rather a particular way of doing something. Suits does not define what people will be doing in Utopia, but rather how they will be doing it. Kretchmar sums this up well: "it is the *way* we encounter difficulty that makes it compatible or incompatible with Utopia."¹⁵⁵ Suits' account of Utopia is grounded in two important claims—1) intrinsic activities are more meaningful than instrumental activities and 2) people are problem solving creatures. These claims should be understood as important anthropological findings that not only inform Suits' account of Utopia, but are also compatible with value pluralism. Identifying how human nature inclines us toward certain kinds of experiences rather than focusing on logical conundrums related to selecting between competing absolute values, these claims support a pluralistic worldview.

The most significant and direct challenges to Suits' account of Utopia, that it is merely stipulated and that it is incoherent, have been addressed. Broader challenges will be addressed pertaining to the distinctive role of games in Suits' account of Utopia in the next section. But at this point, the critics have not demonstrated in their challenges to

¹⁵⁵ Kretchmar, "The Intelligibility of Suits' Utopia," 70.

Suits' account of Utopia anything that would undermine his Utopian thesis. However, the most compelling criticisms pertain to Suits' Utopian thesis.

On Game Playing as the Central Activity of Utopia

The most serious challenges to Suits' Utopian thesis have been directly aimed at the relationship of games and Utopia. The most compelling criticisms fall into one of two categories. Some critics have argued that the role games play in Suits' Utopian thesis is incoherent. Other critics argue that Suits overstates the role of games and understates the importance of other activities in Utopia.

Critics such as Thompson and Holowchak argue that, even if the concept of Utopia is not incoherent, the significance that Suits gives to games in Utopia makes little or no sense. Thompson introduces a syllogism that attempts to show how the role of games in Suits' account of Utopia is incoherent. The syllogism is as follows: "In an ideal world there would be no pain, suffering or disappointment. Sport, at a high level, necessarily involves pain, suffering, and disappointment. Therefore, there can be no place for such sport in an ideal world."¹⁵⁶ Because this is a valid syllogism, he argues, there must be "something wrong with the premises or with sport lovers."¹⁵⁷ Thompson concludes that the error must be with the premise and, therefore, Suits both "clings to the concept of utopia and abandons it."¹⁵⁸ Thompson believes that Suits clings to an account

¹⁵⁶ Thompson, "Sport and Utopia," 60.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

of Utopia as the ideal of existence, but abandons it by trying to situate games as the central activity of Utopia. If the ideal of existence precludes pain and games invariably involve pain and suffering, then Suits' thesis is clearly self-contradictory.

Thompson claims that the "possibility of pain, suffering, and disappointment is inherent in choosing to participate in, or actively to support, high-level sport" and "the price one pays for the intense pleasure and satisfaction of seeking the best in a sphere of high skill and commitment, in an activity which one values for its own sake and not as a means to something else."¹⁵⁹

Although Thompson's identification of pain and suffering as part and parcel of the satisfaction derived from engaging in games is compelling, his conclusion about what this means for Suits' Utopian thesis is not. Although his syllogism points out a contradiction, it does not demonstrate Suits' Utopian thesis to be contradictory.

Thompson argues that the incoherence of game playing in Utopia is due to the premise of "an ideal world." But Suits would likely argue that the error lay in Thompson's exclusion of pain, suffering and disappointment from an ideal world. Suits, in fact, does not preclude these "negative" experiences in his account of Utopia. Thus, rather than discrediting Suits' account of Utopia, Thompson's inclusion of pain and suffering in the ideal world actually highlights an important aspect of Suits' Utopian thesis. It is not just any pain and suffering that is compatible with Utopia, but rather the pain and suffering that is associated with the effort and uncertainty that comes with trying to solve freely-chosen problems. The problem-solving associated with games creates the

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 63.

possibility for both suffering (a person may be unsuccessful) and meaning (success is difficult enough to merit a sense of achievement). The experience of pain, suffering and disappointment is evidence that Utopia entails activities worthy of a life most worth living. Situating game playing in Utopia, as Suits defines it, is not incoherent at all, but the condition for the intelligibility of Utopia.

Hollowchak also challenges the intelligibility of Suits' Utopian thesis by arguing that games are contentious by nature and are therefore incompatible with Utopia. He asks, "Is not game playing essentially a form of contentiousness, and is not contentiousness a psychological defect—something impossible in Utopia?"¹⁶⁰

This critique, however, rests on a confused notion of games. Suits does, as Hollowchak claims, suggest that in Utopia there will be no psychological defects because "all possible interpersonal problems have been solved by appropriate methods."¹⁶¹ But Suits' account of games, even to the extent that they are contentious, are not the same as the competition for "love, approval, attention, and admiration"—a form of utilitarian strife that is ruled out in Utopia.¹⁶²

Suits, in fact, anticipates this criticism in *The Grasshopper* when addressing Eric Berne's *Games People Play*.¹⁶³ There is an "irreconcilable difference between" how

¹⁶⁰ Hollowchak, "Games as Pastimes in Suits's Utopia," 91.

¹⁶¹ Suits, *The Grasshopper*, 167.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 148-153.

Berne and Holowchak identify games and how Suits identifies games.¹⁶⁴ While the former two individuals claim that people are playing a game “in order to secure their psychological survival,” Suits argues that “playing ‘genuine’ games is precisely what economically *and* psychologically autonomous individuals would find themselves doing.”¹⁶⁵

Even when “essentially a form of contentiousness,” game playing need not be interpreted in a negative manner. Robert Simon’s account of competition as a “mutual quest of excellence” and Kretchmar’s analysis of testing and contesting excellences serve as important correctives to Holowchak’s claim that competition rests on psychological needs and manipulations.¹⁶⁶

If it is not contradictory to include games in Utopia, despite the pain, suffering and contentiousness they often occasion, then perhaps such logical problems are associated with game challenges. Both Thompson and Holowchak express such concerns for the following reason: “[If] any challenge can be met spontaneously through telepathy [then] nothing is challenging.”¹⁶⁷ If utility is unnecessary in Utopia, why not eliminate the utility inherent in solving game problems too?

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 153.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Robert Simon, *Fair Play: The Ethics of Sport* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2004). R. Scott Kretchmar, “From Test to Contest: An Analysis of Two Kinds of Counterpoint in Sport,” *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport 2* (1975): 23-30. R. Scott Kretchmar. “In Defense of Winning.” in *Sport Ethics: An Anthology*, ed. Jan Boxill (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing Co., 2003), 130-135.

¹⁶⁷ Holowchak, “Games as Pastimes in Suits’s Utopia,” 91.

But Suits recognizes the importance of challenges, which is precisely why he is interested in preserving the possibility of meaningful challenges in Utopia. Just because a challenge can be spontaneously met or eliminated, does not mean it must be. An online crossword puzzle could be completed with a click of a button. But it can also be completed by filling it in by using the accompanying clues and accepting the challenge of the crossword puzzle.¹⁶⁸ For Suits, Utopia is not best conceptualized as requiring the elimination of all challenges and problems, but only the elimination of necessary difficulties.

Thompson still fears that Suits' account of Utopia entails a dystopian future. In an alternative version to the Grasshopper's dream, Thompson recounts "the Dream" of a golfer in heaven whose golf game continues to improve until he realizes that he "would play a round of golf in 18 shots... and then what?" And then what indeed! In time he realizes that what seems ideal is totally boring. Remember that Suits wanted more challenging games even in his utopia (without seeing the irony that a challenge is only a challenge if you can fail to meet it)."¹⁶⁹

This criticism also misses the mark. Perhaps a technological future will come in which houses can be built at a push of the button and holes-in-one can be assured with every golf shot. But even in a Utopian world that presents no necessary problems we, as problem-solving creatures, will still desire and be able to develop artificial problems.

¹⁶⁸ Suits offers other examples such as a labyrinth with paper walls and mountain climbing. Someone could walk through the paper walls to exit the labyrinth or insist on exiting it labyrinthically by not breaking the paper walls. Someone could utilize other means to the top of the mountain or resist using technological aids such as escalators or helicopters.

¹⁶⁹ Thompson, "Sport and Utopia," 63.

The rules of games can evolve to address advances in technology. Additionally, even if technology allows for a golfer to play a round of golf in 18 shots, the golfer need not utilize that technology. Eliminating the need to solve problems does not eliminate the desire or possibility of solving the problems. An online crossword puzzle can literally be solved with the press of a button. But it can still be undertaken as a game with a lusory attitude using only lusory means. Even if technology in Utopia eliminates both necessary and unnecessary problems, our desire to engage in, create, and attempt to solve such problems by implementing lusory means still remains.

Thompson's vision of heaven runs counter to Suits understanding of human nature as well as the joys and pleasures that go with it. Thompson's interpretation of the dream is, for Suits, dystopian because it assumes that there can be no challenges in Utopia.¹⁷⁰ Thompson's elimination of the problematic would lead to a life of boredom while Suits' argues that it is precisely the acceptance of challenges that most forcefully unlocks the life most worth living. Rather than identifying how technology makes a game playing Utopia incoherent, Thompson's dream accurately accounts for why problems are still being pursued in Utopia.

Furthermore, Suits does not insist on a technological future. In "Games and Utopia" he argues that even an effort to forestall a future technological age would, in effect, introduce a game playing existence. By reintroducing instrumental activity into Utopia, what is at issue is not what problems or technology exist but rather how people attempt to overcome unnecessary problems.

¹⁷⁰ This is supported by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's work on optimal experience. See page 46.

Thompson and Holowchak regard Suits' Utopian thesis is incoherent. But their criticism does not adequately show why games and Utopia are incompatible. Suits' Utopian thesis is compatible with pain and suffering, contesting, and lusive problems in a technologically advanced future.

Some critics focus on issues other than incoherency. Even if it is granted that gratuitous problem solving makes sense in Utopia, why they ask, would its residents choose games to the near exclusion of other intrinsically satisfying activities? Why football over reading a good book? Why Sudoku over lounging around in the sun? Suits' preference of games over other intrinsically valued activities has led many critics to question whether Suits has not exaggerated the significance of games in his Utopian thesis. Some suggest that other activities should be more readily recognized as part and parcel of a Utopian existence; while others claim that games would actually be subordinate to other activities.

Before addressing the critics' concerns about the content of Utopia, it is worth recounting what Suits' position was regarding other activities in Utopia. Games clearly hold a privileged status in Suits' account of Utopia. While "game playing performs a crucial role in delineating" the ideal of existence "which cannot be performed by any other activity," "game playing is not the sole occupation of Utopia."¹⁷¹ For Suits, games are the linchpin of Utopia, "the essence, the 'without which not' of Utopia."¹⁷² Additionally, "the notable institutions of Utopia" will be those that foster games.¹⁷³

¹⁷¹ Suits, *The Grasshopper*, 166, 176.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 176.

Suits nevertheless recognizes that there will be a role for other activities in Utopia. In short, Suits privileges games, but does not argue that they will be the sole activities in a world where work-like utility is no longer needed. This is important information when considering the critics' claims.

Tasioulas is concerned that the range of activities in Suits' Utopia is too exclusive. He challenges Hurka's focus "on 'excellence' manifested in skilful game playing and the 'admiration' it merits" because "there are innumerable instances of game playing in ordinary life that we judge worthwhile even though they do not... realize the excellence/admiration pairing."¹⁷⁴ In rejecting excellence and achievement in games as the primary good, Tasioulas presents an alternative account of the primary good—namely, the concept of play as developed by Johan Huizinga in *Homo Ludens*.¹⁷⁵ By inserting play as the primary good, Tasioulas broadens the activities of interest in Utopia.

Tasioulas also introduces play as the primary intrinsic value of games in order to remedy the over-inclusiveness of Suits' definition of games.¹⁷⁶ As addressed above, this concern rests on a mistaken notion of Suits' definition of games. Therefore, by instituting play (as opposed to games) as the central activity of Utopia, Tasioulas does not account for Suits' argument that play, or intrinsically valuable activity, is insufficient to account for the good life.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Tasioulas, "Games and the Good," 240.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 244.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 248.

In attempting to correct the account of games by Hurka that is too narrow, Tasioulas goes too far by overstating the role of play. This is significant for two reasons. On one hand, play, or intrinsically valued activity, is not sufficient to account for Utopia. On the other hand, play is not sufficient to account for games. By relying on the concept of play, which is more expansive in scope than both Utopia and games, Tasioulas does not account for factors that have an important role in distinguishing games and Utopia—particularly the significance of problem solving. In turn, this makes his account of Utopia too broad.

While Tasioulas presents an alternative account to Suits' Utopian thesis, Holowchak questions the significant role of games in Utopia. He answers this concern through an empirical observation of "the sorts of noninstrumental activities that we now do in our spare time."¹⁷⁷ Although a significant amount of time is spent playing games, "we also spend much time in other leisure activities... Therefore, an appeal to experience fails to show that playing games is the sole, or even chief, human end."¹⁷⁸

Holowchak's conclusion about the significance of games does not follow from the empirical data for several reasons. First, Holowchak argues that empirical data shows that game playing is not the sole human end. But this observation, as already noted, does not contradict Suits argument. This is so because Suits does not preclude the possibility of other activities in Utopia

Secondly, Holowchak's empirical findings do not adequately address the relationship between noninstrumental activities and the life most worth living. It is

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

important to remember that the Grasshopper is a speculative Utopian who moves from more obvious to less obvious insights about Utopia. One implication of his insightful revelations is that aspiring Utopians will become more involved in game playing. People engaging in other activities are like the ants that lack of awareness about how prudential activities are self-defeating. In part, engagement in non-game leisure activities may be due to their lack of awareness about the significance of games to the good living—a kind of ignorance that will dissipate when work activities decline and disappear. As more people are informed by Suits' Utopian thesis, there may well be a shift in the empirical findings.

