

# GAMES AND THE GOOD

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**ABSTRACT** Using Bernard Suits's brilliant analysis (*contra* Wittgenstein) of playing a game, this paper examines the intrinsic value of game-playing. It argues that two elements in Suits's analysis make success in games difficult, which is one ground of value, while a third involves choosing a good activity for the property that makes it good, which is a further ground. The paper concludes by arguing that game-playing is the paradigm modern (Marx, Nietzsche) as against classical (Aristotle) value: since its goal is intrinsically trivial, its value is entirely one of process rather than product, journey rather than destination.

**O**ur societies attach considerable value to excellence in sports. In Canada hockey players are named to the highest level of the Order of Canada; in Britain footballers and cricketers are made MBE and even knighted. And this attitude extends more widely. Sports are a subclass of the wider category of games, and we similarly admire those who excel in non-athletic games such as chess, bridge, and even Scrabble.

I take this admiration to rest on the judgement that excellence in games is good in itself, apart from any pleasure it may give the player or other people, but just for the properties that make it excellent. The admiration, in other words, rests on the perfectionist judgement that skill in games is worth pursuing for its own sake and can add value to one's life. This skill is not the only thing we value in this way; we give similar honours to achievements in the arts, science and business. But one thing we admire, and to a significant degree, is excellence in athletic and non-athletic games.

Unless we dismiss this view, one task for philosophy is to explain why such excellence is good. But few philosophers have attempted this, for a well-known reason. A unified explanation of why excellence in games is good requires a unified account of what games are, and many doubt that this is possible. After all, Wittgenstein famously gave the concept of a game as his primary example of one for which necessary and sufficient conditions cannot be given but whose instances are linked only by looser

‘family resemblances’.<sup>1</sup> If Wittgenstein was right about this, there can be no single explanation of why skill in games is good, just a series of distinct explanations of the value of skill in hockey, skill in chess, and so on.

But Wittgenstein was not right, as is shown in a little-known book that is nonetheless a classic of twentieth-century philosophy, Bernard Suits’s *The Grasshopper: Games, Life and Utopia*. Suits gives a perfectly persuasive analysis of playing a game as, to quote his summary statement, ‘the voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles’.<sup>2</sup> And in this paper I will use his analysis to explain the value of playing games. More specifically, I will argue that the different elements of Suits’s analysis give game-playing two distinct but related grounds of value, so it instantiates two related intrinsic goods. I will also argue that game-playing is an important intrinsic good, which gives the clearest possible expression of what can be called a modern as against a classical, or more specifically, Aristotelian, view of value.

But first Suits’s analysis. It says that a game has three main elements, which he calls the prelusory goal, the constitutive rules, and the lusory attitude. To begin with the first, in playing a game one always aims at a goal that can be described independently of the game. In golf, this is that a ball enter a hole in the ground; in mountain climbing, that one stand on top of a mountain; in Olympic sprinting, that one cross a line on the track before one’s competitors. Suits calls this goal ‘prelusory’ because it can be understood and achieved apart from the game, and he argues that every game has such a goal. Of course, in playing a game one also aims at a goal internal to it, such as winning the race, climbing the mountain, or breaking par on the golf course. But on Suits’s view this ‘lusory’ goal is derivative, since achieving it involves achieving the prior prelusory goal in a specified way.

1. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 3rd edn, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, Oxford: Blackwell, 1972, Sect. 66.

2. Bernard Suits, *The Grasshopper: Games, Life and Utopia*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978; repr. Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2005, p. 41/55 (page references are first to the University of Toronto Press edition, then to the Broadview Press edition).

This way is identified by the second element, the game's constitutive rules. According to Suits, the function of these rules is to forbid the most efficient means to the prelusory goal. Thus, in golf one may not carry the ball down the fairway and drop it in the hole by hand; one must advance it using clubs, play it where it lies, and so on. In mountain climbing one may not ride a gondola to the top of the mountain or charter a helicopter; in 200-metre sprinting, one may not cut across the infield. Once these rules are in place, success in the game typically requires achieving the prelusory goal as efficiently as they allow, such as getting the ball into the hole in the fewest possible strokes or choosing the best way up the mountain. But this is efficiency within the rules, whose larger function is to forbid the easiest means to the game's initial goal.

