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# **On the Relationship between Philosophy and Game-Playing**

**Yuanfan Huang and Emily Ryall**

This chapter focuses on the relation between ‘philosophy’ and ‘games’ and argues most of philosophy is a form of game-playing. Two approaches are considered: Wittgenstein’s notion of family resemblance and Suits’ analytic definition of a game. Both approaches support the assertion that the relationship is a close, if not categorical, one but it is the lusory attitude that is the ultimate determinant.

As noted in Ryall (2013), Suits took up Wittgenstein’s challenge that the concept of a game could not be analytically defined. Suits attempted to demonstrate otherwise and therefore both approaches are used in our analysis.

## **The Family Resemblance**

Wittgenstein’s concept of ‘family resemblance’ contends that entities that belong to a particular concept may not share any common feature (thus defeating an analytic definition) but instead share a resemblance. In identifying which entities belong to which concept, Wittgenstein advises us: ‘don’t think, but look’ (Wittgenstein, 2009: §66) and continues: ‘the result of this examination is: we see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail’. He concludes:

I can think of no better expression to characterise these similarities than ‘family resemblance’; for the various resemblances between members of a family: build, features, colour of eyes, gait, temperament, etc. etc. overlap and criss-cross in the same way. And I shall say: ‘games form a family’. (Wittgenstein, 2009: §67)

Wittgenstein’s paradigm case of family resemblance was that of ‘game’. Whilst it may not appear that there are any common features to all games, it is the case that all activities that



can be called games share a set of features between them. Following Wittgenstein's advice, we will look at whether there are any family resemblances between philosophical activities and games: does the act of philosophy resemble that of game-playing?

At first glance, it appears not. Philosophy is a serious enterprise that aims to discover truth. Playing games in contrast is frivolous and non-serious whereby the rules of play are often informal and change over time. Even when the rules of games are more strictly enforced, they are often bent and manipulated in order to provide that player with an advantage. And whilst gamesmanship is generally ethically frowned upon, it is arguably a skill in sport and considered part of the game (Ryall, 2016). It is recognised as such because of the non-serious and trivial nature of game-playing. Playing games is not a matter of truth-seeking, and the rules merely exist to enable the game to be played. It has no other purpose. In this sense, the acceptance of gamesmanship can be seen as a form of sophistry which is the antithesis of philosophy as the search for wisdom. And yet, there are similarities between the two. Sophistry is a form of (albeit bad) philosophy, and has been used frequently in the history of philosophy, as Johan Huizinga (1949) noted in his analysis of play. Historically, the Sophists' purpose was both to demonstrate a wealth of knowledge and to defeat rivals in public contest. Renowned Sophists were treated in the same manner as athletic heroes: 'It was pure play, catching your opponent in a net of argument or giving him a knock-out blow. It was a point of honour to put nothing but twisters, to which every answer must be wrong' (Huizinga, 1949: 171). The Sophists were well aware that they were playing games with their foes, and held the same lusory attitude in their game-playing that wrestlers held when facing each other on the dirt arena. Even Socrates and Plato, who rejected the rationale of philosophy as game-playing for its own sake, utilised their game-playing methods in order to highlight their errors. As Huizinga notes, 'Plato was not above borrowing their loose, easy manner of dialogue. For, much as he deepened philosophy, he still saw it as a noble game' (Huizinga, 1949: 175).



This competitive game-playing feature of philosophical argument is also salient in scholasticism and the mediaeval university, which Huizinga argued as 'profoundly agonistic and ludic' (Huizinga, 1949: 180), and the resemblance can be traced through modern times too, perhaps most obviously with the twentieth century 'linguistic turn' and the preoccupations of those in the Vienna Circle on what are often derided as trivial philosophical problems.

Similar comparisons have been made between philosophy and games of riddles. Dilthey (1954: 8) asserts that 'philosophers are chiefly and directly addressed to the riddle of the world and of life' whilst Kuhn (1996) identifies philosophy as riddle solving in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. He argues, 'It is, I think, particularly in periods of acknowledged crisis that scientists have turned to philosophical analysis as a device for unlocking the riddles of their field' (Kuhn, 1996: 88). Riddles by their nature are problems that are approached with a particular playful attitude; an attitude which resembles much of philosophy, as noted by Peter Baofu:

if there is seriousness (e.g., the serious business of those in analytic philosophy to understand the central topics and problems in regard to language aforesaid), there is playfulness (e.g., the playful part of those in analytic philosophy, when different philosophers play around with different positions, often conflicting and even contradictory, so as to test and see which ones resolve the issue and problem in question) (Baofu, 2012: 221).