Finally, Holowchak's findings do not consider how people are engaging in activities not commonly considered games. Holowchak claims that Suits' account of Utopia “rules out other activities that could be suitable candidates for meaningful autotelic activity—activities such as reading, writing, and contemplation, which Suits disregards.”¹⁷⁹ But are we certain that individuals have not “gamed up” life and engaged in these activities as games? Would the inclusion of activities such as reading and contemplation make Suits' definition of games too broad? Such an inclusion, as noted before, would suggest that nearly anything could be turned into a game.

But it may not be problematic to associate gaming with activities not commonly thought to be games. It is not altogether unreasonable to categorize some forms of reading as games. While not all reading is intrinsically valued activity, some certainly is or can be. Of course, the qualification of reading as an “intrinsically valued activity”

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

would merely make reading a form of play. But even when reading is an intrinsically valued activity, the reader must consider what will be intrinsically rewarding to read. Most readers will give some thought to select material that is neither too easy nor too challenging. Some readers may challenge themselves by setting a goal of reading a certain number of books, say, over a summer vacation. The number they set is provocatively challenging.

While it may seem awkward to identify an activity like reading a game, many readers do engage in the voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles by freely choosing to read more complex and sophisticated texts about a subject, or by reading a challenging large number of books, just for the sake of the challenge it makes possible. This analysis applies not only to other possible ways that reading could be transformed into a game, but also to virtually any other activity as well. Suits' conclusion about the potential expansion of gaming seems reasonable. It is reasonable because it is not difficult to imagine how virtually any life activity can be artificially problematized.

In addition to his empirical findings, Holowchak claims that "Suits has not shown that game playing is the ideal of human existence—he has merely stipulated it is. Suits has defined Utopia in such a way that there are no reasonable candidates for meaningful Utopian activities, other than sportive activities, and that amounts to question begging."¹⁸⁰ Holowchak summarizes Suits' logic in the following way:

1. In Utopia, all instrumental activities can be accomplished by mere thought.
2. Therefore, in Utopia all instrumental activities are in vain.

¹⁸⁰ Holowchak, "Games as Pastimes in Suits's Utopia," 92.

3. Game playing is the only activity that people *really* want, and do not need, to do.
4. An activity that people really want, and do not need, to do is the only autotelic activity.
5. Therefore, game playing is the only autotelic activity.
6. Therefore, people will play games in utopia.¹⁸¹

But Holowchak's summarization of the definition is actually narrower in scope than allowed by Suits' definition. Holowchak argues that other activities such as reading and contemplation are "no less suitable... for the human ideal" and that "Suits gives no reasons for ruling those out and preferring game playing."¹⁸² But for Suits, as argued above, it is not what someone is doing that is distinctive of game playing so much as how someone is doing it. Reading and contemplation can be examples of games based on Suits' broad definition just as he demonstrated with activities associated with carpentry, science, law, and medicine. Holowchak may still take issue with the role of games in Utopia, but his concerns about the content of Utopia are moderated by Suits' broader definition of games.

Holowchak also questions the scope of activity in Utopia by asking the reader to "imagine someone in Suits's Utopia who comes to loathe acting in an autotelic manner all the time. Thus, he lays aside his telepathic talents and decides to do everything nonautotelically."¹⁸³

Suits already addresses this concern in the examples of William Striver and John Seeker in *The Grasshopper* and his discussion of doctors and lawyers in "Games and

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 92.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 91.

Utopia.” Suits’ analysis identifies how the nonautotelic pursuits of Striver and Seeker lead to either the downfall of Utopia or people becoming unwitting game-players, something that Holowchak does not address.

Additionally, Holowchak asks if there is “really reason to believe that a society where no activities could be instrumental in any significant sense would be utopic?”¹⁸⁴ While Holowchak may be concerned that games are trivial, his greater concern pertains to a world exclusively devoted to intrinsic activities—that is a world without the values and satisfactions of work.

But Suits welcomes instrumental activity in Utopia because it plays a crucial role in the construction of games. Suits identifies people who intrinsically value activities that are typically done for instrumental reasons as grasshoppers-in-disguise. Hence, Suits’ final claims about Utopia are not that “*objectively* instrumental activities have been banished... [;] what has been banished is simply all activity which is not *valued* intrinsically.”¹⁸⁵ In Suits’ account of Utopia, people find significance in more activities than Holowchak recognizes.

Hurka concurs with Holowchak’s concern about the range of activities in Utopia. Hurka claims that any suggestion that “game playing is the supreme human good” is an exaggeration.¹⁸⁶ His argument is that “Suits’ claim of supreme value for game playing is bold-in fact, too bold to be believable. If we think about it, there’s no supreme good;

¹⁸⁴ Holowchak, “Games as Pastimes in Suits’s Utopia,” 92.

¹⁸⁵ Suits, *The Grasshopper*, 173.

¹⁸⁶ Hurka, “Introduction,” 12.

many different things have value, and many different good lives can be built around them. Nor are Suits' arguments for his claim persuasive."¹⁸⁷

Hurka's claim is perplexing, given his favorable assessment of Suits' definition of games. Hurka argues that Suits' definition of games shows "how conceptual analysis can be illuminating" and praises it for three different reasons.¹⁸⁸ First, Suits subjects "his ideas to rigorous critique before presenting them as true."¹⁸⁹ Second, Suits presents a structural definition by "citing abstract properties... that can be shared by activities with quite different surface features."¹⁹⁰ And finally, Suits' definition makes "explicit what we previously knew only implicitly."¹⁹¹

Suits' Utopian thesis arguably fulfills these three factors, identified by Hurka, as providing a conceptually illuminating analysis. Suits subjects his account of Utopia to a rigorous critique, although it largely takes places in "Games and Utopia." Suits presents a structural definition of Utopia that includes intrinsically valued activity, problem-solving, and the lusory attitude as key elements. Suits may not have met the third criterion as successfully as with his definition of games, but he still made his Utopian thesis explicit. Since these characteristics of conceptually illuminating analysis apply, why then does Hurka so quickly dismiss Suits' Utopian thesis?

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 13.

¹⁸⁸ Hurka, "Introduction," 12.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

Perhaps it is for reasons similar to Suits' remarks about Wittgenstein's analysis of games. Hurka "looked, to be sure, but because he had decided beforehand that" games were not the central activity of Utopia, "his look was fleeting, and he saw very little."¹⁹² Without seriously entertaining the possibility of Suits' Utopian thesis, Hurka argues that in Utopia other activities possess a greater amount of good than games. Remember that Hurka argues that game playing involves an "initial good of difficulty with the further good of loving difficulty for itself," which makes it "not a fundamental but a derivative good. It wouldn't appear on a list of basic goods, since it combines two other, more fundamental given goods in a specific way."¹⁹³ This conclusion, however, as discussed previously, is based on a confused account of the lusory attitude. For Suits, the lusory attitude is not a derivative good, but rather the linchpin of game playing that serves to identify the basic good of games.

Hurka also argues that there are more valuable activities in Utopia because game playing is not the supreme value and that "playing in games is also in one respect a lesser good."¹⁹⁴ Hurka asks the reader to imagine two activities that are "equally complex and difficult, one of which produces an intrinsically good result while the other does not. Perhaps one is political activity that liberates an entire nation from oppression while the other involves winning a high-level chess tournament. The first activity will, of course,

¹⁹² Suits, *The Grasshopper*, x.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 16, 17.

¹⁹⁴ Thomas Hurka, "Games and the Good," *Aristotelian Society: Supplementary Volume* 80 (2006): 233.

be instrumentally better, because it produces a separate intrinsic good.”¹⁹⁵ He goes on to claim that “when an activity aimed at a valuable end successfully achieves that end and therefore is instrumentally good, its being instrumentally good is an extra source of intrinsic goodness.”¹⁹⁶

This seems a strange calculus. The good of game playing is devalued as a derivative good, but political activity is elevated for its derivative value. Additionally, Hurka claims that “because game playing has a trivial end of result, it cannot have the additional intrinsic value that derives from instrumental value.”¹⁹⁷

But, as argued above, the goal of games need not be trivial. While Suits’ claims about more sophisticated games may depend on non-trivial goals, Hurka’s conclusion suggests that intrinsic value is dependent upon instrumental value. But if someone undertakes an activity for instrumental reasons, there is no guarantee that it will ever be valued intrinsically—no matter how much good it entails. Suits recognizes that intrinsic and instrumental values coexist when he argues against radical autotelicity and radical instrumentalism, but clearly gives primacy to intrinsic value. In contrast, Hurka gives primacy to instrumental value. But if Aristotle and Suits are right, the good life is more compellingly justified when grounded in intrinsically valued activity, as opposed to instrumental projects.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

Kretchmar has the most favorable assessment of Suits' Utopian thesis. He argues that Suits' "Utopia is the hard-won existence of human beings who gradually solve their workaday problems and then find, in games, a delightful solution for having too little to do."¹⁹⁸ But Kretchmar questions Suits' claim that, by eliminating all necessary problems, there is nothing to do in Utopia. He also questions the claim that games specifically need to fill the void left by Utopia. While recognizing that "having 'nothing to do,' in a sense might be exactly what people, during all their years of frenetic and arduous labor, envisioned for their future," Kretchmar takes issue with the characterization of there being nothing to do in Utopia for two reasons.¹⁹⁹ First, "Suits's conclusion that in Utopia there is nothing to do is false. In fact, it has to be false if we are to recognize the significance and utility of games."²⁰⁰ Second, Kretchmar recognizes that despite there being no necessary problems to solve in Utopia, "countless things remain to be done.... These alternative 'doings' might include eating, drinking, and making merry; traveling; listening to Beethoven; holding hands; meditating peacefully; relaxing; sitting in the sun; and so on."²⁰¹

In regards to there being "nothing to do," Suits identifies something quite meaningful to do in Utopia in the form of games. But having "nothing to do" may best be understood not literally, but rather as a description of a person's attitude toward

¹⁹⁸ Kretchmar, "The Intelligibility of Suits' Utopia," 75.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 71.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 72.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*

available activities. Given the possibility of several activities to engage in, a person who does not find any of them personally meaningful or interesting may claim that he or she has nothing to do.

Kretchmar's recognition that there are indeed other activities in Utopia does not discredit Suits' claim about Utopia. Kretchmar claims that Suits "never answers the question raised earlier by Prudence and Scepticus about 'why a life freed from necessity to work be identical with a life dedicated to games.'"²⁰² But Suits does in both *The Grasshopper* and "Games and Utopia," identifying games as "the without which not" of Utopia.²⁰³ Kretchmar asks "why not a life of contemplation, as recommended by Aristotle? Or why not an existence of sensuous and aesthetic pleasure? Or why not a life of play that embraces a variety of intrinsic satisfactions- an existence that may include games but does not place such extraordinary weight on their shoulders?"²⁰⁴ But if activities such as contemplation and reading can be understood as a game, then at issue is not the types of activities, but rather the way people engage in them.

Conclusion

In the preface to *The Grasshopper*, Suits prepares the reader to follow the argument where it leads, even if it leads to surprising and disconcerting discoveries. Situating game playing at the center of the good life certainly qualifies as a disconcerting conclusion. But Suits finds that his definition of games converges with his definition of

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Suits, *The Grasshopper*, 176.

²⁰⁴ Kretchmar, "The Intelligibility of Suits' Utopia," 72.

Utopia. The critics have challenged Suits' accounts of games and Utopia as well as his Utopian thesis. But as shown in the above analysis, their criticisms do not adequately discount Suits' thesis. So why has Suits' Utopian thesis not gained more traction? I will argue that it may well be due to an ambiguity that resides in Suits' account of the lusory attitude. In the next chapter, I will attempt to illuminate the lusory attitude in an effort to give greater credence to Grasshopper logic, ideals, and dreams

Chapter 4

Elucidating the Lusory Attitude in Defense of the Life of the Grasshopper

In the last two chapters, Suits' Utopian thesis was analyzed and the concerns of recent critics were addressed. I argued that, for the most part, these critics have not discredited his claims about games, Utopia, and the good life. Why then has Suits' Utopian thesis not garnered greater acceptance?

In this chapter, I will argue that this can be attributed primarily to the faint attention given to the lusory attitude subsequent to the publication of *The Grasshopper*. Because sport philosophy literature focuses primarily on rules and goals, the lusory attitude (the linchpin of Suits' definition of games) has been largely neglected.

To address this neglect, I will flesh out the lusory attitude by describing two of its components—gratuitous logic and lusory experience. Gratuitous logic fixes “the intelligible limits of [games] by petitioning its internal logic” and operationalizes “that logic by petitioning the critically informed and shared conception of practice-communities themselves.”²⁰⁵ Although important for understanding the lusory attitude and subsequently the role of games in Utopian existence, gratuitous logic does not sufficiently account for the lusory attitude. What then grounds the internal logic and informed practice-communities? I will argue that it is our lusory experience that grounds gratuitous logic.

²⁰⁵ William J. Morgan, *Leftist Theories of Sport: A Critique and Reconstruction* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 222.

Unfortunately, lusory experience has not been developed in the sport philosophy literature. Therefore, descriptive accounts will be presented in order to elucidate the key features of lusory experience. Additionally, philosopher John Dewey's notion of experience, in particular the dual moments of doing and undergoing, will be utilized to shed light on lusory experience and how it is a distinct form of play. Informed by lusory experience and gratuitous logic, a more robust account of the lusory attitude can be generated.

How the values, actions, and behaviors of the Grasshopper exemplify "the life most worth living" is more apparent with this more sophisticated account of the lusory attitude.²⁰⁶ This appreciation is implied in the work of several other writers.

With a robust account of the lusory attitude, it is possible to reinterpret the modern stories from chapter 1. These stories ("Speaking in tongues," "With all due respect," and "Reinventing the wheel") were originally presented as common sense refutations of the life of the Grasshopper. In this chapter the stories are retold from a perspective that is informed by the lusory attitude; and therefore show the life of the Grasshopper as intelligible, authentic, and meaningful.

