

# Moritz Schlick on the value of play

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Beth Pollard

## Abstract

The focus of this essay is Moritz Schlick's *On the Meaning of Life*. Schlick wrote *On the Meaning of Life* in 1927 and hoped to push back against pessimist currents of thought that were popular at the time by using the concepts of play and youth. Schlick defines plays as any "activities which carry their own purpose and value within them, independently of any extraneous goals..." (Schlick, M. 2008, p.64). For Schlick, these intrinsically valuable activities are the key to creating meaningful lives. However, I argue that there are certain tensions in Schlick's essay that need addressing. In the first half of this essay, I make some vital changes to Schlick's theory of play in order to address these tensions. In particular, through a discussion of Aristotle's concepts of leisure and play, along with Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's concept of flow, I argue that play should be understood as a state rather than as certain activities. I also explore aspects of Schlick's writing such as his distinction between joy and pleasure and the potential criticisms that could be levelled at this distinction. By addressing the tensions in Schlick's work and by clarifying his theory of play, I hope to show that play is a serious candidate for giving us more meaningful and fulfilling experiences. Having addressed the issues in *On The Meaning of Life*, the second half of this essay is dedicated to showing how we can maximise play in our lives. To do this, I begin with an exploration of the relationship between our values and play via a discussion of Friedrich Nietzsche's writing and argue that in order to maximise playfulness in our lives, there is a subsidiary task, which is to uncover and analyse our own values. Lastly, I argue that playfulness is a skill that we can, and ought, to develop, and explore Csikszentmihalyi's suggestions for how we might develop this skill.

**Keywords:** *Moritz Schlick, play, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, flow, meaning, meaning of life, Friedrich Nietzsche, values*

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## Schlick and play

For Schlick, the purpose of *On the Meaning of Life* was to push back against Schopenhauerian pessimism by developing a 'philosophy of youth'. Schlick wanted to show that having "the enthusiasm of youth" can help create meaning in an individual's life. (Schlick, M. 2008, p.69). In fact, before his death, Schlick was working on a book called *Philosophy of Youth*. In his memoir of Schlick's life, Herbert Feigl says that in this work, "The grandeur of Schlick's optimism can be seen" (Feigl, H. 1939, p.393). Sadly, this work remains unpublished and therefore the brief essay *On the Meaning of Life* is the main body of work that shows Schlick's thoughts on the topic of youth and play. Nonetheless, in this essay it is clear that Schlick sees youth and play as central concepts in tackling the question of meaning. Schlick intended to expand on his philosophy of youth and it is no surprise, considering the root of 'play', that his interest in developing a philosophy of youth became intertwined with the topic of play (Kidd, S. E. 2016). It is worth noting that when Schlick writes about the meaning of life, he is not writing about the meaning of universal human life but instead he is writing about individual's lives. Schlick did not think life is intrinsically meaningful but sought to show that life *can* be meaningful because the content of one's life can provide meaning. For Schlick, finding something that will provide us with meaningful content will overcome existential nihilism. His answer to finding this meaningful content is the task of *On the Meaning of Life* (Schlick, M. 2008, p.62)

Schlick begins with a discussion of work. Work is a reasonable candidate to begin this search with, as most of us spend the majority of our lives working. We must work in order to survive. We must have shelter and food and a large proportion of our lives are taken up by working in order to have these things. Yet, if we look towards work to provide meaningful content, Schlick argues that we will be left wanting. Work is a means of surviving and if life is not intrinsically meaningful, our survival will not give us meaning. If work is only valuable in that it maintains life, then a circular argument is produced by claiming that work will give us meaning.

"For mere living, pure existence as such is certainly valueless; it must also have a content, and in that only can the meaning of life reside. But what actually fills up our days almost entirely is activities serving to maintain life. In other words, the content of existence consists in the work that is needed in order to exist. We are therefore moving in a circle, and in this fashion fail to arrive at a meaning for life. Nor is it any better if, in place of work itself, we direct our attention to the fruits of our work. The greater part of its products is again subservient to work of some kind and hence indirectly to the maintenance of life, and another large part is undoubtedly meaningless trash..." (Schlick, M. 2008, p.63-64).

Here, we can see that Schlick sees the majority of work as being necessary for survival but he also claims that the fruits of our work are always either linked to some further purpose outside itself or largely 'meaningless trash'. These are certainly not uncontroversial claims.

Schlick seemed to have intuited this and does not go as far as saying *all* products of our work is meaningless, but rather a large part. Yet, even this is an objectionable claim. However, Schlick subtly uses a more philosophically broad definition of work, which he goes on to formally define as such: "...in its philosophical generality – we simply mean any activity undertaken solely in order to realise some purpose. It is therefore the characteristic mark of work that it has its purpose outside itself, and is not performed for its own sake." (Schlick, M. 2008, p.64). For Schlick, work is any activity that is only instrumentally valuable. For Schlick, most of what we call 'work' in everyday lexicon is always linked to a purpose and this undermines the quality he is looking for in meaningful activities (Schlick, M. 2008, p.63-64). Schlick doesn't really just mean our jobs when he refers to 'work'. Any activity that has its purpose outside of itself is what Schlick considers to be work. Those activities that have their purpose outside of themselves are not the answer to meaning for Schlick. Rather, the key to truly meaningful activity is the quality of being *autotelic*. These autotelic activities are what Schlick calls 'play'.

"...if we wish to find a meaning...we must seek for *activities* which carry their own purpose and value within them, independently of any extraneous goals; activities, therefore, which are not work, in the philosophical sense of the word. If such activities exist, then in them the seemingly divided is reconciled, means and end, action and consequence are fused into one, we have found end-in-themselves which are more than mere end-points of activity and resting-points of existence, and it is these alone that can take over the role of a true content to life. There really are such activities. To be consistent, we must call them play, since that is the name for free, purposeless action, that is, action which in fact carries its purpose within itself". (Schlick, M. 2008, p.64).

This is the foundation of Schlick's philosophy on the meaning of life.

I will argue that Schlick's concept of play is a useful concept in enriching our lives with meaning. However, there are some unresolved tensions in Schlick's work that need to be addressed first. Namely, it is unclear whether Schlick thinks of play as certain activities that are intrinsically valuable or whether play should be understood as a state that we can reach. Additionally, it is unclear at times whether Schlick makes objective claims about what activities can count as play and this can be addressed by resolving the activity/state ambiguity in his writing. Furthermore, Schlick makes an important distinction between joy and pleasure later on in his essay and his discussion brings up potential objections that need to be addressed. Once these issues have been analysed and addressed, I will discuss how we can use a reformulated version of Schlick's play to create meaning in our lives.

### A genuine instance of play

Throughout *On the Meaning of Life*, Schlick only gives hints at solid examples of play. The main instance is when Schlick refers to the activities of artists and poets as examples of creative play "Let us look about us: where do we find creative play? The brightest example...is to be seen in the creation of the artist. His activity, the shaping of his work by inspiration, is

itself pleasure, and it is half by accident that enduring values arise from it” (Schlick, M. 2008, p.66). Schlick adds that poets and scientists have a similar relationship to their activities.

In order to make adjustments to Schlick’s concept of play and address the tensions in his work, it will be helpful to have a clearer example of what I argue to be a true case of play. Csikszentmihalyi provides the example I would like to refer to throughout my analysis of play in his book *Flow: The Classic Work on How to Achieve Happiness*. Csikszentmihalyi is a professor of Psychology and his research focuses on the phenomenon of what he calls ‘flow’ – a state of joy, creativity and total enjoyment that is autotelic and completely absorbs our attention (Csikszentmihalyi, M. 2002). Csikszentmihalyi describes flow as “an optical experience...that is an end in itself. Even if initially undertaken for other reasons, the activity that consumes us becomes intrinsically rewarding.” (Csikszentmihalyi, M. 2002, p.67). It is a state of being completely absorbed in an activity, to the point that any external reasons for that activity are forgotten. Later, it will become clear that flow states and play share the essential property of being autotelic and for the purposes of this essay can be understood as the having the same definition. It should, however, be noted that there are significant differences in Schlick and Csikszentmihalyi’s work. For example, Schlick sees autotelic experiences as being the answer to the meaning of life, whereas Csikszentmihalyi sees autotelic experiences as being ‘good’ only in that they have the potential to increase “the strength and complexity of the self” (Csikszentmihalyi, M. p.70). This can be expected, as Csikszentmihalyi is writing as a psychologist and Schlick is writing as a philosopher.

The example I wish to use throughout this essay is of a man called Rico Medellin who works in a factory assembly line. His job is to perform the exact same task on each unit that comes through the assembly line, day in, day out. Most people would find this unbearably boring. However, Rico reported that he often felt like he was in a ‘flow’ state, a state of complete absorption, because he has managed to change his attitude towards the task and in doing so has turned it into a game of sorts.

“The task he has to perform on each unit that passes in front of his station should take forty-three seconds to perform – the same exact operation almost six hundred times in a working day. Most people would grow tired of such work very soon. But Rico has been at this job for over five years, and he still enjoys it. The reason is that he approaches his task in the same way an Olympic athlete approaches his event: How can I beat my record? Like the runner who trains for years to shave a few seconds off his best performance on the track, Rico has trained himself to better his time on the assembly line. With the painstaking care of a surgeon, he has worked out a private routine for how to use his tools, how to do his moves. After five years, his best average for a day has been twenty-eight seconds per unit.” (Csikszentmihalyi, M. 2002, p.39).