These first two elements involve pursuing a goal by less than the most efficient means, but they are not sufficient for playing a game. This is because someone can be forced to use these means by circumstances he regrets and wishes were different. If this is the case—if, for example, a farmer harvests his field by hand because he cannot afford the mechanical harvester he would much rather use—he is not playing a game. Hence the need for the third element in Suits's analysis, the lusory attitude, which involves a person's willingly accepting the constitutive rules, or accepting them because they make the game possible. Thus, a golfer accepts that he may not carry the ball by hand or improve his lie because he wants to play golf, and obeying those rules is necessary for him to do so; the mountaineer accepts that he may not take a helicopter to the summit because he wants to climb. The restrictions the rules impose are adhered to not reluctantly but willingly, because they are essential to the game. Adding this third element gives Suits's full definition: 'To play a game is to attempt to achieve a specific state of affairs [prelusory goal], using only means permitted by the rules ... where the rules prohibit the use of more efficient in favour of less efficient means [constitutive rules], and where the rules are accepted just because they make possible such activity [lusory attitude].' Or, in the summary statement quoted above, 'playing a game is the voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles.'<sup>3</sup>

3. *Ibid.*, p. 41/54–5.

This analysis will doubtless meet with objections, in the form of attempted counterexamples. But Suits considers a whole series of these in his book, showing repeatedly that his analysis handles them correctly, and not by some ad hoc addition but once its elements are properly understood. Nor would it matter terribly if there were a few counterexamples. Some minor lack of fit between his analysis and the English use of 'game' would not be important if the analysis picks out a phenomenon that is unified, close to what is meant by 'game', and philosophically interesting. But the analysis is interesting if, as I will now argue, it allows a persuasive explanation of the value of excellence in games.

Suits himself addresses this issue of value. In fact, a central aim of his book is to give a defence of the grasshopper in Aesop's fable, who played all summer, against the ant, who worked. But in doing so he argues for the strong thesis that playing games is not just an intrinsic good but the supreme such good, since in the ideal conditions of utopia, where all instrumental goods are provided, it would be everyone's primary pursuit. The grasshopper's game-playing, therefore, while it had the unfortunate effect of leaving him without food for the winter, involved him in the intrinsically finest activity. Now, I do not accept Suits's strong thesis that game-playing is the supreme good—I think many other states and activities have comparable value—and I do not find his arguments for it persuasive. But I will connect the weaker thesis that playing games is one intrinsic good to the details of his analysis more explicitly than he ever does.

Consider the first two elements of the analysis, the prelusory goal and constitutive rules. By forbidding the most efficient means to that goal, the constitutive rules usually make for an activity that is reasonably difficult. They do not always do so. Rock, paper, scissors is a game whose prelusory goal is to throw rock to one's opponent's scissors, scissors to his paper, or paper to his rock, and the rules forbid the easiest means to this goal by forbidding one to make one's throw after he has made his. But though the rules make achieving this goal more difficult than it might be, they do not make it by absolute standards difficult; rock, paper, scissors is not a challenging activity. But then rock, paper, scissors is not a very good game, and certainly not one the playing of which has much intrinsic value. It is characteristic of good games to be not only more

difficult than they might be but also in absolute terms reasonably difficult. They cannot be so difficult that no one can succeed at them, but also cannot lack all challenge; they must strike a balance between too much and too little difficulty. In what follows I will defend the value only of playing good games, because they realize what seems an internal goal of the design of games. If the constitutive rules of a game make achieving its prelusory goal more difficult than it might be, this is surely because they aim at making it simply difficult.

If the prelusory goal and rules of a good game make succeeding at it reasonably difficult, they will also give it one ground of value if difficult activities are as such intrinsically good. And I believe that difficult activities are as such good. Though not often explicitly affirmed by philosophers, this view can be defended in at least two ways.

Many contemporary philosophers include among their intrinsic goods achievement, by which they mean not just moral but also non-moral achievement, for example, in business or the arts.<sup>4</sup> But what exactly is achievement? It clearly involves realizing a goal, but not every such realization counts as an achievement; for example, tying one's shoelace does not unless one has some disability. And among achievements some are more valuable than others; thus, starting a new business and making it successful is a greater achievement than making a single sale. If we ask what explains these differences—between achievements and non-achievements, and between greater and lesser achievements—the answer is surely in large part their difficulty: how complex or physically challenging they are, or how much skill and ingenuity they require. It is when a goal is hard to bring about that doing so is an achievement. So reflection on our intuitive understanding of the value of achievement suggests a first reason for holding that difficult activities are as such good.