On the Significance of the Lusory Attitude

The intelligibility of Suits' Utopian thesis is grounded in the lusory attitude. The logic of the matter goes like this. Suits' account of Utopia depends in large part on his definition of games. The linchpin of his definition of games is the lusory attitude.

²⁰⁶ Bernard Suits, *The Grasshopper: Games, Life and Utopia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978), ix.

Therefore, the lusory attitude plays a significant role both in understanding and appreciating Suits' account of Utopia.

Unfortunately, the significance of the lusory attitude has largely been neglected. Reasons for this neglect, despite sport philosophers' metaphysical preoccupations, were outlined in the first chapter. I argue that these analysts primarily focus on the goals and rules of games and then support this contention by analyzing the work of Thomas Hurka. I suggest that this failure to see the centrality of the lusory attitude is unfortunate. This is the case, I argue, because the lusory attitude not only distinguishes games from other forms of activity, but also establishes games as the type of activity distinctively suited for Utopian existence.

I am not alone in thinking that a focus on rules and goals has distorted our vision of games. Several sport philosophers have recently criticized the reductive account of games in the literature. One of them is Graham McFee who, in *Sport, Rules and Values: Philosophical Investigations into the Nature of Sport*, argues that rules do not play the central role in determining the nature of sport.²⁰⁷ He turns to experience and real-life examples in making this argument, but he also rejects metaphysical arguments in general.

There is irony in McFee's analysis because he identifies Suits' account of games as an exemplar of the rules-based determinacy. In point of fact, however, Suits' work is in many ways compatible with McFee's position. The main difference is that McFee does not formulate a structural or metaphysical account of what unifies his real-life

²⁰⁷ Graham McFee, *Sport, Rules and Values: Philosophical Investigations into the Nature of Sport* (London: Routledge, 2004).

examples in elucidating the nature of games while Suits, of course, presents what he sees as the necessary and sufficient conditions for games.

Recent debates pertaining to broad internalism are in part informed by the insufficiency of goals and rules to determine games.²⁰⁸ The practice of games, including the establishment of their goals and interpretation of their rules, derive their intelligibility from gratuitous logic—that is, a sense of what the game challenge is about. Those involved with the game, including referees, umpires, players, and fans, utilize gratuitous logic in their involvement with the games. Decisions about which rules to enforce and how to enforce them are based on understandings that transcend the written rules.

Broad internalists have identified the distinction between wooden and informed interpretations of game rules, but they have not accounted for why and how this distinction is made. They have gone part way in recognizing the significance of the lusory attitude in accounting for games and their intelligibility. But they also need an account of the lusory experiences that informs and justifies the employment of gratuitous logic. I will develop such an account on the foundation of experience and rationality in the next section.

Despite the advancements of McFee and the internalists on the nature of games, the lusory attitude has not been comprehensively accounted for. Lacking an account of the lusory attitude leaves several questions about the nature and importance of games.

²⁰⁸ The debate on the nature and significance of an internalist approach to sport is found in the following articles: Robert L. Simon, “Internalism and Internal Values in Sport,” *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* 27 (2000): 1-16. Robert L. Simon, “From Ethnocentrism to Realism: Can Discourse Ethics Bridge the Gap?,” *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* 31 2 (October 2004): 122-141. J. S. Russell, “Moral Realism in Sport,” *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* 31 2 (October 2004): 142-160. William J. Morgan, “Moral Antirealism, Internalism, and Sport,” *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* 31 2 (October 2004): 161-183.

What distinguishes game playing from other forms of behavior? How might we promote game playing? Should we promote game playing? If so, why or for what reasons?

An informed account of the nature of games is essential to answering the above questions in a sophisticated manner. The lusory attitude, as I will show, plays a crucial role in answering metaphysical questions about the nature of games, as well as axiological, ethical and aesthetic questions about the good life. Conceptually confused accounts of the lusory attitude, therefore, have two effects. They lead to conceptually confused accounts of games. They also generate doubts about Suits' account of Utopia, as well as his normative claims about the life of the Grasshopper. This is the case because Suits' vision of games as the primary activity in Utopia is counter-intuitive. A life devoted to games would seem to be a life wasted.

As I noted in chapter 2, Suits identifies four elements—the prelusory goal, lusory means, constitutive rules, and the lusory attitude—as the necessary and sufficient conditions of game playing. He also identifies the lusory attitude as the linchpin that unifies the other elements of the definition. Constitutive rules that outline the goals and means of games are important, but they are derivative. Recognizing the significance of the lusory attitude requires highlighting the role it plays in determining the nature of games, including the codification of their goals and rules.

On the basis of this reasoning, it is clear that a consideration of the role of rules and goals, in determining the nature of games, is insufficient. As noted previously, most human behavior, and certainly most intentional human behavior, is both goal-directed and rule-governed. By accounting only for goals and rules without any other qualifications, it is impossible to distinguish games from many other forms of human

activity. Understanding the role of goals and rules in games must, therefore, be grounded in a deeper analysis that situates the nature of games in the proper context.

This context is established by distinguishing two important features of games. First, in order to differentiate games from other activities, it is important to recognize that games require a selection of inefficient means. But this is not sufficient because other activities, such as moral and bureaucratic activities, also entail a limitation of means. Therefore, a second feature of games pertains to how the adoption of inefficient means is justified. Suits, as I have noted, suggests that such adoption occurs precisely for the sake of the activity it makes possible. These two features—intentional limitation and gratuity—distinguish games from other rule-governed, goal-directed activities.

The limitation of means is an important, but not sufficient, condition of games. It is important because it highlights the centrality of problem-solving in games. It is insufficient because it does not rule out other types of behavior, such as moral behavior, that impose difficulties. Although means are limited in moral behavior, the limitation is put in place for reasons quite different than those required for game playing. This distinction can be seen when considering the following hypothetical case.

In a mile race, a “victory” could be assured if a competitor were to kill his opponents. The competitor wins the race and at the post-race interview the commentator begins by saying: “Congratulations! You sure killed them out there.” The winner angrily answers: “You mean that I beat them soundly, not that I literally killed them. Is that right, because I most assuredly did not kill them?” The commentator replies: “Yes, I know you didn’t really kill them, but now that you’ve raised the question, wouldn’t it

have been much easier to win the race by doing so? For one thing, you wouldn't have had to work so hard to win."

The runner's answer to this question is important. He could reply: "That would be murder!" With this response he is providing a moral rationale for not killing his opponents. Or he could provide a rationale based on the lusory attitude: "Well, if I killed my opponents, I couldn't very well race against them, now could I?" So, the logic of the situation is this. While there may be game playing reasons for limiting how we go about our affairs, there are also other kinds of limitation we impose on the means available to us. The most obvious among these are ethical constraints, but one can also imagine economic, technological, political, bureaucratic, and many other forms of imposed inefficiency.

How the limitations of means are specifically determined, and why those limitations are accepted, is of great importance. Suits' uses the term "lusory attitude" to signify how and why limitations function in games. There are a host of possible reasons for using less than ultimate means in achieving a goal but, in games, the acceptance of limitations is simply for the sake of the activity this acceptance makes possible. In playing games, players accept artificial limitations in attempting to achieve certain outcomes because they appreciate the experience that this acceptance creates. In games, people follow the rules not just because they are moral, or politically astute, or theologically respectful, but because following those rules gives them the challenging experiences they desire.

What does the lusory attitude identify that is not readily apparent through a discussion of goals, rules, and means? Some scholars, such as Hurka, consider the lusory

attitude to be derivative of the rules-goal relationship.²⁰⁹ For Hurka, the logic of setting up appropriately difficult and interesting problems is the central issue in gamewrighting. The lusory attitude merely appreciates this type of problem—that is, the artificial difficulty that the rules and goals provide. But this is not how Suits defines the lusory attitude or understands the nature of games. And, this is not how he understands the gamewrighting process.

According to Suits, the lusory attitude is not derived from the rules and goals. It is actually the other way around. The lusory attitude allows us to recognize in our own daily experiences the possibilities for interesting challenges and identify tasks that are too difficult, too easy, and just right. Whether at work or in our routine daily affairs, our lusory sensitivities gravitate toward those activities that are appropriately challenging. The lusory attitude is, in a sense, “at work” as we experience the whole of our existence. This being “at work” can be understood to have two phases. Our lusory attitude 1) identifies what in our experience is most worthwhile and provocative and 2) formalizes, enhances, and preserves it by developing a convention—that is, by stipulating goals and means through the game’s rules.

Suits’ emphasis on the lusory attitude is established on his understanding of human beings or, more properly, human nature. The lusory attitude is something that is, as it were, built into us. We seek out interesting problems to engage in.

In constructing his definition of games, Suits begins by distinguishing between play (intrinsically valued activity) and work (instrumentally valued activity). According

²⁰⁹ Thomas Hurka, “Introduction,” in *The Grasshopper: Games, Life and Utopia* (Orchard Park, NY: Broadview Press Ltd., 2005), 7-20.

to a famous proverb, “All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy.” Some have suggested that the converse is true, that “All play and no work makes Jack a dull boy.” But both seem to be inadequate when accounting for Suits’ conception of Utopian existence. Games are important for good living because they unify elements of work and play. Play that does not require some effort or challenge can leave us feeling bored. Work that is not personally meaningful can leave us feeling anxious and alienated. But in games, through the lusory attitude, our engagement with an activity can be characterized as play that is work and work that is play.

It is the lusory attitude that is the primal element of games, not a derivative element after all. It is by means of the lusory attitude that we are able to identify problems as attractive and recognize the meaningful possibilities inherent in our lived engagements. Conversely rules, as they function to limit our means for achieving goals, make sense in games only from the perspective of the lusory attitude. Otherwise, the adoption of artificial limitations to projects that would require us to spend extra time, extra energy, and potentially cause extra frustration in completing them amounts to little more than lunacy. It is for this reason that the lusory attitude is central to any appreciation of game playing as an intelligible and desirable form of human behavior. Because the lusory attitude makes game playing intelligible, it also serves an important function in identifying the value of the life of the Grasshopper.

In the next section, I will flesh out the lusory attitude in greater detail. At this point, however, the significance of the lusory attitude should be apparent.

On the Nature of the Lusory Attitude

As noted above, Suits identifies the lusory attitude as the linchpin of his definition of games. It not only holds the other elements together, but determines the necessary and sufficient conditions of games. The lusory attitude, a complex and nuanced concept itself, consists of two main features. The lusory attitude is, in part, comprised of the gratuitous logic which serves to distinguish the internal logic of games and the practice community. But it is also comprised of lusory experience which serves as our lived encounters with “just right” intrinsically valued problem solving. Identifying these features not only makes the lusory attitude a more robust concept, but it also explains why games are so central to the good life.

Gratuitous logic plays a critical role in determining the nature of games. In *Leftist Theories of Sport*, William Morgan develops a sophisticated account of gratuitous logic. Morgan argues “what is crucial to the proper demarcation of [games]... is to notice how its gratuitous logic is bound up with its constitutive rules.”²¹⁰ But his interest in constitutive rules is for the sake of getting at the “underlying gratuitous logic” of games which has two prongs.²¹¹ The first prong “tries to fix the intelligible limits of [games] by petitioning its internal logic” and the second prong “tries to flesh out that logic by petitioning the critically informed and shared conception of practice-communities

²¹⁰ Morgan. *Leftist Theories of Sport*, 211.

²¹¹ *Ibid*, 214.

themselves.”²¹² The gratuitous logic “furnishes a compelling reason to make the gratuitous difficulties of such practices the central point of one’s engagement in them.”²¹³

The elucidation of gratuitous logic is an important development that has spurred considerable debate between sport philosophers Nicholas Dixon, John Russell, and Robert Simon.²¹⁴ Analyses of gratuitous logic and accompanying accounts of the internal logic of games have been beneficial for several reasons. As noted previously, gratuitous logic serves to distinguish games from other activities and as a source for addressing axiological and ethical considerations of games. It also functions as a resource for conveying the intelligibility of games.

But the gratuitous logic of games does not sufficiently account for the intelligibility of games because it leaves unanswered several serious questions. Why this logic? On what basis are the proper demarcations of games made? How are these demarcations determined? What grounds this logic? These questions are best answered by turning to lusory experience.

In “The Posterior Analytics,” Aristotle argues that “from experience... there comes a principle of skill and of understanding.”²¹⁵ It is through experience that judgments are made and rationality is forged. Likewise, the operations of gratuitous logic can be observed in our diverse lusory experiences. Gratuitous logic is an embodied,

²¹² Ibid, 222.

²¹³ Ibid, 224.

²¹⁴ See note #4.

²¹⁵ Aristotle, *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 165.

human way of thinking and seeing. It is grounded in the lived experience of special moments—moments that present people with new possibilities in the form of welcoming problems. If we were not, in diverse ways in our daily lives, attracted to “just-right” problems, gratuitous logic would not make any sense.

Lusory experience plays an important role in determining the concrete operations of gratuitous logic. It is in and through our lusory experiences that interesting possibilities and challenges are identified. The experience of challenges as more or less fulfilling is the basis for identifying important lusory distinctions. When a challenge is experienced as too easy or too hard, the lusory possibilities are arrested. When the challenge is experienced as just right, lusory possibilities are maximized because our lusory skills match well with the lusory problems. These experienced distinctions in our lusory encounters determine the basis for the gratuitous logic’s formal gamewrighting actions. The sensible construction of rules and means-ends relationships in games is contingent on the lusory experiences of embodied, intelligent, gendered, and culturally embedded individuals.

Because lusory experience is the ground of the gratuitous logic, it is important to be clear about what lusory experience entails. Game experiences involve confrontations with just-right problems. They are just-right because these problems are human constructs. If a game is experienced as not very compelling because its challenges are too hard, too easy, or, for any other reason, not very interesting, then its rules can be changed. But the change is predicated upon experiencing a just-right problem. Without making such a change, the game will likely be discarded and replaced by a more rewarding activity.