Wittgenstein's consideration of games included those that can be categorised as 'language-games'. Philosophy is in some respects an exemplar of such a game since it is conducted through the means of language. Wittgenstein argued that understanding language-games enables us to get past the temptation of being mesmerised by language and leading us into philosophical confusion. He claimed it is language that leads us to perceive philosophical problems where there are none, merely because of the way we isolate language from its context and then wonder why it has such odd consequences.



The resemblance between philosophy and game-playing can also be seen in the way in which skills are developed through practice. John Wilson (1963) describes this 'skill polishing' aspect of philosophy and uses the analogy of playing a good game of football and engaging in philosophical argument. The ability to analyse concepts is an essential skill of philosophy that is developed through practice and good coaching. Wilson argues knowing how to think with concepts resembles that of learning to play a game. It requires an understanding of the object or purpose, plenty of practice, and the ability to listen to, and heed, good advice. Ryall (2010) and Thomson (2003) also indicate the similarity between critical thinking and game playing, in the way that one can only become better and more successful if one spends time and effort in understanding the rules and practicing one's skills.

The aforementioned are a few 'first-look' resemblances between philosophy and game-playing. Arguably, if we keep looking, more common features could be found, such as: the appreciation of honour, being rule-governed, and so on. If Wittgenstein is right about family resemblance, given all these similarities, it is legitimate to identify philosophy as a game. However, the notion of family resemblance is controversial. Colin McGinn (2012) has provided several challenges to this approach. He specifies that providing one necessary condition of game playing is enough to falsify Wittgenstein's claim that games cannot be defined because Wittgenstein claims that no single commonality can be found for all games. McGinn illustrates some possible candidates: to be a game is to resemble other games along some dimension or other; they are all intentional activities and as such goal-directed (McGinn, 2012: 18-20). Moreover, he argues that family resemblance is neither sufficient nor necessary. Though many similarities can be observed between philosophy and games as aforementioned, we can still reject philosophy as a game since the family resemblance account is not strict enough. As McGinn comments on Wittgenstein: 'He wanted to account for the vagueness and open-endedness of the concept (as he saw it), so he kept the conditions for membership loose; but the danger is that the conditions are so loose that virtually anything will end up counting as a game—including things that are palpably not games' (McGinn, 2012: 29). We return to this point later in our consideration of the lusory



attitude. But for McGinn, the problem with the notion of resemblance is that any number of resemblances can be identified between two or more objects depending on how the phenomenon is being viewed. As such, the family resemblance approach might not be strong enough to vindicate the claim that philosophy is a game. In rejecting Wittgenstein's concept of family resemblance, McGinn turns to the definition supplied by Bernard Suits.

### **Suits' Definition**

Suits rejected Wittgenstein's belief that nothing could be found in common with all games and attempted to come up with a definition of game-playing to prove him wrong. The short version of Suits' analytic definition is: 'Playing a game is the voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles' (Suits, 2014: 43) whilst the longer version specifies the *prelusory goal*, the *lusory means*, the *constitutive rules*, and the *lusory attitude*.

The prelusory goal is the goal that designates the aim of that particular game, and therefore does not include supplementary or auxiliary goals such as, winning, enjoyment, or making friends. So the goal of football is to get the ball in the net; in chess, to checkmate; in running races, to cross the finish line. The means, in contrast, specify how the goal can be attained and must be inherently inefficient, hence 'unnecessary obstacles'. In this, game playing is contrasted with working which, as Suits denotes, is a technical activity 'in which an agent seeks to employ the most efficient available means for reaching a desired goal' (Suits, 2014: 24). The means are governed by rules which specify how the game is to be played, whilst the lusory attitude requires players to recognise and accept the rules of the game merely to allow the game to exist:

To play a game is to attempt to achieve a specific state of affairs [prelusory goal], using only means permitted by rules [lusory means], where the rules prohibit 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] (Suits, 2014: 43).



The question then is, does the activity of philosophy meet these conditions?