A second reason, which is complementary but more abstract, is suggested by Robert Nozick's fantasy of an 'experience machine'.<sup>5</sup> This machine, which can electrically stimulate the

4. See, for example, James Griffin, *Well-Being: Its Meaning, Measurement and Moral Importance*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986, p. 67.

5. Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, New York: Basic Books, 1974, pp. 42–5.

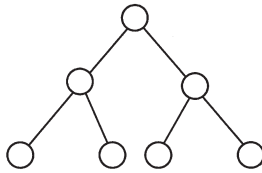


Figure 1

brain to give one the pleasure of any activity one wants, is intended as a counterexample to the hedonistic view that only pleasure is good, but it also makes a positive point. If life on the machine is less than ideal, this is largely because people on it are disconnected from reality. They have only false beliefs about their environment and never actually realize any goals: they may think they are discovering a cure for cancer or climbing Everest, but in fact they are not. This suggests that an important good is what we can call ‘rational connection to reality’, where this has two aspects, one theoretical and one practical.<sup>6</sup>

The theoretical aspect is knowledge, or having beliefs about the world that are both true and justified. The beliefs’ truth means there is a match between one’s mind and reality; their being justified means the match is not a matter of luck but something one’s evidence made likely. But a full account of this good must explain which kinds of knowledge are most worth having. Classical philosophers like Aristotle thought the best knowledge is of the intrinsically best objects, such as the divine substances, but the more plausible view is that the best knowledge has the most of certain formal properties that are independent of its subject matter. More specifically, the best knowledge is explanatorily integrated, with general principles that explain middle-level principles that in turn explain particular facts. This integration results in an explanatory hierarchy like that represented in figure 1, where items of knowledge higher up in the hierarchy explain those below them. And this hierarchy embodies more intrinsic value than if one knew only isolated unexplanatory facts, like the number of grains of sand on seven beaches (figure 2). We can give an artificial but illustrative

6. I give a fuller account of this value in my *Perfectionism*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1993, Chs 8–10.



*Figure 2*

model for measuring this value if we imagine that each item of knowledge initially has one unit of value in itself, but gains an extra unit for every other item of knowledge subordinate to it in a hierarchy. Then the seven isolated items in figure 2 have just one unit of value each, for a total of seven units. But in figure 1 the middle items have three units, since they each explain two further facts, and the top item has seven units, for a total of seventeen units in the hierarchy as a whole. The explanatory relations between them give an integrated set of beliefs more value than ones that are unconnected.

This model can be enriched. We may think it especially valuable to give unifying explanations of diverse facts, or to make surprising connections between what seemed unrelated phenomena. If so, we can count not just the number of individual items a given item of knowledge has subordinate to it, but the number of items of different kinds, so there is more value in explaining more types of fact. We may also value precision of knowledge, such as knowing that the constant of gravitational acceleration is not just somewhere between  $5$  and  $15\text{ m/s}^2$  but exactly  $9.8\text{ m/s}^2$ . And we can capture this view both by giving more value to precise knowledge in itself and by giving it more additional value for explaining further precise truths.

Finally, we may think that knowing truths concerning many objects is better than knowing highly particular ones, even apart from the former's explanatory role; thus, knowing a scientific law is better than knowing the number of grains of sand on some beach even if one has not used the former to explain anything else.

The practical parallel to knowledge, and the other value missing on the experience machine, is achievement, or realizing a goal in the world given a justified belief that one would do so. Here again there is a match between one's mind and reality, though now reality has been made to fit one's mind, and a justified belief that makes the match not just lucky. Again we must specify which achievements are best. A classical view might say they are of the goals that are independently best, but we can maintain the

parallel with knowledge, and give a better account of achievement as achievement, if we say they are of the goals with the most of certain formal properties that again centre on hierarchical integration. This time, however, the integrating relation is not explanatory but means–end. Thus, in figure 1 we achieve the goal at the top of the hierarchy by achieving the two middle-level goals as means to it, and each of those by achieving the two below them. And if each non-luckily achieved goal has one unit of value in itself plus an additional unit for every other goal achieved as a means to it, the achievements in this hierarchy again have seventeen units of value as against the seven in seven unrelated achievements. Just as more complex explanatory relations make for more value in knowledge, so more complex means–end relations make for more value in achievement.