This is an example of Csikszentmihalyi’s flow. However, I argue that Rico is also a real world example of what I consider to be play and I will refer back to Rico throughout this essay. It will also become clear that Schlick might not have had someone like Rico in mind when he defined

play. However, I argue that once the tensions in Schlick's work have been resolved, it is clear that Rico *is* truly playing. It should be noted that the example of Rico is an example where extreme resistance is present. The odds are stacked against Rico in that there is not fertile ground for a play state to arise. As will become obvious throughout this essay, I argue that play is an important part of our lives and by cultivating play, we enrich our lives with more meaningful experiences. If this is the case, there are clear social, economic and political consequences. Schlick is keenly aware of this, which is why he labels some work as 'evil'. This comes from desire to show that if we value play as a culture, we ought to minimise the amount of time people spend in situations like Rico, where he must spend time doing something that is not easily transformed into play. I will not explore these social consequences, but it is worth noting that if we do take play seriously, we may need to reevaluate our social and economic structures. Nonetheless, I have chosen the example of Rico specifically because of these factors. If I can show that Rico is genuinely playing, despite the circumstances being extremely unfavourable in helping him to reach play then the answer play can give to the question of the meaning of life is undoubtedly more robust and helpful to all of us, regardless of our economic and social situation.

For now, I shall return to Schlick's concept of play. A large part of Schlick's essay is dedicated to pitting play against work and railing against purpose-driven action. Schlick is not employing a new tactic by pitting play against work. As far back as Aristotle's *Politics*, work and play have been taken to be antithetical. In a brilliant essay called *Play in Aristotle*, Stephen E. Kidd explores the roles of work, play and leisure in Aristotle's writing. For example, in the *Politics*, Aristotle tries to refute those who argue that play is the *telos* of life and in doing so extensively explores the meaning of the words 'play', 'leisure' and 'work' (Kidd, S. E. 2016). Aristotle's claim that play is not the *telos* of life appears to directly contradict Schlick's argument that play *is* in fact the key to meaning in life. However, I will show that this is only an apparent contradiction. A brief digression to discuss Aristotle's work will help illuminate the apparent conflict in Aristotle and Schlick's work and provide some context for Schlick pitting work against play, as well as why I argue that play is better understood as a state than as certain activities.

### Departing from Aristotle – work vs. play vs. leisure

For Aristotle, play and leisure are different concepts. Play is merely relief from work but in comparison, leisure is the *telos* of work. 'To play' (Παίζω) comes from the root of the word 'child'. Therefore, play is intertwined with the activities of children and the spirit of youth (Kidd, S. E. 2016, p.354). Today, this connection can still be seen as many play researchers and educational psychologists will describe play by pointing to the rough and tumble of babies and children learning about the world around them. Take for example, the everyday usage of the verb 'play', as described in the Cambridge Dictionary Online: 'when you play, especially as a child, you spend time doing an enjoyable and/or entertaining activity' (Cambridge University Press, n.d.). On the other hand, leisure (σχολή) is rooted in the concept of time. Kidd writes that "'Free time" seems to be the meaning of σχολή originally, with emphasis on the "having" of time, as its root ἔχω suggests.'" (Kidd, S. E. 2016, p.355).

Aristotle wished to show that leisure should be seen as the *telos* of life, rather than play. He argued that play has been mistaken as the reason we work. Aristotle's central philosophy was concerned with εὐδαιμονία (happiness) and what makes a *truly* good life. Play appears to be a reasonable candidate for εὐδαιμονία because it is an apparently autotelic activity. This line of thinking goes like this; we work in order to have time to play, and this welcome break from our toils is where we find true enjoyment and meaning in life. However, as he contemplates the idea that play is the key to εὐδαιμονία, something falls short for Aristotle. He thinks that this line of thinking is the result of being misguided by 'tyrants'. (Kidd, S. E. 2016, p.359). We look at tyrants, who are able to indulge in play because of their power, and we assume that this is the key to happiness. However, the thing that does not sit well with Aristotle is that tyrants are not virtuous; they are powerful. We should not try to model our lives on the powerful, we should model our lives on the virtuous. After all, we are searching for εὐδαιμονία. This leads Aristotle to align play with the more bodily, hedonistic activities of tyrants. Kidd sums this up, writing: "What is striking...is the immediate equation of "play" with "pleasures of the body." (Kidd, S. E. 2016, p.359). While some pleasures are "pure and free," other pleasures are "bodily, somatic." (Kidd, S. E. 2016, p.359). Play falls into the latter category for Aristotle so he concludes that play cannot be the *telos* of life after all. He claims that in actual fact, we play *in order* to engage in serious matters. For Aristotle, it turns out that work and play are not antithetical after all. Just as we need to work for survival, we *need* to play as a physical break from work. "...for play is similar to rest, and since people are unable to toil continuously they require rest. Rest indeed is not an end: for it arises for the sake of activity" (Kidd, S. E. 2016, p.359). We engage in child-like play activities because we cannot work endlessly and our bodies need the time to relax. However, for Aristotle, this is not where we should finish our task of seeking happiness. There is another crucial step, which is leisure.

"...there is the pleasure that occurs when one reaches the completion (or perfection) of actions and then there is the pleasure that occurs to break up actions (i.e., the labors and pains which have been). Play provides pleasure of the latter variety. Perhaps the pleasure that arises in contemplating a math problem, for example, is not the same pleasure as the glass of wine to relax from the labors of said math problem." (Kidd, S. E. 2016, p.362).

In this way, Aristotle rejects the idea that play and work are antithetical. Instead, he groups work and play together as a means to be able to have leisure time. Leisure is the *telos* of work *and* play. Therefore, neither work nor play are autotelic for Aristotle. Instead, leisure is autotelic.

Play is a physical necessity for Aristotle. On the other hand, he relates leisure to θεωρία (contemplation) and thinks that leisure activities fall into the earlier category Kidd described as "the pleasure that occurs when one reaches the completion (or perfection) of actions" (Kidd, S. E. 2016, p.362). For Aristotle, leisure is when we engage in activities with a view to be more in touch with the divine. This is why, Kidd argues, the disembodied and embodied aspects of leisure are so important to Aristotle. The best kind of life for Aristotle is one that reflects godliness in the closest way and therefore the best kind of life is one of the mind,



rather than the body. Although I do not agree with this strict alignment of play with bodily activity, one aspect of Aristotle's understanding of play and leisure that is important is that an activity can be either play or leisure, depending on how one engages with the activity. One example Aristotle gives is of music. "...in Politics 8, he considers some activities, like music, to be both a form of play and a form of leisure. This presumably means that some activities can both provide relief from work (play) and be the goal of that work (leisure): it all depends, it seems, on one's reasons for engaging in an activity" (Kidd, S. E. 2016, p.353). I agree that the distinction between play and other states lies in the way we engage with activities. For Aristotle, play is when we are engaging in an activity as a restful break from work. On the other hand, when we engage in an activity for the sake of self-development, to develop a virtue, or to hone a skill, we are in the state of leisure. We can listen to music in a way that helps us to relax after a long day of work. For Aristotle, this is play. On the other hand, if we are listening to music in the way Nietzsche describes in *The Gay Science 334 (GS)*, we are in a different state.

*"One must learn to love. – This happens to us in music: first one must learn to hear a figure and melody at all, to detect and distinguish it, to isolate and delimit it as a life in itself; then one needs effort and good will to stand it despite its strangeness; patience with its appearance and expression, and kindheartedness about its oddity. Finally comes a moment when we are used to it; when we expect it; when we sense that we'd miss it if it were missing, and now it continues relentlessly to compel and enchant us until we have become humble and enraptured lovers..."* (Nietzsche, F. 1973, p.187).

There is a clear difference between the poetic way in which Nietzsche describes the process of learning to love and understand music and putting some music on in order to zone out and relax after a busy day. There is a distinct lack of effort in listening to music as a break from work compared to the kind of cognitive effort Nietzsche describes. This account of two ways of listening to music is sensible and this example shows that we are in fact able to engage in the same activity in different ways.

In many ways, Aristotle's account of play, leisure and work is convincing. From the example of music, we can easily see the way these three categories of play, leisure and work capture the reality of how we engage in activities. What Aristotle has captured that is so convincing and important is that there are different ways of engaging in the *same* activity. Recognising this is vital to understanding play. After all, the example of Rico working in the factory line but reporting that he has a fulfilling, meaningful experience whilst at work shows this to be the case. The case of Rico shows that there are two ways of engaging in the same activity. One way Rico could engage in his factory line job would be to accept that he must do this job to survive and earn money and get through the day with sheer grit and resolution. However, the way Rico engages with his job elevates his experience, helping him to reach a 'flow' state that makes his task become completely absorbing. Similarly to the example of music, the level of cognitive effort Rico puts in to gamifying his work is certainly a factor in his experience.

The concern may be raised at this point that the distinction between play and leisure Aristotle has given completely undermines Schlick's argument that play and work are antithetical. However, I argue that this apparent conflict between Schlick and Aristotle is essentially an issue of linguistics. Both Aristotle and Schlick agree that the meaning of life lies in activities that are autotelic. They both have similar views on work and quickly dismiss work as a candidate for creating a meaningful life. The conflict comes from Aristotle's claim that play is not autotelic, whilst Schlick claims that play is autotelic. Let us revisit Schlick's definition of play. Schlick claims that play is "any activity which takes place entirely for its own sake, independently of its effects and consequences." (Schlick, M. 2008, p.65). In other words, Schlick defines play as any activity that is intrinsically valued, rather than instrumentally valued. The activities that Aristotle calls play are not intrinsically valuable. Aristotle's definition of play is that it is a restful activity, which has the *instrumental value* of giving us a physical break. Therefore, Aristotle's 'play' is instrumentally valuable. Considering this, it logically follows that what Schlick has in mind when he calls autotelic activities 'play' cannot be what Aristotle calls 'play'. Once we understand this, it becomes obvious that what Aristotle calls 'leisure' is what Schlick calls 'play'. The important quality for both Aristotle and Schlick in creating meaningful experiences is the quality of being intrinsically valuable, of being end-in-themselves activities. Therefore, the apparent contradiction between them turns out to be a lot of philosophical hot air.

### How an activity becomes play

Now the apparent conflict between Aristotle and Schlick has been resolved, I can address the fact that through the discussion of Aristotle's work, it has become apparent that the *same* activity can be engaged with in a way that makes it work, rest or play.