It is for this reason that in formalizing game problems, gratuitous logic must answer to lusory experience. The interpretation of rules requires a person to be grounded in the lusory experience and not merely in the gratuitous logic of a game. Rules are often thought of as fixed, but rule changes are made in even the most established games. What is the basis for these changes? How can a change to the rules be justified? An account of the gratuitous logic of games is insufficient without some account of lusory experience. One reason for changing rules is to preserve the lusory project or promote new lusory possibilities. Identifying how different rules affect a game requires consulting lusory experiences that reveal important lusory distinctions. Another reason to change rules is to clarify the lusory project. It is difficult to codify a set of rules that clearly determines the lusory problem (what is to be solved) and lusory means (how this can be done). For the most part, lusory experience and ludic rationality are inseparable in the playing of games. But when quandaries arise over the meaning or intention of a rule, it is necessary to recognize meaningful distinctions in lusory experience that inform gratuitous logic.

In the next chapter, I will present an extended description of how jumping over a creek can be a lusory experience. But several other descriptive accounts of lusory experience may prove illustrative.

The first example, the chalk toss, is an activity that I have used in the classroom in order to illustrate some features of games. It involves trying to toss the chalk into the chalk tray. While placing the chalk in the tray is not the least bit challenging, trying to throw it into the tray from even an arm's length away can be. While perhaps only trivially interesting, it can become quite absorbing. From the moment the chalk leaves

the thrower's hand, there is a sense of uncertainty and drama. Will it land in tray or not?

When it makes first contact with the tray, will it "stick" or bounce out?

As the instructor, I take the first few turns. After my first failed attempt, some students offer unsolicited advice on how to make a better throw such as—"Get more loft." "Reach forward." Other students just moan, suggesting by voice and body language, that it cannot be done. But with my first successful toss, an awakening occurs. Some wide-eyed students want to take a turn. Others heckle me and suggest that I cannot repeat my success. Others say that I should try from a greater distance. Students become engaged spectators who "ooh" successful shots and "aah" near-misses.

With improvement in skill, the difficulty can be elevated by increasing the distance between the thrower and the chalk tray. But the chalk toss can also be made more difficult by utilizing environmental factors, such as throwing the chalk over the hanging light fixture. The variations are virtually limitless.

Throwing the chalk requires some thought, planning, and practice. What makes for a good piece of chalk to toss? It cannot be too big (hard to successfully land in the tray) or too small (hard to control the trajectory of the chalk toss). What technique works best? How good can a person become at this?

The purpose of this simple example is to show how the simple activity of putting chalk in a chalk tray can be problematized such that the very problem is experienced as a welcome possibility and pursued with enthusiasm.

Receiver-defender kinds of activities offer different types of lusory experiences. Rather than presenting an individual test, receiver-defender activities involve mutual

testing that has participants pursuing different ends. The receiver is trying to catch some object while the defender is trying to prevent the receiver from catching it.

A delicate balance exists between these two projects. The greater the distance between the defender and receiver, the easier for the receiver and more difficult for the defender achieving their respective goals become. But if the defender is allowed to make contact with, or even restrain, the receiver, then the difficulty is increased for the receiver and diminished for the defender. The balance between not too close and not too far away is found at some mid-point for both the receiver and defender. Determining rules that allow for just-right distance restrictions are based on negotiating a mutual challenge that engages both parties. Uncertainty must exist for both the receiver and the defender in order to build drama and excitement in this lusory confrontation. This lusory experience is centrally incorporated into many larger lusory projects, for example basketball, football, lacrosse, and Ultimate.

A final descriptive account of the lusory experience comes from perhaps an unlikely source, the kitchen. More than just the preparation of a meal for sustenance, this activity involves an aesthetic expectation for the meal as well as an expectation that a couple will prepare the meal together. Rather than the competitive nature of the previous activity, this activity is cooperative. The couple must identify interesting recipes, negotiate responsibilities in the preparation for cooking, and perhaps learn new culinary skills. In the process, they may discover new ingredients and new flavors. And they make more than just a meal, but forge a life together. While not a direct goal of the activity, a less lusory approach to making dinner would not likely have the same result.

But is making a meal together really a lusory experience? After all, the couple must eat. But in this activity, the selection and preparation of the food is experienced as an enjoyable problem. The adage about too many cooks in the kitchen presages the challenges of communication and allotting tasks that exist in working together to prepare a meal. The aesthetic demands mean that the dinner will be more expensive than simpler alternatives or even store bought alternatives (e.g. making your own pesto). The preparation is also more time consuming than buying microwavable meals or simply ordering in.

Despite all the ways that the unnecessary obstacles of communication, cost, and time can be avoided, the couple engages these limitations as delightful and intrinsically satisfying aspects of preparing and enjoying a delicious meal together. As currently portrayed, making a meal may not be a game. But it can certainly be formalized through gratuitous logic that draws out key limitations of means. While it may seem most readily turned into a gastronomic game, it could just as easily be turned into a relationship game in which sweet tension is experienced through the restriction of means that limits interaction to only culinary forms.

Within these descriptions of lusory experiences, two important aspects can be identified. A worthwhile account of lusory experience must adequately entail the give and take of our experience. John Dewey refers to these two aspects of experience as doing and undergoing. He accounts for these two aspects in describing a person lifting a stone:

In consequence he undergoes, suffers, something: the weight, strain, texture of the surface of the thing lifted. The properties thus undergone determine further doing.... The process continues until a mutual

adaptation of the self and the object emerges and that particular experience comes to a close. What is true of this simple instance is true, as to form, of every experience²¹⁶

An account of lusory experience must account for both undergoing and doing.

In games, lusory experience certainly includes an undergoing. Indeed, people undergo things which intrigue, inspire, and inform them. The distance from the thrower to the chalk tray. The weight of the chalk. The near-miss as the chalk clanks out of the tray. The presence of the defender inhibiting your path to the object. The outstretched hands of the receiver that exceed your reach. The smells accompanying the cooking. The tastes that accompanying consuming the meal. Possibilities for undergoing are presented at every turn in these lusory experiences.

But the engagement with these possibilities is an invitation to doing. Lusory experience entails a willingness to respond to our undergoing, a doing based on the challenges and possibilities that we encounter. Making an adjustment to the trajectory of your chalk toss. Deciding to toss from further away or over some obstacle. Reaching out toward the object to be caught. Cutting in a different direction or changing speed to create distance from the defender. Cutting and dicing vegetables. Going to the farmer's market for fresh produce. Selecting a recipe that is mutually enticing.

Good games are durable because their gratuitous problems cannot easily be solved. Lusory experience abides to the extent that novel challenges are found in our undergoing lusory experience and new skills are developed in our attempts to meet the challenges ever more effectively. The chalk toss can be made more difficult by moving

²¹⁶ John Dewey, "Having an Experience," in *The Philosophy of John Dewey (Volume II): The Lived Experience*, ed. John J. McDermott (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1973), 562.

away from the chalk tray. The rules governing the interaction between receiver and defender can be changed to preserve competitive balance. Or, more complicated recipes requiring advanced culinary skills can be selected.

The doing and undergoing of lusory experience requires that some form of challenge is present. It is for this reason that Suits recognizes that play, per se, is insufficient for the good life. To be sure, play demands a doing, what Drew Hyland calls a “responsive openness.”²¹⁷ But in some forms of play, the quality of this doing is not sufficient to sustain interest or generate meaning. For example, merely lying on the beach or sitting in a hot tub are “doings” that typically wear thin and do not engage us for long. Thus, Suits is adamant about the value games add to play. Lusory experience is not merely valuing something intrinsically, but intrinsically valuing both a gratuitous problem (undergoing) and the necessary problem-solving associated with it (doing).

The above analysis of the lusory attitude is necessarily preliminary. Huizinga’s *Homo Ludens* still serves as an important point of departure for studies on the nature of play. Suits’ *The Grasshopper* serves the same function related to games. Elucidating the lusory attitude is but a branch of study that can trace its lineage to the works of these scholars. While Suits introduced the lusory attitude, this dissertation attempts to contribute an important element—lusory experience—in a vein similar to the contributions about gratuitous logic made by Morgan.

Lusory experience accounts for the intelligibility of games. Lusory experience shows how uncertainty is meaningful and valued, such as standing with chalk in hand

²¹⁷ Drew Hyland quoted in: Klaus V. Meier, “An Affair of Flutes,” *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* 7 (1980): 31.

preparing to toss it into the tray from a challenging distance. It shows how drama unfolds in testing situations, such as in the interactions of the receiver and defender. It also shows how unnecessary effort can lead to deep satisfaction, such as a couple sharing a delicious meal they made together.

As previously stated, gratuitous logic does not sufficiently determine the lusory attitude. Lusory experience is another important aspect that both grounds gratuitous logic and serves to illuminate the role of the lusory attitude in games. While elucidating the lusory attitude and clarifying the role of lusory experience and gratuitous logic is a complex research agenda that will require sophisticated analysis by many competent philosophers, it is possible given this preliminary account to defend the life of the Grasshopper and justify why the good life should be devoted to game playing.

Defending the Life of the Grasshopper

Bernard Suits claims that the life of the Grasshopper exemplifies the life most worth living. Such a claim is challenging given that the life of the Grasshopper is centrally devoted to playing games. Is such a life really the life most worth living? Is such a life even defensible?

Scholars have not reached a uniform conclusion. For Aesop, the life of the Grasshopper was a cautionary tale. Even in Suits' account, the Grasshopper recognizes that his "shabby comeuppance" is due in large part to his devotion to a "premature ideal." But it would be too hasty to conclude that the Grasshopper has doubts about the cogency of his Utopian thesis. Indeed, when scholars recognize that the Grasshopper is

fundamentally inspired by the lusory attitude (rather than a prudential orientation toward life), their assessment of the life of the Grasshopper is typically much more favorable.

The Grasshopper is perhaps best known from his casting in Aesop's fable of the Grasshopper and the Ant. As the story goes:

One fine day in winter some ants were busy drying their store of corn, which had got damp during a long spell of rain. Presently up came a grasshopper and begged them to spare her a few grains. 'For,' she said, 'I'm simply starving.' The ants stopped work for a moment, though this was against their principles. 'May we ask,' said they, 'what you were doing with yourself all last summer? Why didn't you collect a store of food for the winter?' 'The fact is,' replied the grasshopper, 'I was so busy singing that I hadn't had the time.' 'If you spent the summer singing,' replied the ants, 'you can't do better than spend the winter dancing.' And they chuckled and went on with their work.²¹⁸

According to Aesop, an ant's life makes sense because it is a prudent life. The ant prepares for impending hardships that life may present and is not caught off-guard by difficulties that can be reasonably expected. In contrast, the Grasshopper is a model of improvidence and carelessness. The Grasshopper, according to Aesop, gets what he deserves.

But does he? And is an ant's life really so deserving of praise? It is worth noting that the life expectancy of an ant is 90 days. Therefore, an ant is likely dead before ever having an opportunity to enjoy the fruits of its labor. The entomological moral of the story is this: all work and no play is the complete life narrative of the prudent, but dead, ant. Perhaps a life devoted solely to work or prudential activity is even more tragic than the demise of the Grasshopper. At least the Grasshopper derives satisfaction from life

²¹⁸ Aesop, *Aesop's Fables*, ed. D. L. Ashliman (New York: Barnes & Noble Classics, 2003), 146.

along the way. Ants spend their life delaying gratification. The life of ants does not seem, on balance, to exemplify the life most worth living.

But there is an even greater problem with the prudential commitments of the ant. In *The Life of the Grasshopper*, Henri Fabre discredits the ant's story. "Fame is built up mainly of legend; in the animal world, as in the world of men, the story takes precedence over history. Insects in particular... have their fair share in a folk-lore which pays but little regard to truth."²¹⁹ In fact, according to Fabre, the likely hero of Aesop's cautionary tale is the Cicada rather than the Grasshopper. And while "there are sometimes relations between the Cicada and the Ant... these relations are the converse of what we are told." As it turns out, the cicada "is never dependent on the aid of others for his living."²²⁰ Rather, it is the Ant, "a greedy spoiler, who monopolizes every edible thing" that "robs the Cicada of his possessions."²²¹ Fabre offers a more likely account of natural history:

Sitting, always singing, on the branch of a shrub, [the Cicada] bores through the firm, smooth bark swollen with sap ripened in the sun... There are many thirsty [ants] prowling about... the smallest, in order to reach the well, slip under the abdomen of the Cicada, who good-naturedly raises himself on his legs and leaves a free passage for the intruders. [The larger ants] develop into turbulent aggressors, ready to chase away from the spring the well sinker who caused it to gush forth.²²²

²¹⁹ Henri J. Fabre, *The Life of the Grasshopper* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1917), 1.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 9-10.

²²² *Ibid.*, 10-11.

Contra Aesop, it is the Cicada who is the “industrious artisan” who “gladly shares his possessions with the Ant, a hardened beggar.”²²³ In some cases, ants even go so far as to kill the Cicada that provides access to the food the ants store for winter.

From an entomological perspective, sufficient evidence exists to discredit Aesop’s account of the ants and the Grasshopper. But discrediting the lives of ants does not justify the life of the Grasshopper. Can a strong case be made for the life of the Grasshopper? Several commentators have presented favorable evidence that calls for a revision of Aesop’s account of the life of the Grasshopper.

In the children’s book *John J. Plenty and Fiddler Dan: A New Fable of the Grasshopper and the Ant*, John Ciardi offers a validating account of the life of the Grasshopper. In Ciardi’s version, the ant John J. Plenty repeats the phrase “More! Get more! No time for play! Winter is coming!”²²⁴ So prudent is John J. Plenty that he barely uses up his stored reserves in winter, but when summer comes he vows to collect even more food for the following winter. On the other hand, the Grasshopper (Fiddler Dan) plays music all summer. John believes that Fiddler Dan will surely not survive the winter but, when spring arrives, he astonishingly hears Fiddler Dan’s song. Ciardi offers this alternative moral to the story:

I guess about all I really know
Is- save a little or save a lot,
You have to eat some of what’s you’ve got.