Again this model can be enriched. We may think achievements are especially valuable if they require subsidiary achievements of varied kinds, and can capture this view by counting the number of goals of different types a given one has subordinate to it. More strongly, we may deny significant value to achievements that involve only subordinate goals of the same repetitive type. We may also value precision in achievement—hitting a particular target rather than just some vague area—and can give achievements additional value for that. And we can think that, apart from means–end relations, achieving goals whose content extends more widely, through time or in the number of objects they involve, is likewise more valuable.

This model deepens the value of achievement by showing it to be parallel to knowledge and, with it, one aspect of a more abstract good of rational connection to reality. It also makes many difficult activities good for the very properties that make them difficult. First, the more complex the means–end hierarchy an activity involves, the more places there are where one can fail at something crucial and the harder success in the activity becomes. Second, the more complex the hierarchy, the more deliberative skill it requires, since one has to monitor one's progress through a more elaborate sequence of tasks. There is a further increment of difficulty if the hierarchy involves a greater variety of subordinate goals, since then it requires a greater variety of skills, and likewise if the activity demands more precision. And it is more difficult to achieve goals with more extended contents, both because holding them in



one's mind is more difficult and because achieving them requires changing more of the world.<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, these are precisely the aspects of difficulty found in good games. These games usually require one to go through a complex sequence of tasks rather than do one simple thing such as throw rock, paper or scissors. The tasks in question often demand varied skills: thus, golf requires one not only to drive the ball a long distance but to drive it accurately, play from bunkers, putt, and make strategic decisions. Good golfers are also precise, hitting their approach shots to a particular part of the green rather than just somewhere near it. And many games, such as chess, hockey and basketball, require players to grasp an extended content, including all the pieces on the board or all the players on the ice or court, in a single act of consciousness. That again is difficult, and requires years of practice to master.

Not all the difficulty in games involves this complex ratiocination. Weightlifters have to go through a precisely ordered sequence of moves in order to lift their weights, but also need brute strength: if one of two lifters has less perfect technique but is stronger and therefore lifts more, he wins the competition. Boxing, too, depends in part on raw power. These purely physical forms of difficulty do not instantiate the value of rational connection, and their role in making game-playing good is unclear. Why do we value the physical aspects of weightlifting and boxing but not those found in, say, pie-eating contests? Does this reflect just the historical accident that weightlifting and boxing began long enough ago that we can value them now for their traditions? Or do we value physical difficulty only when it accompanies more rational forms of challenge but not on its own? I will not pursue this issue, taking the rational connection model to capture what makes purely cerebral games such as chess difficult, and also much of what makes sports such as golf and hockey difficult.

I have argued that the prelusory goal and constitutive rules make playing a good game difficult, and have given two reasons

7. Some may deny that difficulty is as such good, on the ground that an activity aimed at evil, such as genocide, is not in any way made good by its difficulty. The issue here is complex (see my *Virtue, Vice, and Value*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2001, pp. 144–52), but those moved by this objection can retreat to the weaker claim that only activities with good or neutral aims gain value by being difficult. This weaker claim is sufficient to ground the value of games.

to believe that difficulty is as such good. But I have not yet used the third element in Suits's analysis, the lusury attitude. Let us examine it more closely.

In his 1907 book *The Theory of Good and Evil* Hastings Rashdall remarked that '[s]port has been well defined as the overcoming of difficulties simply for the sake of overcoming them'.<sup>8</sup> This definition is close to Suits's, but differs on one point. It in effect takes the lusury attitude to be one of accepting the rules because they make the game difficult, whereas Suits takes it to be one of accepting the rules because they make the game possible. For Rashdall, the golfer accepts the rule against improving one's lie because it makes golf harder; for Suits, it is because it makes golf golf. Which view is correct?