There are clear tensions within Schlick's writing about how to best understand play and I argue that this comes from the fact that although certain activities are more playful in nature than others, play cannot just be understood in terms of activities because what one considers playful differs for each individual. Stuart Brown notes this in his book *Play*. Brown writes "...For one person, dangling hundreds of feet above the ground, held there by only a few callused fingers on a granite cliff face, is ecstasy...Gardening might be wonderful fun for some but a sweaty bore for others." (Brown, S. 2010, p.15) There is so much variation in what people find playful that it is impossible to give an extensive list of what activities count as play. We cannot uncover the definition of play by trying to write an exhaustive list of playful activities. Neither can we look towards specific activities to help us fully understand play, as what counts as play for some will undoubtedly be nightmarish for others. Given our inability to write an exhaustive list of playful activities, the account that Aristotle gives of the same activities being *transformed* into work, play or leisure seems to be convincing.

The fact that the same activity can be work or play was summed up well by Hugh Hunter in an article called 'About Free Time'. Hunter describes watching a man sail his boat across a lake back and forth and realising this leisure activity could quite easily be work. It was the absence of having to work in order to earn money and survive that made this activity enjoyable.

“I first noticed the problem of free time when I was vacationing...as we watched, motorboats criss-crossed the lake, even though it was small enough that they could go from one side to the other in less than twenty minutes. But back and forth they went. One fellow was so diligent that he put in almost a full eight hours criss-crossing. It looked like work, I thought. If he had been delivering packages from one end of the lake to the other, it would have been work. And yet, it wasn't; it was his free time.” (Hunter, H. 2019, p.24).

I anticipate that a criticism might be levelled at this example. The difference, it could be argued, is that of free will. If a man was being paid to sail from one side of the lake to the other, presumably he needs the job in order to have money for food and shelter, thus he is not acting entirely voluntarily. On the other hand, there is a larger element of free will in the fact that he has *chosen* to spend his free time doing this. What Hunter has intuited is that there is a difference in spending our time doing something for the purpose of survival and out of necessity, and doing something simply because one *chooses* to. If this is the case, we don't need to be able to write a list of playful activities. Instead, any activity we have a certain level of choice in can be playful. Things like work are a necessity, so work-related activities can never be playful. However, I shall return to the example of Rico to help counter this criticism. Rico reported working in the factory line and experiencing a sense of flow that gave him a fulfilling, immersive experience that absorbs his concentration to the point that he forgets he is working. He has created a game out of his job. Therefore, it seems that a work activity can be actively *transformed* into a play state by engaging with the activity in a certain way. Even though Rico would probably not choose to spend his time on the factory line if he did not need the money, nonetheless the way in which he approaches his job means he is able to transform work into play. More importantly, nobody could have forced this internal state so Rico *is* acting out of choice. He has chosen to engage with his work in a way that elevates the task and creates a flow state.

In addition to this, Csikszentmihalyi noted a paradox that cannot be explained by simply dividing activities into work and play by the level of choice someone has over his or her daily activities. Csikszentmihalyi noted that often, reports of flow activity were higher during work hours and infrequent during free time.

“As expected, the more time a person spent in flow during the week, the better was the overall quality of his or her reported experience. People who were more often in flow were especially likely to feel “strong,” “active,” “creative,” “concentrated,” and “motivated”. What was unexpected, however, is how frequently people reported flow situations at work, and how rarely in leisure.” (Csikszentmihalyi, M. 220, p.158)

Csikszentmihalyi often used the Experience Sampling Method, which requires participants to wear a pager for a week. When the pager beeped at random intervals, participants were asked to fill out a two-page form about what they were doing and to what extent they felt they were having flow experiences. In one of these studies, 4,800 responses were collected and the results showed that people reported flow states as high as 54 percent of the time

during work. On the other hand, during leisure time only 18 percent of the responses reported flow states. (Csikszentmihalyi, M. 220, p.158-9). This provides further evidence that we cannot define play and work merely in terms of free choice. The freedom to choose what to do with one's time is neither necessary nor sufficient for autotelic states. The case of Rico experiencing flow at work shows that free time is not necessary for an activity to become autotelic and the paradox Csikszentmihalyi uncovered shows that free time is not sufficient to launch us into autotelic states either. Taking this into account, I conclude that Hugh Hunter's observation is not merely an observation of free will. Hunter's example shows that no activity can clearly belong exclusively to the category of work or play. What matters is our internal state of affairs when we engage in activities. As I have already claimed, any concept of play *must* take this into account if it is to be taken seriously and this is one of the main reasons Schlick's concept of play needs to be reworked.

### Schlick's play: activity vs. state

In describing play, Schlick's writing appears to be contradictory at times. Sometimes, Schlick refers to play as particular activities. Specifically, he seems to suggest that creative activities are playful. At other times, Schlick implies that play is a kind of state one can reach if one has the right attitude towards activities.

Describing play, he writes, "...life means movement and action, and if we wish to find a meaning in it we must seek for *activities* which carry their own purpose and value within them, independently of any extraneous goals..." (Schlick, M. 2008, p.64). However, I have shown that it does not make sense to talk about activities as if they can be put into these separate categories. The examples I have referred to so far, of Rico, of sailing and of music, along with Aristotle's, are evidence that the difference between work, rest and play is not simply the activity itself but that the internal state of affairs that exists whilst we engage in these activities is an important part of play. What matters is, as Kidd pointed out, "...the circumstances and goals in which the activities are engaged in". (Kidd, S.E. 2016, p.362). Therefore, I think that in implying play can be captured solely in terms of activities, Schlick's writing can cause some ambiguity about the essential nature of play. This *must* be resolved because otherwise, the evidence I have shown that the same activity can be work, rest or play undermines Schlick's writing. In fact, Schlick often contradicts himself during *On the Meaning of Life*. Sometimes, he refers to play as a certain activity. At other times, he seems to be describing play as a certain state, or attitude one can take that can transform an activity into play. I argue that the latter is a better representative of the nature of play, and that we ought to discard the idea that play can be understood solely in terms of activities.

When introducing the concept of play, Schlick repeatedly refers to play as an activity. His first reference is when he claims, "...life means movement and action, and if we wish to find a meaning in it we must seek for *activities* which carry their own purpose and value within them, independently of any extraneous goals..." (Schlick, M. 2008, p.64). He continues; "There really are such activities. To be consistent, we must call them *play*..." (Schlick, M. 2008, p.64). In fact, one of Schlick's only solid examples of play is that of the artist and he refers to the *activity* of artists as the reason they are playful. "Let us look about us: where do we find creative play? The brightest example is to be seen in the creation of the artist. His activity, the

shaping of his work by inspiration, is itself pleasure..." (Schlick, M. 2008, p.66). These quotes suggest that Schlick thinks certain activities are play. It appears that Schlick thinks some activities, like that of the artist, qualify as being playful and creative, whilst others are automatically disqualified. For example, he criticises some work because he claims that certain work can never become a playful activity. Schlick even goes so far as calling this kind of work 'evil' (Schlick, M. 2008, p.66).

On the other hand, at times, Schlick seems to be referring to play as a sort of state that can be achieved, if one manages to forget purpose. In forgetting purpose, the activity becomes autotelic and thus becomes a candidate for play. In discussing the work of the artist, Schlick notes that there are some activities an artist must do, such as a painter colour mixing or a composer writing down his notes. He claims these "...remain, for the most part, toil and work; they are the husks and dross that often still attach to play in real life." (Schlick, M. 2008, p.66). Crucially, though, he goes on to write that these activities can, after all, "...develop so much charm and attractiveness that they turn into artistic play themselves." (Schlick, M. 2008, p.66). Schlick seems to recognise here that activities can '*turn into*' play. He goes on to expand on this claim, saying that "The tilling of the fields, the weaving of fabrics, the cobbling of shoes, can all become play, and may take on the character of artistic acts." (Schlick, M. 2008, p.66.) He also claims that "The more activities, indeed, become play in the philosophical sense...the more values would be created in human society." (Schlick, M. 2008, p.65). This suggests that Schlick does in fact recognise that the same activity can be both work or play, depending entirely on the way one approaches that activity internally. In fact, at one point he claims this outright; "Human action is work, not because it bears fruit, but only when it proceeds from, and is governed by, the thought of its fruit" (Schlick, M. 2008, p.66). Our attitude towards the activity can transform it from something we are doing for a purpose, to something we are fully immersed in.

I argue that we ought to understand Schlick's play as a state one can achieve with the right attitude towards an activity, rather than thinking of play as limited to certain activities. It appears to me that the contradictions in Schlick's writing are rooted in the normal usage of 'play' versus Schlick's broader definition of play. The normal usage of play is the verb *to play*, which as we have already seen is 'spend[ing] time doing an enjoyable and/or entertaining activity' (Cambridge University Press, n.d.). However, Schlick's broader, philosophical definition is concerned with the essential property of being autotelic. It may be that it is difficult to completely disentangle Schlick's new definition from the everyday lexicon and this leads to some residual references to play as activities. There is textual evidence that Schlick might have thought of some activities as play, and others as the 'husks and dross', the practicalities that must be attended to. However, Schlick makes outright claims at other points that there is a kind of transformation that can take place which turns activities *into* play. These contradictions must be resolved and, as I previously stated, any concept of play that wishes to be taken seriously ought to account for the fact the same activity can be both work or play – there are simply too many examples to claim the contrary.

Schlick's references to play as an activity seem to be tied up with his belief that there are certain types of work that can never qualify as playful. However, I argue that we ought to

discard this view because it may be at least partly rooted in the current of thought that was popular at the time he was writing. Schlick published *On the Meaning of Life* in 1927, not long after the Arts and Crafts movement had swept through Britain and Europe. The movement began as a reaction against the mass production that came along with factory machines and the emphasis was on hand-made crafts and fine art. This wave of thought reached Germany. For example, there was the establishment of Bauhaus, an art school dedicated to fine arts and crafts. Similar attitudes towards mass production and popular culture can be seen in the works of Theodor Adorno. Adorno wrote *On Popular Music* in which he differentiates between popular music and 'serious' music. He writes that the fundamental characteristic of popular music is that it is standardised. Popular music is not unique and is similar to factory-produced items in that every part of it is 'substitutable'. (Adorno, T. 1941). Adorno's work highlights a popular line of thinking which criticised the standardisation and mass production of the time. Other philosophers like Nietzsche also expressed similar worries that "men seem like factory products" (Nietzsche, F. 1997, p.127). There was clearly a reactionary wave against mass-production and a disdain for the false sense of individualism this encouraged. Therefore, it is not unreasonable to suggest that this line of thought influenced Schlick. Of course, this is speculation but we do know, for example, that Schlick admired Nietzsche's work and was heavily influenced by it. Therefore, the time at which Schlick was writing might explain why he wanted to maintain that there are some activities that can never qualify as play.