²²³ Ibid, 12.

²²⁴ John Ciardi, *John J. Plenty and Fiddler Dan: A New Fable of the Grasshopper and the Ant* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1963), 4.

And-say what you like as you trudge along,
 The world won't turn without song.
 And-fiddlers grow thin and their hands turn blue
 When winter comes, but they pull through.²²⁵

Ciardi identifies a significant difference between the life of John J. Plenty and Fiddler Dan. For Ciardi, the Grasshopper's life has value in part because it is informed by plenitude rather than scarcity, the central feature in the culture of Utopia according to Suits.²²⁶ For Ciardi's Grasshopper, "there's this about music—and oh, it's true!—It never stays stopped."²²⁷ This lusory attitude is an ontological cut that accepts the limitation of life, along with the experience of possibility. Why sing when the end is certain to be bleak? We do so, the Grasshopper discovers, because abundance exists even in our limitedness. This lesson may be strange and perhaps even disconcerting, but for Suits' Grasshopper games persist and for Ciardi's Grasshopper the music endures.

John Updike offers another alternative to the classic fable in his short story "Brother Grasshopper." Fred Emmet (an ant) and Carlyle Lothrop (a grasshopper) marry sisters. Although Fred comes to identify Carlyle as the older brother he never had, he has great difficulty understanding Carlyle's behaviors and appreciating his choices. Everything Carlyle does, from his imposition of exotic locations for family vacations to his purchases of outrageous clothing and expensive cameras, seems excessive. Fred thinks that "all these fond, proprietary gestures subtly spelled power. Even taking the

²²⁵ Ibid, 32-33.

²²⁶ Suits, *The Grasshopper*, 176.

²²⁷ Ciardi, *John J. Plenty and Fiddler Dan*, 33.

photographs places Carlyle on a level above them, an all-seeing appropriator of their fleeting lives.”²²⁸

Carlyle’s life is not free from problems. For example, he struggles to live within his means. But Fred’s existence is every bit as messy. Even so, Fred has difficulty being charitable to Carlyle or sympathetic about Carlyle’s plight until after his death. At the moment he scatters Carlyle’s ashes, Fred finds a moral in the air... “all those old photographs, those old conglomerate times Carlyle had insisted upon, were revealed to Fred as priceless—treasure, stored up against the shadows.”²²⁹

In the short story, Updike humanizes both the ant and the grasshopper by showing a transformation in Fred’s attitude towards Carlyle. Rather than harboring a negative and resentful attitude, Fred grows to appreciate and value Carlyle’s approach to daily existence. Most importantly, Carlyle’s life demonstrates how the life of the Grasshopper entails sophistication and complexity. Updike appreciates and defends the life of Carlyle as a cultivated life. Not just a creature of whim and fancy, Carlyle exerts effort towards realizing goals even if it is in a manner drastically different than Fred. Still, Updike portrays Carlyle’s life as one to be valued, even by the ants.

Updike demonstrates how even the prudential ant can come to appreciate the life of the Grasshopper. Updike is not alone in demonstrating this movement. In his clever essay “Against Joie de Vivre,” Phillip Lopate presents a vision of the good life that is antithetical to Suits’ Utopian thesis. He advocates for the worldview of the ants when

²²⁸ John Updike, *Brother Grasshopper* (Worcester: Metacom Press, 1990), 22.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 34.

arguing that “we should... stay away from any future ecstatic experiences that spoil everyday living by comparison.”²³⁰ But Lopate admits in an introduction to the essay that “the central proposition is nonsensical—no one can be against the joy of life.”²³¹ An argument against *joie de vivre* (or the lusory attitude or the good life), from the perspective of Lopate, is untenable. Despite the ant logic that is cleverly represented in the essay, Lopate concedes that the life of the Grasshopper exemplifies a more compelling option.

Eric Wilson, in *Against Happiness*, is “afraid that our American culture’s overemphasis on happiness at the expense of sadness might be dangerous, a wanton forgetting of an essential part of a full life.... To desire only happiness in a world undoubtedly tragic is to become inauthentic, to settle for unrealistic abstractions that ignore concrete situations.”²³² But he makes clear that he is “not questioning joy in general.”²³³ Wilson takes issue with facile accounts of happiness that are averse to the important role that struggle and effort play in achieving the good life. “To be against happiness, to avert contentment, is to be close to joy, to embrace ecstasy. Incompleteness

²³⁰ Phillip Lopate, “Against Joie de Vivre,” in *The Art of the Personal Essay*, ed. Phillip Lopate (New York, Anchor Books, 1994), 731.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 715.

²³² Eric G. Wilson, *Against Happiness: In Praise of Melancholy* (New York: Sarah Crichton Books, 2008), 6.

²³³ *Ibid.*, 7.

is the call to life. Fragmentation is freedom. The exhilaration of never knowing anything fully is that you can perpetually imagine sublimities beyond reason.”²³⁴

Wilson’s argument against happiness in fact parallels Suits’ Utopian thesis. Both claim that intrinsically valued activity is insufficient to account for the good life. Fulfillment only comes through challenge. Engaging in unnecessary problems and limiting means prove to be powerful mechanisms for experiencing exhilaration, an exhilaration that is unknown by those who engage solely in non-challenging pleasures. For Wilson, an experience of happiness that does not involve some form of effort is void of significance. He is perhaps making an even stronger claim than Suits who makes clear his preference for games without dismissing other forms of play not centered on problem-solving.

A final consideration in the defense of life of the Grasshopper comes from poet C. K. Williams. In his essay “Admiration of Form: Reflections of Poetry and the Novel,” Williams presents a vision that depends on the “belief in the possibility of a kind of radiance of life” that is accessed only through form.²³⁵ In assessing the value of the novel, he wonders “how much of our self-consciousness consists of the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves. Our education for the most part consists of the narratives by which our culture wishes to identify itself. We are our stories, or so we believe.”²³⁶ But what happens when the stories we tell ourselves no longer speak to us?

²³⁴ Ibid., 150.

²³⁵ C. K. Williams, *Poetry and Consciousness* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998), 112.

²³⁶ Ibid., 111.

Williams' concern about those who cling to their novels parallels Suits' concern for the ants that cling to their work. He worries that they may have a "passionate aversion to a too intense involvement in what they are doing and undergoing."²³⁷ Operating under a closed narrative, they are "victims of a cultural despair whose roots are so obscure and whose effects so general that they aren't even aware of the fact they are operating in an unimaginably desolate spiritual universe."²³⁸

Williams identifies a "dedication to form" as the answer this despair.²³⁹ In poetry, "there's a meeting that has to be induced between the text and the reader.... It demands an engagement, an exertion."²⁴⁰ Also, "we tell poems to ourselves until both their rhythms, their forms, and their meanings find, or perhaps create, a place in our voices."²⁴¹

The role that poetry plays for Williams is comparable to the role that games play for the Grasshopper. The formal structures of poetry identify limited, but gratuitous, means of expression. It is form, rather than content, that delineates the vision of a radiant life and Utopian existence respectively.

In explaining why the life of the Grasshopper exemplifies the life most worth living, Suits insists on the centrality of games. This is important because both the ant and the grasshopper are problem-solving creatures. While Aesop identifies ants as successful

²³⁷ Ibid., 119.

²³⁸ Ibid., 124.

²³⁹ Ibid., 113.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 127-128.

²⁴¹ Ibid., 132-133.

problem solvers, he accuses the Grasshopper as an avoider of problems. But Suits identifies the Grasshopper as a specific type of problem solver, one who is concerned with those problems that are deemed most interesting and worthwhile. Unable to avoid problems, the Grasshopper chooses to solve those problems for intrinsic reasons. Moreover, because games are shaped by grasshoppers for grasshoppers, game problems hold greater promise of intrinsic worth than do the dilemmas faced at work. Thus, the Grasshopper is like the ants in regards to being a problem-solving creature. But there is a distinct advantage to being the Grasshopper. He lives for the joy of problem solving and has a great deal to say about the content and shape of the problems he faces.

Suits, as we have seen, is not alone in presenting a favorable account of the life of the Grasshopper. Ciardi, Updike and Lopate recognize the importance of being committed to intrinsically valued activity. Updike, Wilson and Williams recognize how fascinating problems can be and how our efforts to solve them can engage us so fully. Updike and Williams identify how taking matters into one's own hands is important for selecting meaningful, just-right problems as opposed to relying on the vicissitudes of natural work (that may have varying powers of intrinsic value) or natural play (that likewise may have varying degrees of attraction). The works of these other authors affirm Suits' conclusions about the value of the Grasshopper's life and the importance of game playing in the good life.

Even so, any claim to the effect that the good life consists of game playing may still be disconcerting. If Suits has taught us anything, it is that any compelling account of the good life must make room for meaningful challenges. Importantly, these challenges must be freely accepted and voluntarily chosen. Games fit this description. So why is a

life of game playing so disconcerting? Why do we tend to see games as trivial activities and game playing as a waste of time? Perhaps it is because we struggle to see the joys of life amidst its pressing obligations. Perhaps it is because we struggle to experience and comprehend games from the perspective of the Grasshopper.

Reinterpreting the Modern Stories about the Life of the Grasshopper

In chapter 1, three modern stories were presented that questioned the value of a life devoted to game playing. The stories interpreted the life of the Grasshopper as unintelligible, inauthentic, and trivial. But with the elaboration of the lusory attitude, it is possible to reinterpret the stories so that they accurately reflect the life and logic of the Grasshopper. These reinterpretations lead to a more positive conclusion about the value of the life of the Grasshopper. In fact, these modern stories now identify the life of the Grasshopper as being intelligible, authentic, and meaningful.

Speaking in tongues

Remember, the Grasshopper is always talking a good game, literally. Every life situation provides an opportunity to make some allusion to game playing. By always using games to interpret and elucidate life, the Grasshopper seems to be speaking in tongues, communicating in a language that is nonsensical and unintelligible. Many find the Grasshopper's use of game playing utterances strange and discomforting, if not entirely incoherent.

But it is worth noting that the Grasshopper's reliance on game playing is born out of his experience. Having teased out the importance of idealized problems from his

everyday experience, the Grasshopper is expressing how game playing informs his life. If he is speaking in tongues, it is neither nonsensical nor unintelligible. Rather, it expresses the joys he encounters when engaging in just-right problems.

The Grasshopper is not positing some kind of a-human or other-worldly perfection. Rather, he recognizes that he is, through and through and from head to toe, a problem seeking and problem solving creature. Likewise, we humans are what we have been built to be. We will not “change our colors” magically in some future Utopian existence. The prudential lives of the ants are unintelligible in Utopia because their problem-solving skills will no longer be needed. This is why the Grasshopper has an advantage. His problem-solving skills will still be valuable in Utopia. Indeed, they will be given freer reign than ever before.

The Grasshopper recognizes that Utopia will be like those better times that we have come to know in our pre-utopian existence—both at work (when problems are occasionally serendipitously delicious) and at play (when we temporarily, in this imperfect life, stumble on the problematic as delightful). This means that the Grasshopper’s account of Utopia is consistent with our pre-Utopian existence. It is also intelligible because we can understand that what is so delightful in brief glimpses now will be even more fulfilling when utility no longer dominates our existence.

With all due respect

The Grasshopper spends a significant amount of his time engaged in game playing. Considering such behavior to be irrational, some acquaintances of the Grasshopper question such devotion. “With all due respect, don’t you think you are

taking this game playing just a little too seriously?” It seems to them that the Grasshopper is not only living an insincere life by attending to lesser matters, but also an inauthentic life by not focusing on the most important things. They argue that if the Grasshopper is really concerned about a life most worth living then, with all due respect, he would devote less time to playing games.

This perspective fails to consider the importance of our role in designing games. We make games just the way we want them so that the challenges meet our capabilities and generate interest. This just-rightness has multiple elements to it. Some are formally acknowledged by gamewrights and others are probably found via intuitive faculties and trial and error adjustments.

Because games are “just-right” on multiple levels (e.g. “just-right” problems, “just-right” symbolic meanings, and “just-right” cultural fit), they are unusually powerful play attractors. Suits’ vision of the good life is about play; but his wisdom lies, in part, on how play is most powerfully promoted for problem solving creatures like us.

“With all due respect,” the Grasshopper argues, “it is the lusory attitude that assures that I am sincerely and authentically interested in the activities I pursue.” The Grasshopper is sincere about how intrinsic values inform his actions, even the selection of inefficient means that are available to solve gratuitous problems. Unlike Bernean game players who are “playing a con,” the Grasshopper earnestly pursues problems specifically fashioned to be just right.²⁴² The life of the Grasshopper is authentic because

²⁴² Suits, *The Grasshopper*, 148-153. See also: Eric Berne, *Games People Play* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1996).

his activities are not pursued for ulterior reasons but, with all due respect, for the joy and meaning that can be found in the activity itself.

Reinventing the wheel

The Grasshopper spends time playing the same games, doing the same things over and over again. After a while, the repetition of playing the same game must either wear thin or wear out. A sense of “been there, done that” must arise as game problems become exhausted. A life devoted to game playing may seem like reinventing the wheel because it fails to engage people in the evolving problems related to improving existence.

But reinventing the wheel and game playing may not be purposeless and meaningless at all. From the perspective of common sense, we know that solving certain kinds of problems can be both interesting and gratifying. Even when, by objective measures, the goal of a game may be trivial, we do not necessarily experience it as such. Rather than trivial, games are often experienced as meaningful problems through which we freely choose to test ourselves. Our fascination with the lusory problems makes our game playing activity seem quite purposeful. We care deeply about our involvement and achievements in games.