Suits's view is preferable if we are analysing the generic concept of playing a game. Consider what we can call a pure professional golfer, who plays golf only as a means to making money and with no interest in the game for itself. He does not cheat as a means to making money; he knows that to make money he must play golf, which means obeying all its rules. But his only reason for accepting the rules is to make money. If we used Rashdall's view to define the generic concept, we would have to say the pure professional is not playing golf, which is absurd. But on Suits's view he is playing golf: though he accepts the rules only as a means to money, he does accept them in order to play golf and so has the lusury attitude.

But though Suits defines the generic concept of game-playing, this is not what he defends as the supreme intrinsic good. His argument, recall, is that in utopia, where all instrumental goods are provided, game-playing would be everyone's primary activity. But this description of utopia implies that it would contain no professional players; since no one would need to play a game as a means to anything, all players would be amateurs who chose the game for itself. But then they would have Rashdall's lusury attitude of accepting the rules because they make the game difficult, and Suits explicitly agrees. He describes how one utopian character decides to build houses by carpentry rather than order them up telepathically because carpentry requires more skill. And

8. *The Theory of Good and Evil*, 2 vols, London: Oxford University Press, 1907, vol. 2, p. 105.

he starts his discussion of utopia by saying he will defend the value of game-playing as a specific form of play, where he has earlier denied that playing a game necessarily involves playing: to play is to engage in an activity for its own sake, and a pure professional does not do that.<sup>9</sup> So the activity Suits defends as supremely good is game-playing that is also play, or what I will call ‘playing in a game’. And that activity involves accepting the rules not just because they make the game possible, but also because they make it difficult.

I will follow Suits here and narrow my thesis further: not only will I explain the value only of playing good games, I will explain the value only of playing *in* these games, or of playing them with an at least partly amateur attitude. But this is not in practice much of a restriction, since most people do play games at least partly for their own sakes. Consider Pete Rose, an extremely hard-nosed baseball player who was disliked for how much he would do to win. Taking the field near the end of the famous sixth game of the 1975 World Series, and excited by the superb plays that game had involved, he told the opposing team’s third base coach, ‘Win or lose, Popeye, we’re in the fuckin’ greatest game ever played’; after the game, which his team lost, he made a similar comment about it to his manager. Intensely as he wanted to win, Pete Rose also loved baseball for itself.<sup>10</sup>

So the game-playing whose value I will explain involves accepting the rules of the game because they make it difficult. But then the elements that define this type of game-playing are internally related: the prelusory goal and constitutive rules together give it a feature, namely difficulty, and the lusory attitude chooses it because of this feature. More specifically, if difficulty is as such good, the prelusory goal and rules give it a good-making feature and the lusory attitude chooses it because of that good-making feature. This connects the lusory attitude to an attractive view that has been held by many philosophers, namely that if something is intrinsically good, the positive attitude of loving it for the property that makes it good, that is, desiring, pursuing

9. Suits, *The Grasshopper*, pp. 166/149, 144/130.

10. Tom Adelman, *The Long Ball: The Summer of '75—Spaceman, Catfish, Charlie Hustle, and the Greatest World Series Ever Played*, New York: Back Bay Books, 2003, p. 313.

and taking pleasure in it for that property, is also, and separately, intrinsically good. Thus, if another person's happiness is good, desiring, pursuing and being pleased by her happiness as happiness is a further good, namely that of benevolence; likewise, if knowledge is good, desiring, pursuing and being pleased by knowledge is good. Aristotle expressed this view when he said that if an activity is good, pleasure in it is good, whereas if an activity is bad, pleasure in it is bad,<sup>11</sup> and it was accepted around the turn of the twentieth century by many philosophers, including Rashdall, Franz Brentano, G. E. Moore, and W. D. Ross. And it applies directly to playing in games, which combines the good of difficulty with the further good of loving difficulty for itself. The prelusory goal and constitutive rules together give playing in games one ground of value, namely difficulty; the lusory attitude in its amateur form adds a related but distinct ground of value, namely loving something good for the property that makes it so. The second ground depends on the first; loving difficulty would not be good unless difficulty were good. But it adds a further, complementary intrinsic good. When you play a game for its own sake you do something good and do it from a motive that fixes on its good-making property.

This two-part explanation deepens Suits's claim that playing in games is an intrinsic good, by connecting it to more general principles of value with application beyond the case of games. At the same time, however, it makes playing in games a derivative rather than a fundamental intrinsic good. It would not appear on a list of basic goods, since it combines two other, more fundamental, goods in a particular way.