There is another reason that may explain why Schlick calls some work 'evil' and claims it can never be playful. This is tied up with the relationship between activities and states, which also goes some way to demonstrating why Schlick's writing sometimes appears contradictory, with references to play as activities at times and as states at other times. This reason is that certain activities are easier to transform into play than others are. Even if we understand play as a state that can be reached, it is clear that some activities naturally lend themselves to being playful. Perhaps then, Schlick intuited that certain activities naturally lend themselves to being playful, whilst still being alive to the intuition that the way in which we engage with activities determines whether they become playful or not. I maintain the latter intuition that all activities have the potential to become play, depending on the way one engages with the activity. However, this does not commit me to the thought that every activity can become play with the same amount of cognitive effort. Instead, some activities are predisposed to becoming playful because they encourage a certain attitude towards that activity. For example, a person playing a game of tennis is likely to experience a play state with little cognitive effort because the activity naturally lends itself to being absorbing since the elements of sportsmanship and competition capture our attention. Not only this, but it is clear we have certain predispositions to activities we enjoy. As we have seen so far, play is entirely subjective. One person may enjoy extreme sports, whilst another enjoys playing the piano. How or why we have certain predispositions to prefer one activity over another is another topic that I shall not delve into here, but it is true that what we find fun or engaging varies from one individual to another. This means that not only game-like activities such as tennis are easily transformed into play. Each individual will likely have certain activities that they naturally find enjoyable and engaging. Therefore, they are likely to find themselves in a state

of play whilst doing these activities. On the other hand, working in a factory line for hours performing the same operation six hundred times a day is a task that seems more difficult to transform into play. This activity may well seem an unlikely candidate for play, which is why Schlick encourages us to disqualify this kind of activity from having the potential to be playful. Schlick's claim that some work is 'evil' may be rooted in how he thinks we ought to structure our society. If we value play, we ought to structure society in a way where people are not forced to be in conditions like Rico, where a huge amount of cognitive effort is needed to transform the activity into play. After all, Schlick says of this kind of occupation that he "advise[s] a very careful scrutiny of their fruits... So long as our economy is focussed on mere increase of production, instead of on the true enrichment of life, these activities cannot diminish". If, on the other hand, we design our society in a way that values play "All that will then remain over will be simply the avocations serving to generate true culture... in them there dwells a spirit that favours their evolution into true forms of play." (Schlick, M. 2008, p.66). I agree with Schlick that we ought to truly evaluate certain occupations, especially like that of Rico's, if we do value play. If we value play, we ought to create a structure where people are able to spend more time on activities that have in them the 'spirit that favours their evolution into true forms of play'. However, I do not think this logically leads to the conclusion that certain activities can *never* become playful. In fact, we must reject Schlick's claim that certain jobs cannot become play if we want to account for examples like Rico. Ironically, I imagine that the kind of work Schlick thought of as 'evil' is exactly the kind of work Rico is doing in the factory. Yet, Rico reports experiencing an autotelic state. If play is understood as an autotelic state, then Rico is clearly an example of true play. It logically follows, therefore, that we ought to discard Schlick's claim that some activities can never become playful. Therefore, Schlick's suggestions that certain activities are work and other activities are play must be discarded. The example of Rico shows us this is incorrect.

If all activities have the potential to become play, even factory line jobs, then it follows that the ability to transform activities into play lies within each individual and their relationship to that activity. This is what Schlick claims is the essential element of play; namely that we hold that activity as something we intrinsically value. Once we have this cognitive relationship to the activity, it transforms into play. This is the key reason I argue that using the word 'activity' to describe play does not fully capture the essence of Schlick's definition of play. Activities can have elements that make them more likely to become playful, but 'play state' helps to capture the fact that the way we relate to an activity can transform the activity into play. Football, for example, is an activity that is designed in a way that is promotes play. There are elements of competition and sportsmanship and a brief suspension of reality that are all typical of the kind of activities we usually think of when we think of play. However, it is possible to play football in a way that Schlick would not count as playful by his definition. For example, if a person is playing football only to have a successful career and earn money, then they are never truly playing because they do not intrinsically value the activity of football. On the other hand, Rico is able to playfully work on a factory line. In other words, my claim that we ought to refer to play as a state, rather than as activities is rooted in a desire to demonstrate that play can arise regardless of what activity we are physically doing. The essential factor is our valuing our activity intrinsically. Once we do this, we transform the

activity into play. By referring to play as a state, it better captures this nuance. Csikszentmihalyi wanted us to understand flow in a similar way. He writes that “When describing optimal experience... we have given as examples such activities as making music, rock climbing, dancing, sailing, chess and so forth. What makes these conducive to flow is that they were designed to make optimal experience easier to achieve.” From this, it is clear that Csikszentmihalyi also understands flow as something we achieve by engaging in activities in a particular way. Again, this shows that there is a clear difference between activities and play states and that ‘state’ best captures play.

Some people, like Rico, are able to transform even mundane tasks into play. Others appear unable to even enjoy their free time. Csikszentmihalyi’s study showing that only 18 percent of leisure time produced flow states suggests that the onus lies within each of us to cultivate the ability to transform activities into play. I shall return to this point later. For now, I hope to have given a convincing argument that play should be understood as a state, rather than an activity. When play is understood as a state we can account for Aristotle and Hunter’s observations, as well as the example of Rico. Moreover, I have shown that we cannot disqualify any activity from being able to become playful because the determining factor in play is the way in which we engage with the activity.

### Schlick on joy vs. pleasure

Now I have established that play is best understood as a state that comes about as a result of our attitude towards activities, I wish to turn to another issue in Schlick’s writing that needs to be addressed.

Schlick is concerned with existential nihilism and aims to overcome this. He has already concluded that simply surviving cannot give our lives meaning. Schlick needs to show that even if all of life’s practicalities were taken care of and we were guaranteed survival, we could still lack meaning and would still seek it out. This *must* be the case, or else we end up back on the doorstep of existential nihilism. To that end, Schlick is clearly concerned that the content of our lives is not purely trivial. This is potentially another reason why he clings to a certain kind of aestheticism rather than conceding that *any* activity can be transformed into play. There is a certain irony about the aestheticism remaining in Schlick’s work when he writes about creative acts like that of the artist. Throughout *On the Meaning of Life*, Schlick expresses his admiration for “the wisest Nietzsche” and in 1912 Schlick had a series of lectures devoted to Nietzsche (Schlick, M. 2008, p.63). Early in *On the Meaning of Life*, Schlick claims that Nietzsche sought to conquer pessimism first by flight into art, then by flight into knowledge. Finding truth and beauty unsatisfactory, Schlick claims that Nietzsche turned to the idea that “the ultimate value of life, to him, was life itself...” (Schlick, M. 2008, p.63). Yet, Schlick still seems to harbour certain aesthetic values that he thinks Nietzsche eventually abandoned. This may be because of his acute awareness that if we strip play down to being *entirely* subjective, we are left with the nagging question that life might be arbitrary and trivial



after all. Schlick was aware of the danger of putting forward an entirely subjective argument for the meaning of life.<sup>1</sup>

In order to demonstrate how play truly enriches our lives, not in a trivial way, but in a deep, meaningful way, Schlick distinguishes between two feelings – pleasure and joy. Pleasure is a shallow, meaningless feeling that would not give us a sense of meaning if we were to pursue it endlessly. For Schlick, pleasure gives us a fleeting sense of satisfaction, whereas joy gives us a deep feeling of inspiration.

“Yet let us beware of confusing joy, on which life’s value depends, with its surrogate, mere pleasure...Pleasure wearies, while joy refreshes; the latter enriches, the former puts a false sheen upon existence. Both indeed, lead us away from daily toil and distract us from care, but they do it in different ways: pleasure by diverting us, joy by pulling us together. Diversion offers the spirit fleeting excitement, without depth or content; for joy there is more needed, a thought or a feeling which fills the whole man, an inspiration which sets him soaring above everyday life.” (Schlick, M. 2008, p.69).

Pleasure merely “ruffles the surface of the soul and leaves it featureless as before...it leaves behind a stale after-taste, as a symptom of a spiritual turbidity.” (Schlick, M. 2008, p.69). On the other hand, joy is something that pulls us together and fills the soul with inspiration.

Here, Schlick seems to parallel the distinction made by Aristotle between leisure and play. Instead of using ‘leisure’ and ‘play’ as two distinct concepts, Schlick chooses to express the distinction between being distracted from the toils of life and being completely absorbed by an activity by using the feelings these states produce, i.e. ‘joy’ and ‘pleasure’. Of course, there are some vital differences between Schlick and Aristotle here. For example, Aristotle’s ‘play’ is truly restful in nature, whereas Schlick uses pleasure as the grounds for this distinction and it is clear that pleasure is not necessarily restful. Furthermore, the intellectualism of Aristotle’s concept of leisure does not feature in Schlick’s concept of play. Nonetheless, these are merely interesting asides. The important distinction both Aristotle and Schlick have sensed is that there is a real difference between the brief escape from life that pleasure can give us and a deeper, more fulfilling feeling. Aristotle accounted for this by distinguishing between leisure, play and work but Schlick lets this distinction play out later with joy and pleasure. By claiming that play leads to joy, rather than merely to pleasure Schlick can provide a more robust answer to the question of meaning.