It is for this fundamental reason that we come back time and time again to our most cherished game problems. Moreover, games evolve as we ourselves change. Good game problems are complex. As skills are developed to address certain game challenges, new challenges emerge. Reinventing the wheel represents our commitment to developing our lusory skills as the lusory challenges unfold to present new lusory possibilities. Such

devotion to game playing is not a commitment to grinding repetition or senseless achievement. Such devotion is not without purpose and meaning.

The above stories give insight into why game playing is the central activity of the good life. They show how a game playing Utopia is consistent with human nature. They demonstrate how game problems are intelligible in Utopia. And, they explain why a game playing Utopia can be deeply meaningful. For these reasons, they show why the life of the Grasshopper is worth preserving and celebrating. In the next chapter, the significance of the lusory attitude is applied to real-life situations, specifically to educational measures that can be implemented to leave no child behind in the promotion of lusory living.

Chapter 5

The Lusory Attitude, the Good Life and a Grasshopper Education

In the previous chapter, the lusory attitude was analyzed and arguments were presented in defense of the life of the Grasshopper. But questions remain about the application of the Grasshoppers' insights, particularly since he conceded that his message may be premature. Does the lusory attitude have anything to do with our everyday existence? And do the lessons gleaned from the life of the Grasshopper inform us about the quality of our own lives? Particularly, does Suits' Utopian thesis have any relevance for contemporary education?

If my preceding analyses are at all on track, these questions should be answered in the affirmative. The lusory attitude and the life of the Grasshopper have much to do with informing our everyday existence. And if the Grasshopper's ideas are sound, we should be able to apply them in a practical setting. For instance, they should make sense educationally. And, they should promise educational outcomes that cannot be met through other methods.

The application of the Grasshopper's ideas and their promise for educational settings is explored in the following essay which is to be published in the forthcoming anthology *Niñez, deporte y actividad física: perspectivas filosóficas*.²⁴³ A slight shift in terminology is made due to the text's focus on youth sport and physical activity.

²⁴³ Douglas W McLaughlin, "La educación de la Cigarra: sobre el significado de la actitud lúdica en el deporte juvenil" [A Grasshopper Education: On the Significance of the Lusory Attitude for Youth Sport], *Niñez, deporte y actividad física: reflexiones filosóficas sobre una relación compleja* [Childhood, Sport, and Physical Activity: Philosophical Reflections on a Complex Relationship] (Buenos Aires: Miño y Dávila Editores, in press).

Although the term “sport” is used more often than “games” in the essay, the arguments apply just as well to games. In fact, sport is designated as a type of games that involves physical skills.

The essay includes some repetition of ideas from previous chapters as well as a change of tone. Although the ideas from the previous chapters are repeated in the following essay, there is a notable difference. In the previous chapters, I presented arguments in an attempt to identify, illuminate and defend the main concepts (e.g. the lusory attitude) of the essay. The essay represents a turn in focus because the ideas are introduced and then applied to educational practices.

The stylistic changes are due in large part to the editors’ demands based on realistic publishing considerations. The importance of this should not be underestimated. The charm of Suits’ *The Grasshopper* is due, in large part, to the fact that it can be read by those with little philosophical preparation and enjoyed by those with fleeting interest in sport philosophy. Yet, it is still a profound philosophical text that illuminates important insights about the nature of games and the good life. My first four chapters are written in a more technical style that can be described as sport philosophy for sport philosophers. In contrast, the following essay represents my own effort to write in a Suitsian style that is not only insightful about the importance of lusory education, but also available and interesting to a broad audience.

A Grasshopper Education: On the Significance of the Lusory Attitude for Youth Sport

Youth are exposed to sport in a multitude of ways. From their own backyards to faraway summer camps and from physical education classes to elite club teams,

children's experience of sport range drastically. What seems absent in many of these situations is the presence of an important mentor—the Grasshopper. The Grasshopper is an important mentor by teaching children not just about games and sports, but also about their role in the good life.

In his book *On Not Knowing How to Live*, Allen Wheelis claims that “our task is to affirm something.”²⁴⁴ His penetrating look into the human condition leads him to ask the following questions: “Are there no classes in living? Would someone take me as an apprentice?”²⁴⁵ These questions demand our consideration of two important factors. First, that we are all apprentices in learning how to live a meaningful life. Second, that education plays a vital role in our learning how to live well. Not only is there much we need to learn in order to experience the good life, but we also need trusted teachers and mentors to guide us on our journey.

In the United States there is an educational policy titled “No Child Left Behind” that is “based on stronger accountability for results, more freedom for states and communities, proven education methods, and more choices for parents.”²⁴⁶ In theory, who could disagree with such a policy? No child should be left behind in achieving a good and satisfying life. But in practice and implementation, this policy has serious shortcomings. By focusing only on particular types of knowledge, particularly mathematics and reading, achieving a full breadth of knowledge is compromised.

²⁴⁴ Allen Wheelis, *On Not Knowing How to Live* (New York, NY: Harper & Row Publishers, 1975), 12.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 40.

²⁴⁶ United States Department of Education, *Four Pillars of NCLB*, (June 1, 2004). Retrieved August 1, 2008, from <http://www.ed.gov/nclb/overview/intro/4pillars.html>

While the effort to achieve benchmarks in mathematics and reading is to be applauded, it is problematic when those efforts are overemphasized at the expense of other forms of knowledge. Not only is the education of children under this policy too narrowly conceived, but the very project of learning is compromised. The pressure to perform well on standardized tests often leaves children with the feeling that learning is mere drudgery rather than a source of wonder and discovery.

Not only are important subjects such as art, music and physical education marginalized, but certain ways of learning are ignored. For instance, pedagogical practices that rely on a limited range of testing means to assess content knowledge use a correspondingly narrow battery of tests. Within language education, reading comprehension is tested, but the ability to convey meaning through writing is largely neglected. Also, when pedagogical strategies are difficult to assess, they are spurned for more objective and measurable strategies. Unfortunately, the purpose of the “No Child Left Behind” policy is unfulfilled because its implementation does not take seriously the magnitude of different types of knowledge and how students learn in various ways.

The Grasshopper is precisely the educator to address Wheelis’ questions and the failings of “No Child Left Behind.” Most people are familiar with the Grasshopper from Aesop’s fables. In “The Grasshopper and the Ants,” the Grasshopper, after having spent the summer singing, comes to the ants on a winter day begging for food. The ants, who had worked all summer storing up food for winter, turn the grasshopper away.²⁴⁷ In this version of the story, the Grasshopper is a model of the imprudent life and a seemingly

²⁴⁷ Aesop, *Aesop’s Fables*, ed. D. L. Ashliman (New York: Barnes & Noble Classics, 2003), 146.

poor mentor to our children. But this is perhaps not the most compelling account of the life of the Grasshopper. Rather, we should turn instead to the account of the Grasshopper as told by Canadian philosopher Bernard Suits.

In *The Grasshopper: Games, Life and Utopia*, Bernard Suits portrays the Grasshopper not as the central figure “of a cautionary tale” but rather as the exemplification “of the life most worth living.”²⁴⁸ The Grasshopper identifies the good life as a “Utopian existence” which he argues “is fundamentally concerned with game playing.”²⁴⁹ While it may seem easy to dismiss the radical claim that the good life consists of game playing, it would be wise to pay heed to the Grasshopper’s message. It demands not only a reformulation of the education for our children, but also a reconsideration of the role of games and sports in educating our children for the good life.

Sports, Games and the Lusory Attitude

In order to understand the role of games in the good life, it is necessary to understand the nature of sports and games.²⁵⁰ The Grasshopper defines playing a game as “the voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles.”²⁵¹ This definition takes into account that games have specific goals, rules, and means that take on a particular

²⁴⁸ Bernard Suits, *The Grasshopper: Games, Life and Utopia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978), ix.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ For the sake of this paper, “sport” is a specific type of “game” that centrally involves physical skills. It is desired that basic assumptions about sport and games be set aside in order to understand them as informed by the notion of lusory attitude. Such an understanding would challenge not only our assumptions about what sport is but also about what it means to us and what lessons we can learn from it.

²⁵¹ Suits, *The Grasshopper*, 41.

meaning in the context of playing a game. But while it is important to learn the goals, rules, and means when playing games, these elements are not sufficient in explaining why a game is a game.

An important aspect of games is that they involve problem-solving in which achieving the goal is made more difficult by limiting the means by which it can be achieved. Footballers are not allowed to use their hands. Runners are not allowed to cut across the infield of the track. While using one's hands in football or taking shortcuts across the track's infield may make achieving the goal easier, such behaviors are disallowed by the rules. But there are even situations where certain limitations would be disallowed in principle. A climber who refuses the assistance of a helicopter to reach the summit of a mountain is not only serious about reaching the summit but serious about reaching it in a particular way. Therefore, even if there is no specific rule limiting the use of helicopters to reach the summit, a climber recognizing his intention to *climb* to the top of the mountain has a principled, if unstated, ban on helicopters. While the limitations in the first two examples help make the game problem, in the climbing scenario the problem exists naturally. Whether requiring an artificial restriction (not using hands or keeping on the specified track rather than take the most direct route) or natural restriction (using only human abilities rather than mechanical devices to reach the summit), trying to solve the game-problem is made more difficult by some limitation of available means. But in each case, the limitation makes for a unique game problem.

But such limitations of means by rules in achieving a goal are not unique to games. Ethical principles may prevent us from achieving certain goals in certain ways. The commandment "Thou shall not steal" serves as a rule that prevents the use of certain

means such as robbing banks in order to attain the goal of becoming a millionaire. There are also bureaucratic restrictions that seem to have no justification at all for limiting the means of achieving a goal. Some requirements of employment have no direct or, at least, strong correlation to one's ability to perform the tasks of that employment; yet workers must meet those requirements to stay employed.²⁵² There are also prudential reasons. This is the logic of the ants who, fearing the impending winter, work all summer prudentially storing food. How ants spend their time in summer is restricted to cautiously guard against the demands of winter.

What makes games distinct from ethical, bureaucratic or prudential activities? It is what the Grasshopper calls the "lusory attitude." The lusory attitude is the linchpin that unifies the other elements of game playing into a sensible activity. The Grasshopper defines the lusory attitude as "the acceptance of constitutive rules just so the activity made possible by such acceptance can occur."²⁵³ Ethical considerations often compel people to act in ways that they would not choose of their own accord. The limitation of behaviors, both what is precluded and what is mandated, is not freely chosen but is imposed by the important distinctions between wrong and right that guide our moral life. The red tape that is foisted upon someone by a bureaucratic institution is not freely chosen but often greeted with frustration and resentment. Prudential actions are not freely chosen, but are a calculated response to some perceived demand. But in games,

²⁵² For instance, in the United States employment in some sport professions requires certifications. But some sport certifications are less demanding than a corresponding university diploma. This is certainly not the case for all certifications. But when it is necessary to maintain your certification, especially when it is not accompanied by legitimate continuing education, this requirement seems to have little to do with how well someone can perform their occupational duties.

²⁵³ Suits, *The Grasshopper*, 40.

the limitation of behavior is freely chosen just for the sake of the activity. What is critical in this distinction is the way in which rules determine the relationship between the goal and means. Of the above mentioned forms of activities, it is only in games that the rules are accepted for intrinsic reasons.²⁵⁴

In games, the limitations are accepted because they make possible the type of experience one wishes to experience. But in the above examples, the limitation of means is for reasons independent of and external to how the goal of the activity is achieved. Bureaucratic limitations of means are precisely that form of limitations that are not accepted for their own sake but are foisted upon us. But in games, the limitations of means are intrinsically related to making the goal intelligible and accepted precisely to try to achieve the goal in that specified manner. This is an important and critical distinction. It is the lusory attitude that explains why game playing is the central activity of the good life. Wheelis claims that “the existence of problems affirms our existence.”²⁵⁵ But the Grasshopper would make an even stronger claim, that the types of problems that most affirm our existence are the ones that we voluntarily attempt to solve. It is reasonable to suggest that the Grasshopper, paraphrasing Wheelis, would claim that the serious cultivation of a lusory attitude is our salvation.²⁵⁶ It is the lusory attitude that

²⁵⁴ While rules are accepted for intrinsic reasons in many others forms of activities besides games, they are not accepted for intrinsic reasons in ethical, beraucratic, or prudential activities.

²⁵⁵ Wheelis, *On Not Knowing How to Live*, 89.

²⁵⁶ Ibid. “We rush back to our problems, for the existence of problems affirms our existence” (89). When read in context, informed by what Wheelis means by “problems,” it seems reasonable to correlate the existence of problems to the cultivation of the lusory attitude. For it is not the problems themselves that affirm our existence, but how it is that we engage them. This may be affirmed when Wheelis writes “The only thing in life worth having is not a thing . . . but a feeling: a soaring, intense, exalted longing” (101).

allows people to identify the problems they have an interest in solving, the value of limited means in problem-solving, and the rationale for accepting rules that limit means. And not only is the lusory attitude central to understanding game playing, but also the nature of the good life. But before this claim can be defended, it will be necessary to analyze an example of the lusory attitude. The investigation of the act of creek jumping, and how it can become a game, provides an account of what the lusory attitude is and how it informs our experience.

Imagine walking along a forest trail. Your reason for traveling may be for business (your job is to survey this forest or you are hunting for sustenance) or pleasure (you are delighting in nature's beauty or you are meeting a lover at a secret swimming hole). During the walk, you are confronted by a creek. If the creek is sufficiently narrow that you can just step over it, then you may hardly notice it. If the creek is sufficiently wide, then you may stop dead in your tracks, aggravated by this natural barrier, to look upstream and down for a suitable place to cross. But imagine instead that the creek is neither so narrow that it can be easily traversed nor so wide that it cannot be traversed at all. The creek's width, such that a successful leap across it is possible but not guaranteed, creates a bit of tense, internal debate. Should you try to cross or should you look for a safer, more certain location to cross?