But a good that is not fundamental can nonetheless be paradigmatic because it gives the clearest possible expression of a certain type of value. If difficult activities are as such good, they must aim at a goal: it is achieving that which is challenging. But their value does not derive from properties of that goal considered in itself, depending instead on features of the process of achieving it. Yet this can be obscured if the goal is independently good, since then the activity, if successful, will be instrumentally

11. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. W. D. Ross and J. O. Urmsen, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980, 1175b24–30. I discuss this view at length in *Virtue, Vice, and Value*.

good, and this can seem the most important thing about it. If the farmer who works by hand successfully harvests a crop, his work contributes to the vital good of feeding his family, and this can distract us from the value it has in itself. But there is no such danger if the goal is intrinsically valueless, as it most clearly is in games. Since a game's prelusory goal—getting a ball into a hole in the ground or standing atop a mountain—is intrinsically trivial, the value of playing the game can depend only on facts about the process of achieving that goal. And this point is further emphasized by the lusory attitude, which chooses that process just as a process, since it willingly accepts rules that make achieving the goal harder. Game-playing must have some external goal one aims at, but the specific features of this goal are irrelevant to the activity's value, which is entirely one of process rather than product, journey rather than destination. This is why playing in games gives the clearest expression of a modern as against an Aristotelian view of value: because modern values are precisely ones of process or journey rather than of the end-state they lead to.

The contrary Aristotelian view, which denigrates these values, was expressed most clearly in Aristotle's division of all activities into the two categories of *kinēsis* and *energeia*, and his subsequent judgements about them.<sup>12</sup> An Aristotelian *kinēsis*—often translated as 'movement'—is an activity aimed at a goal external to it, as driving to Toronto is aimed at being in Toronto. It is therefore brought to an end by the achievement of that goal, which means that a *kinēsis* can be identified by a grammatical test: if the fact that one has *X*-ed implies that one is no longer *X*-ing, as the fact that one has driven to Toronto implies that one is no longer driving there, then *X*-ing is a *kinēsis*. But the main point is that a *kinēsis* aims at an end-state separate from it. By contrast, an *energeia*—translated variously as 'actuality', 'activity', or 'action'—is not directed at an external goal but has its end internal to it. Contemplation is an *energeia*, because it does not aim to produce anything beyond itself, as is the state of feeling pleased. And *energeiai* do not pass the above grammatical test, and therefore, unlike *kinēseis*, can be carried on indefinitely: that one has contemplated does not imply that one is not

12. *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1094a1–7, 1174a13–b8, 1176b1–8, 1177b2–4.

contemplating now or will not continue to do so. Contemplation, like driving to Toronto, is an activity, but it does not aim to produce anything apart from itself.

Now, Aristotle held that *energeiai* are more valuable than *kinēseis*, so the best human activities must be ones that can be carried on continuously, such as contemplation. This is because he assumed that the value of a *kinēsis* must derive from that of its goal, so its value is subordinate, and even just instrumental, to that of the goal. As he said at the start of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, 'Where there are ends apart from the actions, it is the nature of the products to be better than the activities.'<sup>13</sup> But it is characteristic of what I am calling modern values to deny this assumption, and to hold that there are activities that necessarily aim at an external goal but whose value is internal to them in the sense that it depends entirely on features of the process of achieving that goal. Suits cites expressions of this modern view by Kierkegaard, Kant, Schiller, and Georg Simmel,<sup>14</sup> but for an especially clear one consider Marx's view that a central human good is transforming nature through productive labour. This activity necessarily has an external goal—one cannot produce without producing some thing—and in conditions of scarcity this goal will be something vital for humans' survival or comfort. But Marx held that when scarcity is overcome and humans enter the 'realm of freedom' they will still have work as their 'prime want', so they will engage in the process of production for its own sake without any interest in its goal as such. Or consider Nietzsche's account of human greatness. In an early work he said the one thing 'needful' is to 'give style to one's character', so its elements are unified by 'a single taste', and that it matters less whether this taste is good or bad than whether it is a single taste.<sup>15</sup> Later he said the will to power involves not the 'multitude and disgregation' of one's impulses but their coordination under a single predominant impulse.<sup>16</sup> In both discussions he deemed activities good if they involve organizing one's aims around a

13. *Ibid.*, 109414–5.