However, by doing this, it is apparent to me that Schlick is in danger of suggesting that play is instrumental after all, in that play helps to produce joy. The poetic nature of Schlick’s writing in this section of the essay only serves to emphasise the fact that he seems to imply that play is instrumental after all. For example, he writes that ‘life’s value depends’ on joy and quotes Nietzsche’s claim that ‘joy is deeper than heartache’ (Schlick, M. 2008, p.69). He romanticizes

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<sup>1</sup> For an overview of subjective versus hybrid theories of meaning in life, please see Rowlands, M. (2015) ‘The Immortal, the Intrinsic and the Quasi Meaning of Life’ in *The Journal of Ethics*, Vol. 19 (3/4, Special Issue: Immortality) 379-408.

about feelings of joy and truly underscores how much joy is an exalted state compared to pleasure. Importantly, Schlick links joy and play together, claiming that the meaningful parts of our lives are “collected...into a few short hours of deep, serene joy, into the hours of play.” (Schlick, M. 2008, p.69). It becomes ambiguous whether play is instrumental after all, in its ability to bring about joyfulness. By distinguishing between pleasure and joy and writing so passionately about joy, Schlick is in danger of logically committing himself to the idea that play is instrumental. It is obvious that in order to preserve the essential feature of play, i.e. the intrinsic nature of play, joy needs to be understood as a marker of play, rather than the *aim* of play. This must be addressed and Schlick fails to anticipate this criticism.

In order to resolve this, I shall turn to the work of Mark Rowlands. In his essay, *The Immortal, the Intrinsic, and the Quasi Meaning of Life*, Rowlands rephrases Schlick’s distinction between joy and pleasure. He writes:

“Hedonically speaking, two forms of happiness should be distinguished: the former consisting in a form of pleasure whose function is to distract us from how much of our lives has only instrumental value, and the latter a joy that consists in the recognition of what we intrinsically value. Pleasure is a distraction from work. Joy is a celebration of play.” (Rowlands, M. 2015, p.391)

The way Rowlands expresses Schlick’s distinction helps to highlight that joy should be understood as a *celebration* of play, rather than the *goal* of play. Joy comes about as a by-product of the things we intrinsically value. The value still lies in play but we have a natural response to doing things we intrinsically value – i.e. joy. Rather than being distracted by pleasure from the fact that our lives are spent doing things that are merely instrumentally valuable, by finding things we value intrinsically we will genuinely have an answer to the existential question of meaning. In those hours where we feel we have spent our time doing something we genuinely, intrinsically value, we will feel joy.

It is vital for Schlick that joy is a by-product of play, rather than the goal of playing. If this is the case, then we should be able to play without joy and still find it intrinsically valuable. I argue that this is in fact the case. Again, I shall return to the case of Rico. Rico reports a state of complete absorption in the game he plays at work. We know that Rico gets a real sense of satisfaction from his job. He reported “It’s better than anything else” and that “It’s a whole lot better than watching TV” (Csikszentmihalyi, M. 2002, p.39-40). Here, we can see the pleasure/joy distinction. Watching TV might bring pleasure but Rico gets a deeper satisfaction from performing his job. However, joy does not have to be a permanent fixture in the case of Rico. In fact, it seems unreasonable to suggest that every single minute Rico feels joy. He may well experience complete concentration and be in a state of flow but he does not have to feel joy to be in flow. Joy can come and go but Rico can still be fully absorbed by the task. Moments of celebration are likely to come about. For example, we can imagine that he must feel particularly joyous in certain moments like when he beats a personal record. Yet, these will likely be pauses for celebration after he has beaten his record. Whilst he is beating his personal record, he will be so absorbed by the task that he will not necessarily be joyful. When we think of Rico, we do not think of days filled with endless joy because of his attitude to

work. Instead, we think that he has found a way of creating a mindful challenge that takes up all of his concentration and mental energy, to the point that he is not thinking about extrinsic reasons for his task.

Another example can be found in Rowlands' essay. He describes the life of Richard Parks, a rugby player who had to retire due to a shoulder injury. Initially, he struggled to come to terms with the loss of his career but eventually found new meaning in the *737 Challenge*, a challenge to climb to the peak of several mountains (Rowlands, M. 2015, p. 390). At moments, Parks must have been so completely absorbed by trying to complete the challenge that it is doubtful these moments would have been joyous. In fact, they are likely to have been challenging and unpleasant in the moment. Nonetheless, Parks was playing in Schlick's sense – for him, the challenge was intrinsically valuable. Rowlands asks us to imagine Parks' feelings as he set foot on the summit of the last mountain. Similarly, he asks us to imagine the moment a marathon runner realises they will make it to the finish line. These are moments of joy. Rowlands writes that these are moments of "recognition – we might think of it as experiential understanding – that one is doing something that is worth doing just for what it is." (Rowlands, M. 2015, p.391). Joy is not a continuous feature of play but there are moments when we pause and recognise the deep, satisfying feeling we get from doing things we truly value. This shows that joy is undoubtedly a by-product of play but never the goal of play. In fact, for Schlick, if we are driven by the end-goal of feeling joyous, we have entirely missed the central idea of play. Namely, that no extrinsic goal should be our focus. If we are driven by wanting to feel joy, it logically follows we cannot be playing by Schlick's definition.

We must understand joy in this way if Schlick's concept of play is to be taken seriously. If joy becomes the purpose of play, play is no longer autotelic and the entire argument falls apart. Unfortunately, Schlick does stray into romantic prose at times and this is one of the instances where his lyrical writing threatens to undermine his argument. In any case, as long as we understand joy as a celebratory by-product of play, then the value of play does not depend on whether or not this celebration comes about. Therefore, the intrinsic value of play remains intact. Still, Schlick's notion of pleasure and joy is important and should not simply be discarded. The distinction between pleasure and joy is necessary. Schlick needs to show that play is not merely a distraction from existential dread. Rather, joy is the celebration of play and remains a marker that we are doing things we intrinsically value.

## Schlick 2.0

I have now addressed the tensions in Schlick's writing and clarified how we ought to understand the concept of play. Through a discussion of Aristotle's work and a closer look at the definition of play, I have shown that the same activity can launch us into different states. Once this is taken into account, it is clear that we ought to understand play as a state, rather than in terms of particular activities. By showing this to be true, I have addressed the contradictions in Schlick's writing where he refers to play as an activity at times and as a state at other times. I have pushed the concept of play to be entirely subjective by showing that even Rico is playing, despite being in a repetitive, mechanical job. Schlick clearly resists making play entirely subjective by sneaking in objective aesthetic claims about what activities can qualify as play. However, I have shown that we ought to discard this view and embrace

the idea that play *is* entirely subjective. For some, writing will be intrinsically valuable, for others gardening, climbing mountains, painting pictures, etc. is intrinsically valuable. Furthermore, I have addressed the criticism that might be levelled at Schlick that joy is really the state he values, rather than play. I have shown that joy is not necessary for play. Once we understand joy as merely a celebratory by-product of play, this criticism can be avoided.

The changes I have made to Schlick's version of play are important and necessary changes. The work I have done so far has helped make Schlick's concept of play more convincing and consistent. Even so, although I have made adjustments to Schlick's work, what still stands is Schlick's central argument that play is the key to creating meaningful experiences and recognising this will help to enrich our lives.

To summarise, play should be understood as a state we can reach by engaging with an activity in such a way that we become completely absorbed by it and in doing so, forget any extrinsic reason for undertaking that activity. If we are playing, our relational status to the activity we are doing is one of intrinsically valuing that activity. We can reach this state regardless of what activity we are undertaking, although the effort it takes to reach a state of play will depend on both the person and the activity. I have already established that certain activities lend themselves to being playful and later I will show how a person might be able to reach play states more easily than others. Nevertheless, now that a clearer picture of play has been established, it should become obvious that play and flow share the same essential features.

Firstly, Csikszentmihalyi seems to have a similar outlook on life as Schlick and Aristotle in that he seems to agree that the majority of our lives we spend doing things that have a telos, or end, outside of themselves. Schlick rails against purpose for this reason. Csikszentmihalyi too thinks that these kinds of activities will not bring us meaning.

“So much of what we ordinarily do has no value in itself, and we do it only because we have to do it, or because we expect some benefit from it. Many people feel that the time they spend at work is essentially wasted – they are alienated from it, and the psychic energy invested in the job does nothing to strengthen their self. For quite a few people free time is also wasted. Leisure provides a relaxing respite from work, but it generally consists of passively absorbing information, without using any skills or exploring new opportunities for action.” (Csikszentmihalyi, M. 2002, p.68).

The essential feature of flow for Csikszentmihalyi is that a person who is undertaking an activity reaches a state of complete absorption and becomes entirely consumed by the activity so that it becomes autotelic. He sums up flow as such: “The key element of an optimal experience is that it is an end in itself. Even if initially undertaken for other reasons, the activity that consumes us becomes intrinsically rewarding.” (Csikszentmihalyi, M. 2002, p.67). This is the same as Schlick's play. As long as we value our activity *intrinsically*, we are playing. Csikszentmihalyi describes flow as a state that can be achieved if we have a certain attitude towards our activities. As I have shown, this aligns with play. Furthermore, Csikszentmihalyi agrees with Schlick that pleasure does not hold the key to meaningful experience. “Pleasure is an important component of the quality of life, but by itself does not bring happiness...”

(Csikszentmihalyi, M. 2002, p.46). This is the same current of thought that Aristotle sensed, and later Schlick too.

For both Csikszentmihalyi and Schlick, the essential features of flow and play, respectively, are that we are engaging in activities we value in themselves and not because of external reasons. Hence, the example of Rico from Csikszentmihalyi's work can be applied to this discussion of play theory. At this point, I hope to have provided a clear and convincing picture of play and to have resolved any tensions in Schlick's work. Therefore, I can now turn to the second aim of this essay, namely to show how we might use play to create more meaningful lives.