First, does philosophy have a prelusory goal? This question may be difficult to answer convincingly since the general socio-cultural conception of philosophy is that it is not a game, at least not in the same way that football is. A goal is only a prelusory goal if it is self-contained – that is, if it is recognised as the purpose of the game to start with. This may then point to a problem with Suits' notion of prelusory goal, since it is only designated as such if the activity in question is already determined to be a game. In which case, it puts the cart before the horse. A counter-argument to this is whether a greater purpose to the prelusory goal can be identified. In the game of golf, the prelusory goal is to get the ball into the hole and this event seems to be sufficiently trivial and pointless outside of the activity itself: a ball in a hole serves no greater purpose and has no context outside the game of golf. In philosophy however, the goal is generally considered much more important and worthy. It is seen (at least by serious philosophers) as a search for truth or the gaining of knowledge. For a prelusory goal to be identified, its fundamental purpose would need to be self-referential. This might be the case if one thought the concepts of truth or knowledge were interminable and merely dependent on rhetoric, i.e. that philosophy had no other point than participating in the activity itself - but such a position may undermine itself since it would need defending philosophically to begin with. But for those who are willing to provide a bit of leniency here, we might say that the prelusory goal in the game of philosophy is the successful defence of a claim. That is, to convince others of the merits of a particular argument. In analytic circles, this would be the production of a sound conclusion via truthful premises. Nevertheless, the question of whether philosophy can be said to have a prelusory goal is perhaps more dependent on the intrinsic or instrumental value that it is given. This is a point to which we will return in more detail later.

Putting the clear identification of a prelusory goal to one side for the moment, we next turn to the rules and means. Suits argued that the ends and the means of a game are inseparable (Suits, 2014). That is, the end (the prelusory goal) only makes sense when viewed in



accordance with the means to achieve it. For it to be a game, the means must be inefficient. In the game of golf, the way to achieve the prelusory goal of getting the ball into the hole is via the use of designated clubs. If the prelusory goal of the 'game of philosophy' is the successful defence of a claim, there must be more or less efficient ways to reach that goal. More efficient ways may be via the use of rhetorical devices, threats of violence, appeal to charisma, or asserting a claim whilst preventing any further discussion. In contrast, a less efficient way is via the construction of logical argument and considered thought that takes into account criticism and counter-argument. The rules are the way in which the means can be correctly applied, i.e. through non-fallacious reasoning such as denying the consequent or affirming the antecedent, the use of *ad hominem*, and appeal to authority, amongst others.

The last element of Suits' definition to be considered in relation to philosophy is that of the lusory attitude. Could it be argued that philosophers accept that they are engaged in the activity of philosophy merely for its own sake? The vast majority of professional philosophers are academics working in universities or educational institutions. The activity of philosophy is part of their daily employment. Suits distinguished between the amateur who plays the game for the love of it and the professional who plays for money: 'by amateurs I mean those for whom playing the game is an end in itself, and by professionals I mean those who have in view some further purpose which is achievable by playing the game' (Suits, 2014: 154). The question then becomes, is one really game-playing if one is doing it for an end other than itself? Despite this distinction, Suits stated 'game playing' is not exclusive to amateurs. In a game, the player accepts the rules *just because* such acceptance makes game playing possible. There are two ways of interpreting this: 'A just because of R' - (1) 'R is always a reason for doing A, and there *can* be no other reason for doing A', or (2) 'R is always a reason for doing A, and there *need* be no other reason for doing A' (Suits, 2014: 156). It is the latter interpretation of the lusory attitude that Suits is in favour of. So on this account then, the professional is able to play the game despite being paid to play. The fact that one is paid can be considered alongside other auxiliary goals or motivations for engaging in games, such as being sociable, getting fit, or raising money for charity. As such, just because



philosophers might philosophize for a number of reasons, such as earning the money or gaining a reputation, it does not necessarily preclude them being game-players.