14. Suits, *The Grasshopper*, pp. 93–94/92.

15. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, New York: Vintage, 1974, Sect. 290.

16. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale, New York: Vintage, 1968, Sect. 46.

single goal whatever that goal is. So for both Marx and Nietzsche a central human good was activity that on the one side is necessarily directed to a goal but on the other derives its value entirely from aspects of the process of achieving it. This is why the type of value they affirm is paradigmatically illustrated by playing in games; when one's goal is trivial, the only value can be that of process. Marx and Nietzsche would never put it this way, but what each valued is in effect playing in games, in Marx's case the game of material production when there is no longer any instrumental need for it, in Nietzsche's the game of exercising power just for the sake of doing so.

Playing in games also clearly straddles Aristotle's division between *kinēseis* and *energeiai*. It has the logical structure of a *kinēsis*, since it aims at a goal external to itself, and passes the relevant grammatical test: if one has parred a golf hole or climbed a mountain, one is no longer doing so. But it also has value in itself, as an *energeia* does, based on properties internal to it as an activity. We can show this more precisely using our formal model of the value of achievement, on which the value of any goal depends in part on the number of other goals achieved as means to it. In figure 1 the lower-level goals are pursued as means to higher-level ones, and contribute to those goals' value only if they are both successfully achieved and contribute causally to them. And the higher-level goals must themselves also be successfully achieved. Since the hierarchy is precisely one of *achievements*, a highest-level goal that is not achieved does not qualify for inclusion in the hierarchy, and so does not gain any value from having other goals achieved as attempted means to it. This means that if two people go through the same complex process as a means to a given goal, and the first achieves the goal while the second through bad luck does not, the first's activity has more intrinsic value: his hierarchy contains his highest-level goal, which has his greatest value, but the second's does not. (If Pete Rose's opponents played as well as he did but Rose's team won the World Series, his play was intrinsically better.) So the activities valued by our formal model are directed at an external goal, as *kinēseis* are, and have their full value only if that goal is achieved. But their value does not depend on properties of the goal considered by itself; if the same goal were achieved without complex means, it might have just one unit of

value. Instead, their value depends on means–end relations between their components, and so depends on internal features of the activity as does that of an *energeia*.

If playing in games is the paradigm expression of modern values, it helps us see similar value in other activities not normally associated with games. One, emphasized by Nietzsche, is a life organized around a single goal; it embodies through a longer stretch of time the same hierarchical structure present in individual difficult activities. The relevant activities also include ones in business and the arts. Business activity sometimes aims at an independent good such as relieving others' suffering or increasing their comfort. But often its goal is just to win market share and profits for one company, which is morally trivial; there is no intrinsic value in people's drinking Coke rather than Pepsi or using Microsoft rather than Apple. Aristotle should therefore deny this activity value, and he did, arguing that if money has no intrinsic value, the activity of money-making must likewise have no value.<sup>17</sup> But if winning market share is difficult, requiring a complex series of finely balanced decisions, a modern view can grant it significant worth. And its pursuit can also involve something like the lusory attitude, since business people who aim partly for profits can also value the exercise of business skill just as skill, or for its own sake. Artistic creation too, to cite a different activity, has an independently good product if it aims, say, at communicating truths that cannot be communicated by non-artistic means. But a distinctively modern view (which is not to say the only view held nowadays) says that art aims only at beauty, where that consists in organic unity, or having the different elements of a painting, novel or piece of music form a coherent, dynamic whole. This view makes the value of artistic production rest on its intentionally creating all the complex relations that define its product's beauty, that is, on its itself being complex. And its value will be greater if it has

17. *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1096a5–10. An obvious suggestion is that an activity like money-making can be a *kinēsis* when described in one way and an *energeia* when described in another. But, plausible though it is, this does not seem to have been Aristotle's view. He seems to have treated the distinction as a metaphysical one, between types of activities as they are in themselves. Nor could he have accepted the suggestion and continued to give his arguments about the inferiority of money-making and the superiority of contemplation, however described, based on their properties as *kinēsis* or *energeia*.



more of the supplementary qualities mentioned above: if it unifies more varied elements, if it requires more precise brushstrokes, notes or words, and if it involves grasping more extended contents in a single act of consciousness, as Henry Moore could see his sculptures from all sides at once.<sup>18</sup> And of course artistic creation can involve a lusory attitude, if the artist enjoys and values the skill his work involves for its own sake.