## Maximising play

I wish to explore two ways in which we can use play to create more meaning in our lives. The first way to apply play to our lives would be to simply embrace our free time and spend this time playing as much as possible without guilt. We should maximise our time playing and strive to work as little as possible. If we unashamedly pursue only those things that we intrinsically value then we will have created the most meaningful life possible. At face value, this does not seem to be an interesting philosophical pursuit. However, I will explore the fact that we must know *what* we intrinsically value in order to maximise our time playing. Knowing what we value is a pre-requisite to spending as much time as we can doing those things that we value. In order to explore this, I will briefly discuss the ideas that Nietzsche puts forward about creating and uncovering our values. Through this discussion, I hope to show that weaving play into our lives is not a simple case of maximizing our free time. Rather, play is intertwined with our values and nature and we must do some serious internal work in order to be able to reach play states as much as possible.

However, the harsh reality is that we do not have full control over many hours of our lives. The average person must provide food and shelter for themselves and others. We have to pay bills, maintain our living spaces and often provide for children too. Only the elite few have the freedom to pursue their own intrinsic values all the time. For the rest of us, we may have to spend time working in a job we *do not* intrinsically value or spend time doing things like washing up, cooking, cleaning and keeping on top of bills. We usually spend a large amount of our lives doing things that we value instrumentally and if we neglected these things our lives would fall apart. We are unable to change these circumstances so at this point it might seem that play is not helpful after all, except for the few hours of free time we manage to salvage here and there. But Rico has shown that this is not the case. Play is not limited to certain 'free time' activities but can be experienced in a factory too. Rico shows that we can actually cultivate the ability to be able to transform activities into play states. Rather than allowing atrophy to creep into his mindset, in the face of a repetitive and unchallenging job, Rico managed to create a healthy challenge by seeing his job as an opportunity to create a fun game. In doing so, Rico is practicing the skill of play. We must approach activities with an attitude that allows us to find true value in activities and become absorbed by them. If we can learn how to turn activities into play, then we will enrich life with meaning. Csikszentmihalyi recognised this and not only wrote about autotelic states but also about autotelic

personalities. There are certain ways in which we can practice having the right motives and attitudes and in this way, become more likely to experience play states.

I will explore these two ways of maximising play in our lives and in doing so hope to show that play is a serious candidate for creating meaning in our lives.

## Nietzsche on uncovering our true values

The first way of using play to enrich our lives that I would like to explore is the idea that we should try to maximise the amount of time we spend doing things we intrinsically value. As I have already shown, certain activities launch us into play states with less effort than others. These tend to be activities like sport or games, but also the things that each individual is naturally inclined to enjoy. If we love writing, we should design our lives in a way where we can write as much as possible. If we love extreme sports, we should spend as much time as we can doing extreme sports. Whatever it is we truly value, we should pursue those things wherever we can. This seems like sage advice and it is common to hear this kind of wisdom given out. Take, for example, the clichéd advice that if you choose a job you love, you will never work a day in your life. This seems to be what frustrated Adorno when he was repeatedly asked about his hobbies despite feeling as if his job was aligned with his own intentions. (Adorno, T. 1991, p.163) Encouraging people to play as often as they can might appear to be a philosophically uninteresting interpretation of Schlick's work. However, on closer inspection designing our lives around play is a more difficult task than it first appears. Let us remember, the version of Schlick that I have put forward requires us to pursue those activities we value in themselves in order to reach a state where we forget our purpose entirely and become completely absorbed by our action. It is strikingly obvious to me, and no doubt to people who have heard things such as 'do what you love' that it is a task in itself to uncover what you truly value. After all, our friends, family, economic situation and the society and time in which we live influence many of our values. To illustrate the complicated relationship between play and our values, I will briefly discuss Nietzsche's writing on values and authenticity. Schlick admired and was heavily influenced by Nietzsche's work, particularly *Thus Spoke Zarathustra (Z)*. Schlick came across Nietzsche as a teenager and wrote in his unpublished autobiography "no other book would "so shake and enrapture [him] as much as Zarathustra" and in his memoir, Feigl lists Nietzsche as one of the most influential philosophers of Schlick's philosophy of life (Vrahimis, A. 2020, p.4).<sup>2</sup> As I have mentioned, Schlick's admiration of Nietzsche can clearly be seen throughout *On the Meaning of Life* as he quotes him multiple times and calls him "the wisest Nietzsche" (Schlick, M. 2008, p.63). Considering this, Nietzsche is an apt choice for exploring the role of values in the context of Schlick's theory of play.

Nietzsche was, primarily, a cultural critic and he has written extensively about extricating ourselves from the influences of society and to live unique, authentic lives. He refused to give a blueprint on how we ought to live our lives, believing that we cannot merely fashion

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<sup>2</sup> For a more thorough exploration of Schlick's reception of Nietzsche please see Vrahimis, A. (2020) 'The Vienna Circle's Reception of Nietzsche' in *Journal for the History of Analytical Philosophy*, Vol. 8 (9). 1-24. [ISSN: 2159-0303]

ourselves after other people. Throughout his work, Nietzsche consistently rails against the fact that we are too influenced by society, or too afraid to stand out from society, which leads us to become like ‘factory products’, rather than embracing our individual values. He encourages us to ‘become oneself’ and to not be afraid of creating our own values. This infamous phrase ‘to become oneself’ was the subtitle of his autobiography, *Ecce Homo* and the first appearance of Nietzsche’s demand for us to “become who you are” appears in *GS* 270. This demand is part of a wider enterprise of encouraging us to ‘self-fashion’, a theme that is woven throughout Nietzsche’s work (Nietzsche, F. 2001, p.152).<sup>3</sup> What is important in Nietzsche’s writing is that he shows that we are heavily influenced by external factors and that uncovering and creating our *true* values is a difficult task that requires us to do serious internal work. In terms of play, this is important because this means we must take Nietzsche’s task seriously in order to know what we truly value. Only then will we be able to design our lives around these values and in turn, maximise play.

Nietzsche’s first sustained discussion on values and uncovering our true nature takes place in *Schopenhauer as Educator (SE)*. In this text, Nietzsche’s cultural critique is in full swing. He rails against people hiding behind ‘customs and opinions’. He addresses the youth of the day, writing, “All you are now doing, thinking, desiring, is not you yourself” (Nietzsche, F. 1997, p.127) He continues:

“But how can we find ourselves again? How can man know himself? He is a thing dark and veiled; and if the hare has seven skins, man can slough off seventy times seven and still not be able to say: ‘this is really you, this is no longer outer shell” (Nietzsche, F. 1997, p.129)

Nietzsche recognised that often we are not living in accordance with our true selves because society requires us to conform. Moreover, he recognises that it is extremely difficult to shed this ‘outer shell’ and discover who we truly are and what we truly value. It is hard work to learn who we are and what is important to us. Nonetheless, Nietzsche consistently rails against conforming to society and encourages us to lose this ‘herd mentality’. *SE* is, as the name suggests, focused on the role of educators and Schlick mentions this in *On the Meaning of Life* too. They both agree that educators have an important role. Nietzsche claims that ‘...there may be other means of finding oneself...but I know of none better than to think on one’s true educators and cultivators.’ (Nietzsche, F. 1997, p.130) Schlick claims that educators need to recognise that the ‘enthusiasm of youth’, which allows us to become immersed in our activities, is important and should be cultivated, rather than quashed.

In *SE* Nietzsche gives a hint at how we might go about uncovering our true values. He encourages us to look back at our lives and think of all of the things we truly loved, at those

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<sup>3</sup> Further reading on Nietzsche’s self-fashioning can be found in Nehamas, A. (1985) *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (originally published 1946). Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, Nehamas, A. (1998) *The Art of Living: Socratic Reflections from Plato to Foucault*. US: University of California Press and Franco, P. (2018) ‘Becoming Who You Are: Nietzsche on Self-Creation’ in *The Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, Vol. 49 (1). 52-77.

things that have “drawn [our] soul aloft” (Nietzsche, F. 1997, p.129). He asks us to inspect these things and see if there is some kind of pattern to these things that might help us find our true nature. These clues can be the foundation on which we can build our selves. It is not unreasonable to suggest that those things that have drawn our souls aloft, that we have truly loved, are instances of play. After all, when Schlick refers to joy the imagery he uses is very similar. He writes that “...for joy there is more needed, a thought or feeling which fills the whole man, an inspiration which sets him soaring above everyday life.” (Schlick, M. 2008, p.69).

In other texts, such as *GS*, Nietzsche describes ‘actors’ and ‘acting’ at length in order to show that we are influenced by external factors and we need to extricate our true values from these external influences. He writes that

“Almost all Europeans, at an advanced age, confuse themselves with their role; they become the victims of their ‘good performance’; they themselves have forgotten how much they were determined by accidents, moods, and arbitrariness at the time that their ‘profession’ was decided – and many other roles they may have been *able* to play...” (Nietzsche, F. 2001, p.215).

Again, Nietzsche’s disdain for societal customs and opinions can be seen here. He realises that so many of the external influences and factors that make up our lives happen arbitrarily, yet we cling to these identities. When Nietzsche asks us to ‘become ourselves’, he is urging us to shed our ‘coats’ (*GS* 356) and live by our true nature, rather than allowing these arbitrary factors to determine who we are (Nietzsche, F. 2001, p.215). Another example of this can be found in *Z*, the text that Schlick admired, where Nietzsche talks about the three metamorphoses. Here, Nietzsche describes a dragon of ‘*Thou shalt*’ that must be slayed in order to reach the last, crucial stage of the metamorphoses. If we do slay the dragon, we will be able to create our own values.

““Thou-shalt,” stands in its way, gleaming golden, a scaly animal, and upon every scale “thou shalt!” gleams like gold.

The values of millennia gleam on these scales, and thus speaks the most powerful of all dragons: “the value of all things – it gleams in me.

All value has already been created, the value of all created things – that am I. Indeed, there shall be no more ‘I will’” Thus speaks that dragon.” (p. Nietzsche, F. 2006, p.16).