Imagine that circumstances compel you to attempt the jump. That a delay to look for safer crossing will prevent you from getting your work done, keep you from meeting your lover who has already been waiting for your arrival, or prevent you from seeing the vistas that are ahead for the sun will soon set. With a bit of trepidation you assess the

creek's width, as well as a path for your approach, take-off, and landing. After this careful and deliberate preparation, you make your leap.

Does it matter, for this scenario, if you successfully make it to the other side of the creek? Not necessarily. If you land smack dab in the middle of the creek and are the least bit reflective, you will wonder how you could have so miscalculated this challenge. If you just miss the crossing, you may wonder if given another chance you might successfully clear the creek. And if your jump was successful, whether by a wide margin or just long enough to prevent you from getting wet, you may be left wondering how far you could have gone.

Whether successful or not, each outcome provides an important lesson. The scenario begins with a problem that is sufficiently complex, neither too easy nor too hard. This is what R. Scott Kretchmar calls a "test" that is both impregnable and vulnerable.²⁵⁷ After taking this test, by making an effort to leap over the creek, you recognize that perhaps the challenge was too great, too easy, or just right, but questions persist. What is an appropriate challenge? Can you jump farther?

In this scenario, the leap may not have been taken with a lusory attitude. But if you are left with lingering wonder about the challenge, if the question persists, your initial experience of tension transforms into sweet tension.²⁵⁸ Tension may best be understood as our response to challenges and difficulties. Challenge and difficulty are

²⁵⁷ R. Scott Kretchmar, "From Test to Contest: An Analysis of Two Kinds of Counterpoint," *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*, 2 (1975): 23-30.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 30. The term "sweet tension" was coined by American philosopher of sport Warren Fraleigh "to describe human fascination with sport."

usually thought of as unwelcome intrusions in our life and as a result tension has a negative connotation. When walking through the woods, a creek of substantial width may at first be seen as an undesirable obstacle that disrupts a fine walk in the woods. But once the challenge is taken up for its own sake and the challenge is welcomed, our response to the challenge is no longer negative. But the tension abides. It may be seen in the contrasting use of the term “anxious”. A child may be anxious about an upcoming test in school, an illness, or familial squabbles. Each of these situations and the child’s accompanying anxiety are unwelcome. Such anxiety is not to be sought out. But a child may feel anxious in a very different sense. The night before Christmas or waiting in line for an amusement park ride may find the child anxious, but it is quite welcomed. There is an uncertainty in both situations, but one is marked with fear and the other with excitement. Likewise, when challenges are freely chosen, the accompanying tension is best identified as a sweet tension because facing the challenges elicits a response of anticipatory excitement. You now welcome both finding the appropriate challenge (a creek of appropriate width) and then facing it (jumping over the creek). And so, when your jump is made with this sense of sweet tension, you are taking a lusory leap.

While creek jumping may not become a lusory project for everyone, this scenario holds within it several elements of a lusory experience. As already mentioned, it identifies the importance of an appropriate challenge. Lusory experience entails sweet tension. There is doubt and wonder regarding whether your abilities will allow you to successfully pass the test. The goal, though reasonably achievable, is not certain to be attained. But these counterpoints are held in a delicate balance. The tension, felt as uncertainty, is welcomed because it is balanced by the sweet possibility of success. This

represents two important counterpoints to our experience that American educator and philosopher John Dewey calls “doing” and “undergoing.”²⁵⁹ The creek asserts itself in our experience as an obstacle. If we are honest about our intention to be on the other side of the creek, then we must necessarily attend to the creek. We must undergo the challenge of the creek’s width and wetness if we are to reach our goal. All game problems present us with some undergoing, whether it is the demands of time, space, objects, ourselves, or others. In football, the end of regulation time can demand an urgency to score. To score a goal demands accuracy in our kicking or heading the ball which, in turn, demand certain skills. Our own conditioning, agility, size and skills demand or preclude certain actions to successfully respond to the demands of other players, both those working with us and those working against us, in confronting our goals in the football match. In the experience of facing the challenges of creek jumping and football, there are numerous factors that are beyond our control that we undergo because they play a crucial role in the making of the lusory project.

In turn, our doings are a response to our undergoings. Our actions are an attempt to engage in or react to the challenges and demands we find in the world. Informed by the lusory attitude, we must make that leap across the creek, for it is this doing that affirms us in our confrontation with a specific undergoing. We are compelled to sprint, stall, fake, pass, attack, defend, kick, dribble, head and dive in a football match. Our doings correspond to our undergoings, just as our skills correspond to the demands of our

²⁵⁹ John Dewey, “Having an Experience,” in *The Philosophy of John Dewey (Volume II): The Lived Experience*, ed. John J. McDermott (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1973), 554-573.

chosen sport. It is necessary to find that sweet tension that exists when our doing and undergoing and our skills and our challenges are perfectly balanced.

It is important to recognize that creek jumping is a rather simple challenge compared to the dynamic and complex challenges of football. Yet even within particular activities there is a range of difficulties. Creek jumping can be made more difficult not only by selecting wider crossings, but also by altering the suitability of jumping and landing spaces. Football can be made easier or less technical by isolating skills through different drills. The point is that it is not enough to take the lusory leap. If we are serious about our lusory projects, then we must develop greater sophistication in our skills to address greater complexity in our challenges. It requires persistence in the same activity over time, a commitment to develop greater lusory awareness and ability. This development requires a lusory education.

“Ludic rationality” is a term often used to describe the logical relationship between goals, means, and rules. Certainly there is a special logic that sustains the distinctions between doings and undergoings in such a way that rules are formed to provide for an interesting test. But it is not enough to have a formal understanding of the rules. Rules are fully intelligible only when informed by the context of our lusory experiences. Without this contextualization, the rules amount to nothing more than bureaucratic limitations in which game players are not invested. But informed by our lusory experience, we can better determine the appropriateness of the limitations determined by rules. It is through experience that we identify when challenges are too easy, too hard or just right and how the rules determine those challenges such that lusory possibilities are encouraged or suppressed. For this reason it is just as important to

educate youth on the importance of the logic as it is the experience of the lusory attitude. Before turning to what lusory pedagogy should entail, it might be helpful to identify lapses in lusory education.

Failed Sporting Pedagogies

Perhaps a greater evil than not providing children with a lusory education is to provide them a faulty one. Learning the wrong lessons may well be more harmful than not learning the right lessons. So while sport is presented to children and youth in a variety of ways, many methods are problematic. Specifically, there are concerns related to youth sport education that improperly account for the lusory attitude related to the logic, values and most compelling game narratives.

The first problem concerns a failure relating to the lusory logic of games. This is most commonly found when the value of winning is either overemphasized or diminished. In both cases, students fail to learn the lusory context in which winning is properly valued. When too much emphasis is placed on winning, children are often taught to focus on sport from a narrow perspective. The phrase “if you ain’t cheating, you ain’t trying” conveys how far some people will go to win. Trying to win “by any means” or “at all cost” may not be intentionally taught to youth, but it is a lesson that is all too often learned. Youth who put too much emphasis on winning do so without an appreciation of the context which makes winning intelligible from the perspective of the lusory attitude. Players with a lusory attitude and steeped in lusory experience understand the rationale for certain rules and behaviors in a given sporting situation. But to those students uninformed by the lusory attitude, the rationale for limiting means to

attain the goal may not be compelling. Rather than accepting the limitations for the sake of the activity they make possible, the rules can be seen as nuisances to be avoided or circumvented whenever possible. Rather than lusory logic, students educated with an overemphasis on winning will utilize a logic of expediency and efficiency in solving the game problem. The danger is that people cannot easily shift their thinking from one form of logic to another. While it may not be hard to identify this disease, it is very difficult to cure.

Conversely, to diminish the significance of winning or even to suggest that winning is not important is problematic. While perhaps not as common a problem as overemphasizing winning, the suggestion that doing well does not matter fails to take seriously the nature of the game problem. If focusing too greatly on winning is to overemphasize one's doing, then ignoring results is to underestimate the importance of doing. Students must learn to appreciate the relationship between doing and undergoing. Students should learn to make sense of their doings in relationship to their undergoings. By focusing too much on winning, people may select an activity knowing their abilities will guarantee victory. This attitude undermines the lusory attitude which requires and values uncertainty. But by ignoring the results of competition, people may not recognize lessons related to how their doings could be more responsive to their undergoings. An important lusory lesson is that as our skills improve, so does our experience of the challenges. And as the game challenges get more complex, our skills must improve. Whether win, lose, or tie, awareness of how contest resolutions happen can provide important feedback that allows for more sophisticated lusory experiences. If sport education focuses exclusively on the outcome of winning or dismisses the significance of

how the resolution is achieved, then it compromises the significance of the lusory attitude.²⁶⁰

A failure in sport pedagogy also occurs when the value of game playing is misunderstood. This happens when the education of games and sports comes from the perspective of an ant instead of a grasshopper. Remember that the ants consider the Grasshopper's life as the model of the imprudent life. According to the spin-doctoring of the ants, a life devoted to game playing is problematic because playing games should be delayed until other more pressing concerns are addressed. Because the Grasshopper spends his summer playing instead of working, he is left unprepared for winter.

The problem of the ants' lesson is twofold. First, grasshoppers actually are being productive while seemingly *just* at play and ants are actually dependent on the grasshoppers for their own survival. For instance, grasshoppers are, despite playing games, really pursuing goals. And while they may not be producing in the traditional sense, it is not uncommon for the ants to commodify the practices of grasshoppers. A clear example may be found in surf culture. Surfers may be considered the grasshoppers devoted to a certain lifestyle situated in a particular pursuit. The ants are represented by merchandisers who capitalize on a lifestyle by selling certain products that are representative of but subsidiary to that lifestyle. There is a certain authenticity in the life of the Grasshopper which is the product of devoting oneself to a certain way of life.

While the ants may produce more tangible stuff, the life of ants does not produce a more

²⁶⁰ The distinction between outcome seekers and resolution seekers refers to and explores the different relationships that contestants establish with winning and losing in relation to the structure of competitive sport. See: Cesar R. Torres and Douglas W. McLaughlin, "Indigestion?: An Apology for Ties," *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* 30 2 (October 2003): 144-158. See particularly pages 148-150.

authentic life. But even if this were not the case, the logic of ants is problematic because it amounts to an absurd delay in gratification. The life expectancy of ants is only between 45 and 60 days. While the grasshoppers are busy living a meaningful life, the ants are busy delaying the most rewarding activities of life until the very point it is too late to enjoy them. To discount the value of games based on the logic of ants is to discount games based on faulty reasoning.

Sport education is guilty of using ant logic when it focuses too exclusively on health. Rather than appreciating the doings and undergoings of games and sports, ant logic prescribes movement as an extrinsic value. The problem with utilizing the logic of ants is that it does not meaningfully speak to most students. The same problems arise when sports are presented primarily for instrumental reasons. Rather than learning to intrinsically value and appreciate problem solving, it is viewed as a means to an end—as something that must be endured for the sake of some other end. People get pigeon-holed into activities they do not enjoy, but select them because they are effective means of achieving health benefits. But because they do not enjoy it, they often end up resenting their time spent involved in sporting activities or, worse yet, attempting to avoid participation altogether.

Another failed strategy is to fail to elucidate the important lessons available through games and sports. It is often assumed that participation in sport develops not only health; but also character; there is much at stake. But it is not enough to role out the ball and assume that students will learn about character or comprehend the intricacies of their lusory experience. While it is necessary to take time for games and sports, it is also necessary to take time to reflect on our sporting experiences. Our experiences provide a

fertile ground in which to elucidate important lessons. For example, what does excellence mean in a sporting context? Winning may sometimes represent excellence, but it does not always do so. Nor does losing preclude excellence. A gifted athlete may not perform at her best but still beat an inferior opponent, or may set a personal record, despite losing to a superior athlete. It seems that excellence, winning, and losing are sophisticated concepts that warrant inclusion in sports curriculums if they are to be fully appreciated.

Additionally, how does sport challenge students to rethink the nature of problems in their life? Often students assume problems are to be avoided, but experience in sport can teach them that problems can be engaging and enjoyable. What does sport teach us about competition? Is winning always good and losing always bad? Often students assume that winning is good and losing bad, but sporting experience can teach them that the resolution of contests is complex and that winning and losing should not be thought just in absolute terms of good and bad, respectively. What considerations should we give to our opponents? Are they merely obstacles in our path to success? Students often fail to recognize that opponents are necessary partners in their exploration of their own ability. The extent to which sport can play an important role in the good life is often determined by the extent to which students can recognize the complex and sophisticated narrative possibilities that can be experienced in sport. Unfortunately, students are all too often unaware of the profound meanings and nuanced stories available to them because sport pedagogies do not incorporate these lessons.

Grasshoppers-in-Training

As the above analysis suggests, not all sport experiences are created equal. If a desired outcome of sport education is to promote the good life (and to understand the role of sport in that good life), then it is necessary to take this into account when designing a sport curriculum. There are several essential considerations for developing such a curriculum including the role of movement, community and the good life. If the life of the Grasshopper exemplifies the life most worth living, then education would do well to be designed for students to be grasshoppers-in-training. This lusory education would make explicit the lessons of the Grasshopper, most importantly a clear understanding of the good life as well as the role of game playing in it.

It is worth pointing out that the Grasshopper is not the only one advocating for a new curricular orientation. American philosophers Sam Keen and John McDermott have both suggested new curriculums that address the context and purpose of education. While not directly related to the Grasshopper's call for a lusory education, they share important considerations.