But playing in games is also in one respect a lesser good, and I want to close by explaining why. Imagine two activities that are equally complex and difficult, one of which produces an intrinsically good result while the other does not. Perhaps one is political activity that liberates an entire nation from oppression while the other involves winning a high-level chess tournament. The first activity will, of course, be instrumentally better, because it produces a separate intrinsic good. But it will also arguably be on that basis intrinsically better. Consider Derek Parfit's example of a person who spends his life working for the preservation of Venice. Parfit claims, plausibly, that if after this person's death Venice is preserved, and in a way that depends crucially on his efforts, that will make his life and activities intrinsically better than if Venice had been destroyed.<sup>19</sup> This conclusion already follows from our formal model of achievement, since any realization of a topmost goal adds value to a hierarchy. But I think there is an extra ground for its truth if, as Parfit clearly intends, the preservation of Venice is independently good. Whatever additional value there is in achieving a goal just as a goal, there is further value in achieving one that is good. When an activity aimed at a valuable end successfully achieves that end and therefore is instrumentally good, its being instrumentally good is an extra source of intrinsic goodness.<sup>20</sup>

Now, because game-playing has a trivial end result, it cannot have the additional intrinsic value that derives from instrumental value. This implies that excellence in games, though admirable, is less so than success in equally challenging activities that produce a

18. Howard Gardner, *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*, New York: Basic Books, 1983, p. 188.

19. Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984, p. 151.

20. On this see Shelly Kagan, 'Rethinking Intrinsic Value', *Journal of Ethics*, 2, 1998, pp. 277–97; and my 'Two Kinds of Organic Unity', *Journal of Ethics*, 2, 1998, pp. 299–320.

great good or prevent a great evil. This seems intuitively right: the honour due athletic achievements for themselves is less than that due the achievements of great political reformers or medical researchers. Whatever admiration we should feel for Tiger Woods or Gary Kasparov is less than we should feel for Nelson Mandela. It also implies that, whatever their other merits, Suits's utopia and Marx's realm of freedom would lack an important intrinsic good. Their inhabitants could play the game of, say, farming or medicine by going through the same complex procedures as farmers and doctors today. But if food could be produced and diseases cured by pushing a button, as they can in Suits's vision, their activity would not have the additional intrinsic value that comes from actually feeding or curing people and that is found in present-day farming and medicine.<sup>21</sup> The very perfection of Suits's and Marx's utopias prevents them from containing the distinctive good of producing intrinsic goods that would not otherwise exist.

The point that an ideal world may exclude certain intrinsic goods should not be unfamiliar: G. E. Moore noted that the best possible world could not contain compassion for real pain, which he plausibly held was a greater good than compassion for merely imaginary pain.<sup>22</sup> And Suits's and Marx's utopias can still contain, alongside such goods as pleasure and knowledge, the distinctively modern good of achieving a difficult goal regardless of its value. Moreover, their doing so can help make them better on balance than any world in which successful instrumental activity is possible. Many philosophers have assumed, with Aristotle, that the value of a process aimed at producing some end-state must derive entirely from the end-state's value, so if the latter is negligible so is the former. But there is no reason to believe this. Even if some of the process's intrinsic value depends on its instrumental value, in the way just described, there can also be intrinsic value in its properties just as a process and apart from any value in its product. To return again to figure 1, this value will depend not on any qualities of

21. This claim is defended, with specific reference to Suits, in Shelly Kagan, 'The Grasshopper, Aristotle, Bob Adams, and Me' (unpublished ms.).

22. G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1903, pp. 219–21.

the topmost goal considered in itself, but only on the means–ends relations between the various goals whose sequential achievement constitutes the process. I have argued that this distinctively modern value is illustrated most clearly by playing in games, especially when that is analysed as in Bernard Suits’s wonderful book *The Grasshopper*.<sup>23</sup>

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23. I am grateful for helpful conversations to my former student Gwendolyn Bradford, whose essay ‘Kudos for Ludus’ first linked the value of games and the details of Suits’s definition of a game.