Here, Nietzsche urges us to be true to ourselves by slaying the “*Thou shalt*” dragon. By doing so, we can move to the last stage of the metamorphoses, where the spirit allows its own will to determine values, rather than merely following those values that have already been created. In other words, we must emerge from the shadow of cultural customs and in doing so we will be able to find and create our own values. Once we have shunned the societal pressure to conform, we will be able to create our own values. Interestingly, Nietzsche



equates the creation of our *own* values with the image of a child and this in turn conjures imagery of play.

This is a very brief overview of Nietzsche's writing on values. However, this gives enough context for a discussion on how play and values are intertwined.

## Play and values

The relationship between play and values is two-fold. Firstly, I argue that play can help us uncover our true values. Yet, on the other hand, we must know our true values in order to actively pursue play.

I have already established that there are certain states of play that come about with little effort. There are certain activities that have the potential to become play with minimal effort on the part of the person engaged in that activity. I shall call this spontaneous play. When play states arise spontaneously, we ought to pay attention because this means we are engaging in something we find intrinsically valuable. In this sense, joy will be a good marker of our true values. If we feel joyful when we spend our time doing something, then we ought to take note and try to maximise the time we spend doing that activity. Let us remember Schlick's important pleasure/joy distinction. It is not a case of paying attention to when we feel pleasure, but when we feel satisfied and joyful.

It might seem odd to suggest that only when a state of play arises will a person realise they intrinsically value an activity. But as Nietzsche points out, man is a 'dark and veiled thing' and we easily deceive ourselves. We are heavily influenced by a variety of external factors such as friends, family and the culture of the time we live in. The discussion of Nietzsche has shown that we ought to take seriously the task of reflecting on and analysing our values in order to disentangle our own values from those that come from external sources. We must truly reflect on our values and analyse our reasons for holding certain beliefs. Therefore, when spontaneous play occurs, we ought to pay attention. Nietzsche seemed to realise this when he asks us to look back at the things that we have truly loved in *SE*. These things give us a sense of what we value, without any external influence. After all, there is no such thing as a pseudo-play state because the play state depends on the relational status between the individual and the activity. Brown notes, "Authentic play comes from deep down inside of us. It's not formed or motivated solely by others." (Brown, S. 2010, p.104). Spontaneous play and the joy that we feel by playing should be a marker for our true values.

However, we should not be satisfied with sitting back and hoping we experience spontaneous play. Some people may never be lucky enough to stumble upon states of play in this way and others will be lucky enough to fill many playful hours with no real effort. We ought to actively try to maximise the amount of time we experience states of play. To do so, we must analyse our values and uncover our true selves. We need to embark on the journey that Nietzsche sets out and uncover and create our own authentic values. Once we have done so, we should try to shape our lives in a way where we spend the maximum amount of time possible engaging in activities that we intrinsically value. In doing so, we will experience play more often. If we allow society, culture or other external influences to determine our values for us, we will not be doing what we truly value. We will not be living in accordance with our own

values and because of this, we are less to experience play. Let us take for example, a philosophy academic. Csikszentmihalyi asks us to remember that philosophy has flourished because people truly value spending time thinking. "Great thinkers have always been motivated by the enjoyment of thinking rather than by the material rewards that could be gained by it" (Csikszentmihalyi, M. 2002, p.126). Just like any other activity, philosophy can be playful. There may be times a philosopher is thinking about an important deadline that they want to meet to get an article published in a highly esteemed journal. When he sits down to write the article with this in mind he is not playing. However, once he starts to wrestle with the problem, to really engage with the puzzle in his mind, he may reach a state of autotelic play. Not always, not necessarily, but he might. What is clear from this is that if this academic only ever engages in philosophy in order to have a successful career or get his work published, he will never experience play. He does not value philosophy for anything other than instrumental reasons. His motives will never be transformed from external to internal motives so he will never achieve the relational properties needed for play. This happens in the world all the time. People continue down career paths they do not intrinsically value because of societal pressures or the allure of external reasons like money or success.

On the other hand, a person who has taken the time to evaluate what they find intrinsically valuable will be able to shape their life in accordance with those values. Unless we spend time uncovering our true values, we will find it difficult to reach play states often. We must take Nietzsche's advice and be courageous enough to reject values based on 'customs and opinions'. We cannot allow ourselves to be guided by what society tells us we ought to value, i.e. the 'Thou shalt's' that are imposed upon us. Instead, we should look inwards and be true to ourselves. Furthermore, we must be honest when we inspect our internal reasoning for valuing certain activities. When we are playing, we step back from the societal values and pursue what we *really* value for ourselves. Perhaps this is why Nietzsche alluded to a child at play when he writes of creating our own values in *Z*.

There is a two-fold relationship between play and authenticity. Spontaneous play experiences can teach us something about our values that we might not have realised before. When we experience spontaneous play we should pay attention to what that tells us about our true values. Yet at the same time, a certain amount of effort should go into the task of uncovering our true values. In doing so, we will be able to shape our lives around those values we hold which will in turn maximise how often we truly play. Through this discussion I hope to have shown that play is a rich philosophical concept that can help inform discussions around our values, authenticity and meaning. I also hope to have given some insight into how we can maximise play in our lives.

## Becoming Rico

I shall now turn to the second way in which we can maximise play in our lives. The previous discussion of play and values is important. Yet, it is obvious that consistently pursuing play is unrealistic for most people, except for the elite in society. I have argued that no specific activity should be disqualified from having the potential to become playful and that Schlick's aesthetic pretentiousness should be rejected. Similarly, I argue that play should not be something only accessible to those who do not have to worry about earning money or

surviving. Most people are unable to only pursue the things they intrinsically value. If this were the only way of bringing about playful states, then it would appear those who are wealthy enough to not work and are free to pursue play would have more meaningful lives. Yet, this is not the case. Let us remember the study Csikszentmihalyi carried out that showed during leisure time only 18 percent of the respondents reported flow states (Csikszentmihalyi, M. 2002, p.158-9). Perhaps a lack of self-awareness of our own values is one contributing factor as to why we are not have absorbing, autotelic experiences during our free time. However, it is doubtful this can account for such a small amount of our free time being spent playing. More importantly, Rico again provides a counter-example to this. We can *learn* to value activities and create playful experiences. As I have already argued, there are states of play that require more effort than others. We do not only experience play when we are doing things we are naturally inclined to intrinsically value. This is what Rico is doing when he is at work. He is cultivating the skill of playfulness.

Rather than allowing those hours to be wasted away, Rico has managed to turn his work into a game. In fact, what is so admirable about Rico's attitude towards his work is that he manages to create a meaningful experience *despite* the dull nature of his job. Furthermore, it is easy to imagine that when Rico leaves the factory, the attitude that he has towards his work leaves with him. We can imagine that Rico has a happier life because he has cultivated a way of making the necessary everyday activities of life into something playful. Schlick points out that even the artist must carry out tasks such as managing materials or colour-mixing and that these tasks "remains, for the most part; toil and work; they are the husks and dross" (Schlick, M. 2008, p. 66). Similarly, there are certain activities that we must carry out. Our basic needs require us to make sure we have food, water and shelter. Most of us, except for an elite few, must work to pay bills in order to have these things. Just like Rico, we have economic restraints that mean we cannot always be pursuing hobbies or activities purely of our choosing. What makes us admire Rico is his attitude towards these things. Csikszentmihalyi realised that certain people have an aptitude for turning experiences into autotelic experiences and coined the term 'autotelic self'. He describes the autotelic self as such: "The autotelic self transforms potentially entropic experience into flow." (Csikszentmihalyi, M. 2002, p.209). Autotelic selves (or personalities) achieve flow states more often because they possess the kind of features that allow them to turn activities into flow. Csikszentmihalyi even provides rules as to how one becomes autotelic. There are four rules, as follows: i) setting goals, ii) becoming immersed in the activity, iii) paying attention to what is happening, iv) learning to enjoy immediate experience (Csikszentmihalyi, M. 2002, p.209-213). I will explore these rules in more detail to give a clearer picture of how we might develop the skill of playfulness and how Schlick's concept of play fits with these rules.

### i) setting goals

The rule of setting goals is interesting because as we have seen so far, Schlick rails against purpose and extrinsic goals. Schlick expresses despair at that fact that we often shift value and meaning to the future. We wish away time in order to get to the 'meaningful' part of life. For Schlick, this is the result of a society that prizes purpose-driven goals. We are driven by a goal and then once we complete it, we swiftly move to the next goal and think that eventually

we will land in some state of happiness or meaning. Yet, this sense of happiness and meaning never comes. This is essentially the Schopenhauer's concern about boredom and suffering. Schopenhauer thought that we are either suffering because we are deprived of something we want, some goal we want to achieve, or are trying to survive. Yet, once we reach this goal, boredom quickly sets in. Thus, we are doomed to swing on a pendulum between pain and boredom (Schopenhauer, A. 2008). As we have seen, Schlick was concerned with overcoming Schopenhauerian pessimism so it is not surprising that he tries to guide us away from goal setting and purpose. If I defend Csikszentmihalyi's advice that goal-setting leads to an autotelic personality, it appears that I am in danger of bringing this vicious circle back into the picture.

However, Schlick himself concedes that a certain amount of goal setting is necessary in life. In encouraging us to step out from the shadow of purpose and live a life full of play, which requires us to be completely immersed in our activity, Schlick recognises that an objection could be raised that he is encouraging us to ignore our human nature. Humans have the ability of foresight and hindsight; we can plan for the future and imagine how our lives might play out. By being fully immersed in each activity, surely Schlick is asking us to reject our own nature. "The objection may be raised at this point, that such a life would represent to a lower level, to the status of plants and animals. For the latter assuredly live for the moment, their consciousness is confined to a brief present." (Schlick, M. 2008, p.67) In order to address this potential objection, Schlick argues that instead of trying to ignore purpose entirely, the playful person will be able to see all the possibilities and consequences with clear vision. Yet, no one goal stands as the end purpose of all of his actions.