In his "Education for Serendipity," Sam Keen promotes a curriculum that leads students "in search of the wisdom necessary for living with vividness."²⁶¹ He claims that "education must deal with the intimate roots of experience of creativity."²⁶² This seems to be strongly in line with an account of lusory experience. By developing an "attitude of wonder" and an "integration of body, mind, and world," students are able "to develop a

²⁶¹ Sam Keen, *To A Dancing God: Notes of a Spiritual Traveler* (San Francisco: Harper, 1970), 40.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, 41.

life-style richly infused with sensual and kinesthetic awareness.”²⁶³ Keen’s curriculum understands the need “to explore and strengthen wishing, dreaming, fantasizing, and imagining.”²⁶⁴ Keen’s education for serendipity, like a lusory education, takes seriously the importance of education for the good life. His proposed curriculum recognizes that learning requires us to experience ever more profound and complex possibilities in our doing and undergoing.

McDermott suggests educational reform by developing a cultural pedagogy. In addition to the traditional curriculum, he seeks to add classes on autobiography, the science of living things, sculpture, and theater.²⁶⁵ These courses are designed to help students “make relations” which “is the central and most important task of pedagogy.”²⁶⁶ Students need mentoring in order to make increasingly more complex relationships, “that is, the forging of a distinctively personal presence in the doings and undergoings which constitute our experience.”²⁶⁷ McDermott understands that our capacity to live a rich, meaningful life is dependent on our ability to wonder, which in turn is dependent on our ability to seriously make relations. His rationale for a cultural pedagogy could equally serve as a rationale for a lusory education. Our capacity to live a good life is dependent on our ability to face intrinsically meaningful challenges, which is dependent on our

²⁶³ Ibid., 46.

²⁶⁴ Ibid., 66.

²⁶⁵ John J. McDermott, *Streams of Experience: Reflections of the History and Philosophy of American Culture* (Amherst, MA: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1986).

²⁶⁶ Ibid., 184.

²⁶⁷ Ibid., 184.

ability to recognize compelling relationships between our doings and undergoings. Both Keen and McDermott understand the importance of learning about ourselves and our connection to our world and others; important lessons for grasshoppers-in-training. While their curriculums provide a good start, there are some specific considerations necessary for developing a lusory education.

The first consideration pertains to the role of movement in our lives. In order to experience the good life, people must feel competent to meet the challenges they face. While this profound sense has been referred to as the “I can,”²⁶⁸ American philosopher Maxine Sheets-Johnstone argues that it is preceded by the sense of “I move” which in turn is preceded by moving itself.²⁶⁹ It is as if our ability to move well increases our vocabulary to live meaningful stories. How we move determines how we are able to fully engage in lusory opportunities. It is for this reason that we need suitable movement education. While it may seem odd, Sheets-Johnstone reminds us that “in the beginning, we were *all* challenged to learn our bodies.”²⁷⁰ And it is “in the process of discovering ourselves . . . [that] we expanded our repertoire of ‘I cans’; we learned possibilities of movement and became progressively aware of our capacity to move effectively with respect to these possibilities.”²⁷¹ Our moving is a source of discovery and wonder as

²⁶⁸ Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, trans. David Carr (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1970). Our repertoire of “I cans” is our fundamental faculty to engage the world and our potentialities for problem-solving.

²⁶⁹ Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, *The Primacy of Movement* (Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins Publishing, 1999), 134-135.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 149.

well as a foundational source of lusory possibility. Grasshoppers-in-training need to learn how to move themselves well in preparation for more complex lusory experiences.

We all have in common the need to learn how to move ourselves as well as face problems as animate beings. Indeed, we share a “common intercorporeal being” which is the very source of human community.²⁷² Let us revisit the creek jumping scenario from above. When walking in the woods, we all confront the creek in a similar fashion. We confront the creek as upright beings, who do not want to get wet and have common kinesthetic abilities that provide us with similar options for successfully getting across it. We undergo the challenge the creek presents us and must undergo it in a similar way.

Because we experience sport and game problems from a common kinesthetic framework, we are able to share tests and forge contesting possibilities. Kretchmar refers to the move from test to contest as a move from singularity to community.²⁷³ But in many ways this is a logical rather than an existential distinction. While testing families arise from a shared interest in a test, players often become testers and contesters concurrently. What is most important is that students learn how to recognize and communicate the relevant features of their experiences of testing and contesting. Our lusory attitude must take into account those who participate in the doings and undergoings of our lusory challenges. Just as we learn to move ourselves, we must also learn how to interact with others, including those who share in our lusory experiences.

²⁷¹ Ibid., 150.

²⁷² Ibid.

²⁷³ Kretchmar, “From Test to Contest: An Analysis of Two Kinds of Counterpoint.”

Another feature in developing a sport curriculum is our understanding of the good life. It is not uncommon to have a desire for something only to find that once the desire is met the person remains unfulfilled. People must learn to have a more complex and sophisticated understanding of the good life to avoid such a fate. Often the good life is conceptualized as a life free from problems. But to the extent that people pursue and achieve that end, they will only find it to be unfulfilling. The nature of persons is to be problem-solvers. It is in negotiating problems, engaging the doings and undergoings of our life, that people experience tension. But in order for that tension to situate us in the good life, in order for it to be sweet tension, we must negotiate problems that we freely chose. If we are to take the Grasshopper seriously, then it is necessary to understand games and sports in a much broader context. Often games and sports are thought of as *what* we are doing, but the Grasshopper shows us that almost any goal-directed behavior can be a game based upon *how* we are engaging in it. While this means that lusory education extends well beyond games and sports, it is indisputable that games and sports are an excellent educational source for teaching students about the lusory education. Sport requires that we recognize the importance of the above mentioned features of lusory education, movement, and community. But sport is also an activity that structurally helps students recognize the role of problem-solving in the good life. The good life is not an end state of affairs but a process toward developing ever increasing skills to negotiate greater and greater challenges.

The significance of a lusory education in achieving a good life can be seen in a life informed by and devoted to endurance sport. According to educator Christopher Martin, “running is an experience because running involves an absolute ‘interpenetration’

of the self and the world.... Authentic running is an activity that is completely open to the challenges and ‘disruptions’ created by our surroundings.”²⁷⁴ Recognizing the challenge, doing and undergoing that running presents, Martin identifies the lusory with the aesthetic. “Aesthetic running is the deliberate creation of an experience that requires an intense, *vital* interaction between self and world that is valued as both an act that we do *and* as something that we undergo.”²⁷⁵ Even though Martin clearly identifies how running is a lusory experience, how is it strongly connected to the good life?

Evidence can be found in the writings of American runner George Sheehan and American triathlete Scott Tinley who show how sport plays a vital role, as a lusory project, in forming a meaningful and fulfilling life. It is clear that for both Sheehan and Tinley, their identity is in large part shaped by their participation in sport. Sheehan refers to his discovery of identity through running itself. His self-concept is determined by the strong statement “I am a runner.”²⁷⁶ Tinley refers to triathlons being a source of “self-knowledge.”²⁷⁷ In both cases, a strong sense of self is formed and derives meaning through sport. For both athletes, sport plays a vital role in the formation of their identity, provides them with a source of meaning, and gives them a measure of what the good life is. Sheehan claims that “whatever our sport is, then, is the way we move from actuality

²⁷⁴ Christopher Martin, “John Dewey and the Beautiful Stride: Running as Aesthetic Experience,” in *Running and Philosophy: A Marathon for the Mind*, ed. Michael W. Austin (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 175.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 178.

²⁷⁶ George Sheehan, *Running and Being: The Total Experience* (Red Bank, NJ: Second Wind II, 1978), 34.

²⁷⁷ Scott Tinley, *Finding the Wheel’s Hub: Tales and Thoughts from the Endurance Athletic Lifestyle* (Palo Alto, CA: Trimarket Company, 1995), 8.

toward our potential, toward becoming all we can be.”²⁷⁸ It is in this becoming through sport that an authentic life is achieved.

Games and sports play a pivotal role not only in identity formation but also in presenting people with welcomed challenges. Quoting American philosopher William James, Sheehan identifies how running serves an important function because “man must be stretched.”²⁷⁹ It may be difficult to understand how such involvement with sport, characterized as suffering, can be compatible with the good life. But it makes more sense when this involvement is characterized by Tinley as related to “deep personal longings.”²⁸⁰ The good life consists not in the absence of challenges, but rather the presence on meaningful ones. It is by engaging these meaningful challenges that we are fulfilled. The effort required to overcome the obstacles presented by sport is not the absence of the good life, but the very condition for its possibility for it is in engaging these challenges that we are affirmed. Just as with the term anxiety, suffering can be understood in very different ways. In a negative sense, we suffer when we are forced to go through trials and tribulations that are forced upon us. But in a positive sense, we suffer, or struggle, to achieve the goals of games and sports just because we find that activity worthwhile. An important lesson for youth is that if you care deeply about something then it is worth making a tremendous effort to achieve it. Indeed, this may be indispensable knowledge regarding the good life.

²⁷⁸ Sheehan, *Running and Being*, 69.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 205.

²⁸⁰ Tinley, *Finding the Wheel's Hub*, 29.

As grasshoppers-in-training, there is a need for a curriculum that will help people learn about the lusory elements of our experience and how they necessarily inform our understanding of the good life. Sport, as a lusory practice, provides a good mechanism by which to develop grasshopper sensibilities.

A Grasshopper Education

So what does a Grasshopper education look like? Canadian philosopher John Russon identifies education as an unfolding “project of learning the truth about reality . . . in the service of human maturation.”²⁸¹ A Grasshopper education would therefore be a project in learning about the truth about a life most worth living. According to the Grasshopper, the life most worth living entails a life of game playing and therefore lusory education must be oriented toward a human maturation in and of the lusory attitude. It is for this reason that the Grasshopper wants students to be able to identify lusory elements, recognize lusory potentialities, and appreciate lusory experiences. Students must develop lusory skills and ludic rationality in order to mature into a profound good life.

The lusory elements of life pertain not to games and sports alone. The elements pertain most directly to how it is that we make relations between what we do and what we undergo in a way that we identify interesting and compelling problems. The Grasshopper recognizes that our account of the good life, of personal fulfillment, and even self-actualization rest in and upon our ability to recognize the lusory elements of our lives. The lusory element does not just pertain to game playing but to the good life as

²⁸¹ John Russon, *Human Experience: Philosophy, Neurosis, and the Elements of the Everyday Life* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2003), 143-144.

well. It is for this reason that Suits offers the maxim “Life is a game. Live accordingly.”²⁸² To identify the lusory elements of our activities is to live a meaningful life engaged in meaningful activities.

To maximize that meaning it is necessary to develop our lusory potentialities. Suits suggests that “the discovery that life is a game might disclose unimagined sources of human action and stimulate unexpected feats of human invention.”²⁸³ We are born with certain lusory potentialities and born to a world with lusory possibilities. The extent to which we recognize how the world and others present challenges we must undergo, we recognize what we must do to respond to those challenges. By developing new proficiencies to meet challenges, we are then able to recognize and build even greater challenges. A Grasshopper education is meant to secure students’ recognition of new lusory potentialities and possibilities that can be found in their lives.

It is for this reason that lusory experience is so important to a Grasshopper education. It is not enough to have a theoretical conception of doing and undergoing, but to have experience with how our doing and undergoing can forge lusory projects. It is not enough to write and read about creeks that may or may not be jumped. Students must confront the creek itself, as well as other challenges, and learn to identify their lusory possibilities. In our experiences of moving in and amongst certain challenges we learn to discern more sophisticated and complicated lusory engagements.

²⁸² Bernard Suits, “Is Life a Game We Are Playing?,” *Ethics* 77 3 (1967): 209-213.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, 213.

The above considerations provide the proper context for developing lusory skills. Unlike failed sport pedagogies that focus on skills in a narrow sense and not fully informed by the lusory attitude, a Grasshopper education aims to have students recognize how skills are contextualized within their own lusory experience. It is not enough to overcome challenges in any way possible, but rather in a lusory fashion. Our development of skills should take that into consideration. While our skills may determine what we can do, our lusory skills also determine how we do it. A Grasshopper education is designed to help students internalize that significant wisdom.

A Grasshopper education also is designed to elucidate the significance of the lusory logic. Our lusory logic is forged from our lusory experiences by which we forge and come to appreciate the connections in our doings and undergoings. It serves to formalize and preserve our most cherished lusory projects. Learning to identify the lusory logic and how it informs our continued practice in sport is an important step in recognizing and preserving games and sports as central activities of the good life.

The Grasshopper, in defending his claim of a game playing good life, has a vision in which he sees himself “and a multitude of other Grasshoppers engaged in playing the most elaborate, subtle, and challenging games.”²⁸⁴ It is for this reason that the Grasshopper believes “we ought to be devising really magnificent games.”²⁸⁵ In order to devise magnificent games suitable for the good life, it is necessary to have a magnificent lusory education. If we fail to attend to and educate our children for lusory

²⁸⁴ Bernard Suits, “Games and Utopia: Posthumous Reflections,” *Simulation and Games* 15 1 (1984): 23.

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

experiences, they may fail to develop into people who can fully appreciate games and sports. If their education neglects the lusory attitude, then they will be left behind in relation to a life most worth living. But if we are to accept the wisdom of the Grasshopper, then games and sports will play a central role in lusory education which, in turn, will play a central role in preparing our children for living a meaningful and good life. If we wish to leave no child behind and take seriously Wheelis' questions about an education in living that will affirm us, then it seems that our youth require a Grasshopper education.

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- McLaughlin, Douglas W. and Cesar R. Torres (2005). Fit to Be Tied! The Relevance of Ties in Teaching Physical Education. *The Journal of Physical Education, Recreation & Dance*, 79(9), 38-42.
- Torres, Cesar R. and Douglas W. McLaughlin (2003). Indigestion?: An Apology for Ties. *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*, XXX, 144-158.

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- Sport, Lusory Experience and the Primacy of Grace. 2007 International Conference on Sport and Spirituality, York, England.
- A Tale of Two Creatures: The Grasshopper from Aesop to Updike. 2007 Sport Literature Association conference. Saratoga Springs, NY.
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