"He still sees even the remotest consequences of his action clearly before him, and not only the real consequences, but all possible ones as well; but no specific goal stands there as an end to be necessarily attained, so that the whole road would be meaningless if it were not; every point, rather, of the whole road already has its own intrinsic meaning, like a mountain path that offers sublime views at every step and new enchantments at every turn, whether it may lead to a summit or not" (Schlick, M. 2008, p.67).

What matters to Schlick is that we are not so focused on our goals that we forget to find meaning in the present. If we fail to achieve our goal, it should not entirely strip our journey of meaning because we should find the striving *itself* to be meaningful. Schlick goes on to admit that goals are in fact necessary.

"The setting of certain goals is admittedly needed in order to produce the tension required for life; even playful activity is constantly setting itself tasks, most palpably in sport and competition, which still remains play so long as it does not degenerate into real fighting. But such goals are harmless, they impose no burden on life and do not dominate it; they are left aside and it does not matter if they are achieved, since at any moment they can be replaced by others..." (Schlick, M. p.67).

The playful person that Schlick has in mind may well set themselves tasks and goals, but the success of these goals does not determine whether the activity was meaningful. They may fail to reach their goal but still find meaning in their activity. For example, imagine Richard Parks, the rugby player who took on the *737 Challenge*, not making it to the last summit. If Parks still found meaning in his pursuit, despite failing to complete the challenge, he would be the kind of person Schlick admires. Similarly, it is clear that Rico is playing even though he does set himself tasks. Rico tries to beat his own record. He tries to shave off seconds by creating the best routine for completing his task. Each time he beats his record, he will have a new target to beat. Within each completed part, he has many subsidiary tasks he tries to complete in the most efficient way possible. Yet, this is still play. Schlick was right to concede that some element of goal setting must remain. However, the outcome of our goals should not be the sole focus of our lives. Goal setting can be done in a harmful way but it is not intrinsically harmful, so long as we do not cling to those goals. We should be able to let them go, adjust them, fail at them, and still find meaning in our pursuit.

Csikszentmihalyi also realised this. In his description of the autotelic person, he writes that the autotelic person will easily adjust her goals when they no longer make sense. This can be seen in his description of conventional artists compared to unique artists:

“Whereas a conventional artist starts painting a canvas knowing what she wants to paint, and holds to her original intention until the work is finished, an original artist with equal technical training commences with a deeply felt but undefined goal in mind, keeps modifying the picture in response to the unexpected colours and shapes emerging on the canvas, and ends up with a finished work that probably will not resemble anything she started out with. If the artist is responsive to her inner feelings, knows what she likes and does not like, and pays attention to what is happening on the canvas, a good painting is bound to emerge. On the other hand, if she holds on to a preconceived notion of what the painting should look like...the painting is likely to be trite”. (Csikszentmihalyi, M. 2002, p.208).

The painter that Csikszentmihalyi describes here is, I imagine, the kind of painter that Schlick has in mind when he briefly refers to the life of an artist as example of a playful life. Although the painter undeniably has the goal of creating a painting, this goal does not overshadow the process. This is the kind of painter who is guided by love of the deed, rather than the outcome. Csikszentmihalyi clearly thinks that being solely guided by preconceived notions and goals is the way to a ‘trite’ painting. Rather, the key is that the goal must be left aside and forgotten during the process.

Furthermore, Csikszentmihalyi sees the goals of an autotelic person as being completely separated from external pressures. Rather than being influenced by friends, popular culture or societal norms, the autotelic person takes ownership over their own goals. They are entirely self-determined goals and are based on what the autotelic person truly values. Csikszentmihalyi specifically defines the kind of goal setting he has in mind as being entirely ‘self-determined’. Entirely self-determined goals are clearly compatible with Schlick’s concept of play.

“[Autotelic] literally means “a self that has self-contained goals,” and it reflects the idea that such an individual has relatively few goals that do not originate from within the self. For most people, goals are shaped directly by biological needs and social conventions, and therefore their origin is outside the self. For an autotelic person, the primary goals emerge from experience evaluated in consciousness, and therefore from the self proper. (Csikszentmihalyi, M. 2002, p.209).

This links to the previous discussion around values. Schlick does not address the issue of knowing our true values, nor does he have any kind of sustained discussion on values. However, it is clearly an important factor in play, as I have already shown. One way in which goal setting becomes less harmful is to ensure we do not value the achievement of the goal over the activity itself. However, if some goal setting is required we should also make sure that the goals we do set are based on the things we intrinsically value.

The way we set goals can help us cultivate the skill of playfulness. If we come to understand our goals not as the source of value or the focus of our activity, we will be able to find meaning in the present moment. The love of the deed is more important than the outcome and being mindful of this is something we can practice.

ii) becoming immersed in activity; iii) paying attention to what is happening and iv) learning to enjoy immediate experience

For the purposes of this essay, the remaining rules that Csikszentmihalyi lays out for developing an autotelic personality can be discussed together. These three rules, ii) becoming immersed in activity; iii) paying attention to what is happening and iv) learning to enjoy immediate experience are very similar as they are all internal mindsets that can be practiced and that help to promote play.

One of the reasons Schlick rails so much against goals is because when they are the focus of our pursuit, they stop us from being able to pay attention to what is happening. He writes that “...if life has meaning, it must lie in the present, for only the present is real.” (Schlick, M. 2009, p71). Goals are not the only thing that can distract us. There are many things that can do this. For example, if Rico is often distracted by what is going on around him, he is not going to reach a state where he is completely absorbed by trying to complete his part on the factory line. If he pays too much attention to a conversation his colleagues are having or on whether another person is working more efficiently than he is, he will not be able to become fully immersed in his activity. Likewise, if his mind is elsewhere because he doesn't wish to be in the factory, he is not enjoying the immediate experience and this will stop him from being able to be playful. If he is counting down the minutes until he can clock off work or spending his mental energy daydreaming about things he would rather be doing, he will never be able to find value in his activity and become immersed in it. Being able to focus on our tasks is a skill that requires practice and only when we are able to hone these skills will we be able to turn potentially entropic experiences into play. Having a present state of mind, concentrating and enjoying the moment are all important parts of this skill. After all, as Csikszentmihalyi points out ““A person can feel pleasure without any effort... But it is impossible to enjoy a

tennis game, a book, or a conversation unless attention is fully concentrated on the activity” (Csikszentmihalyi, M. 2002, p.46).

The same kind of attitude we recognise in Rico seems to be the attitude Schlick admired about youth. Rather than being consistently driven by extrinsic goals, Schlick claims that during our youth, we are more likely to focus on the activity at hand, rather than worrying about the extrinsic purpose for the activity. This enthusiasm and attention is what helps elevate activities to play states. He writes that “The enthusiasm of youth (it is basically what the Greeks called Eros), is devotion to the deed, not the goal. This act, this way of acting, is true play.” (Schlick, M. 2008, p.69). Schlick admires youthful thinking for the lack of influence goals have over youth. By not focusing on extrinsic goals, adolescents are able to be completely immersed in their activities. “Youth...does not really care about purposes; if one collapses, another is quickly built up; goals are merely an invitation to rush in and fight, and this enterprising ardour is the true fulfilment of the youthful spirit” (Schlick, M. 2008, p.69). When we are completely devoted to the deed and our attention is in the present, we are youthful.

Schlick’s claims that adolescents are completely immune to the influence of goals and extrinsic reasons are not entirely true, especially in the modern world. We know that some young children and teenagers now experience immense pressure to perform well academically and in extracurricular activities. Nonetheless, Schlick is gesturing at something important here. Instead of always looking to the future, to a time when we imagine we will feel fulfilled, be it when we get a certain job, buy a house, or achieve certain level of success or recognition, we ought to try and live in the present and enjoy our immediate experience. We should try to approach life with presence of mind, focusing on our daily activities and finding value in them. Although we may try to pursue things we are naturally inclined to value, we can also *create* value in the immediate moment. This approach to life is what Schlick is asking us to cultivate. He goes on to say that this youthfulness, this devotion to the deed, is a state we can achieve. “...the word “youth” does not have the external meaning of a specific period of one’s life, a particular span of years; it is a state, a way of leading one’s life...” (Schlick, M. 2008, p.71). Again, Rico comes to mind. Rico has managed to create a valuable experience because he has focused completely on the activity at hand and is not distracted by things around him or thoughts of the future. By paying attention to the task at hand and enjoying the present moment, Rico has discovered a kind of rhythm in his activity that can be turned into a challenging game. Rico has managed to cultivate the skill of turning activities into play and in doing so, he will be able to live the youthful way of life that is realised at the end of *On the Meaning of Life*.

We can cultivate the skill of play by devotion to the deed, rather than the goal and by being fully present and attentive of the moment. By cultivating this skill, as well as pursuing things we intrinsically value, we will be able to spend our lives playing and perhaps the road is, indeed, open to realisation of Schlick’s dream that we can escape a meaningless existence by playing (Schlick, M. 2008, p.65).

## Conclusion

I have made adjustments to Schlick's work in order to address certain tensions that were present. Firstly, I have shown that we ought to understand play as a state, rather than looking for playful activities. In light of this, no activity can automatically be disqualified from being able to launch us into a state of play. Instead, play can be found anywhere, and at any time – even in a factory line performing the same task six hundred times a day. Although I have amended and clarified Schlick's position, the essence of *On The Meaning of Life* remains untouched and is an important and interesting addition to the literature on the question of the meaning of life. By understanding play as a state one can achieve, play does not remain something that is reserved for childish activity or some abstract experience that we have no control over. Instead, we can cultivate playfulness in our lives. If we embrace Schlick's theory and weave play throughout our lives, we will find meaning in the present, rather than placing our meaning in the future and perhaps by doing this, we escape the pendulum of boredom and pain that Schopenhauer describes. After all, "Life without play is a grinding, mechanical existence organized around doing the things necessary for survival" (Brown, S. 2020, p.11). I have also shown through the discussion of Nietzsche and values that there may be some subsidiary tasks that come along with cultivating play, such as creating our own values and rejecting those that are imposed on us. I hope this has demonstrated that play is not a frivolous or fatuous concept but instead, is a philosophically rich concept that we ought to take seriously.





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