### **The Challenge**

As we noted at the outset, philosophy at 'first look' does not appear to be a game. It is a serious enterprise that aims at (re)solving problems and searching for truth. Yet, one of the perennial criticisms of philosophy and the work of philosophers is that it is insignificant and without practical application. Indeed, this formed the basis of Daniel Dennett's (2006) criticism in his article 'Higher-order truths about chmess'. In it, he argued that most philosophy is akin to chmess. Chmess is a game similar to chess but with one rule difference: the king can move two squares in one direction, rather than one (the actual rule difference is immaterial). Both chess and chmess contain an infinite number of *a priori* truths about the way in which the game can legally be played and the outcomes that will result. Since chess is well established, aficionados and proponents of the game have spent considerable time identifying and describing these truths to allow a greater enjoyment of the game and to develop their skills in playing it. On the other hand, since chmess is a recent invention, our knowledge is limited and considerable time and effort would be required to understand the game and how it can be played. In this sense, philosophy does resemble that of game-playing. Training in chmess, as in philosophy, is a matter of 'learning the moves that have been tried and tested' (Dennett, 2006: 40). Dennett provides the example of Professor Goofmaker to illustrate. Goofmaker is an eminent and successful figure in this game who provides the inspiration for others to follow. Students of the game both learn how to emulate Professor Goofmaker but also to avoid her mistakes. And through this teaching and learning, a young player becomes proficient in claim/move, counter claim/move, counter-counter claim/move, and so on. But this training and the process of argument and counter-argument merely serves to allow the game to exist and to continue existing. It serves no purpose other than the playing of the game itself.



The reason that Dennett argues philosophy is akin to the game of chess is that we have a habit of developing new versions of similar, older problems that are equally infinite and interminable. And many of these only engage a handful of earnest and enthusiastic minds. As such, philosophy has a tendency of appealing to the few who are engaged and knowledgeable enough about the problem to be able to take part in the discussion. Dennett does not explicitly argue that philosophy is a game – merely that students ought to be careful which problems they choose to focus upon – but the case that philosophers are (merely!) playing games can still be made.

Mulligan *et al.* (2006), in *What's Wrong with Contemporary Philosophy*, support Dennett's criticism. They point to the range of puzzles in the recent history of analytic philosophy, such as 'gavagai', 'rigid designation', and 'possible worlds', that leaves us with 'a trail of unresolved problems' (Mulligan *et al.*, 2006: 64). Such puzzle forming and solving practice is like an ever-lasting game and arguably a form of Sophistry:

The quickest way to a career in the competitive world of modern [analytic philosophy] is to pick a puzzle in a trendy area— be it vagueness, modal counterparts, rigid designation, 'the hard problem' or the elimination of truth – and come up with hitherto unsuspected twist in the dialectic, earning a few more citations in one or another of the on-going games of fashionable philosophical ping-pong (Mulligan *et al.* 2006: 65).

Such a view is shared by Kitcher (2011) who notes the problem for philosophy can be seen in the different methods (and outcomes) between it and the natural sciences. Whilst scientific claims and evidence are initially contested the methods scientists use appear to allow for steady progress and general consensus, something which is rarely achieved in philosophy. In contrast, philosophical methods result in a diluting and dispersal of key problems:

as philosophical questions diminish in size, disagreement and controversy persist, new distinctions are drawn, and yet tinier issues are generated. Decomposition continues downwards, until the interested community becomes too exhausted, too small, or too tired to play the game any further (Kitcher, 2011: 251).



This leads to one of the more obvious challenges against the claim that philosophy fulfils Suits' definition of a game. A game, according to Suits has a clearly defined pre-lusory goal which we initially suggested was the formulating of a conclusion by recourse to linguistic and logical argument. And yet, it seems that there is no way to 'win' in philosophy. The game is interminable.

There are two ways that this challenge could be counteracted. The first response is to argue that philosophical debate is a series of games in which each instance of debate produces a winner. In this sense, it resembles a league table with the most eminent and successful philosophers (or philosophical arguments) at the top with less credible philosophers (or arguments) languishing at the bottom. Yet this seems unconvincing since the conclusion of a single 'game' of philosophy is unclear. In chess, the end is clear when checkmate is achieved, in football, when the final whistle blows after 90 minutes (or after penalties), and in running, when the first competitor has passed the finish line. In contrast, philosophy has no clear way to determine the winner.

The second response then is to compare the game of philosophy to open-ended (or infinite) games such as 'cops and robbers' or 'cowboys and indians'. Suits allowed for the genus of open games in his definition since he argued that the pre-lusory goal of these types of games is to keep the game going in the attempt to achieve a particular state of affairs. For instance, in the game of ping-pong rally, the pre-lusory goal is to maintain the rally for as long as possible. In theory, this could be days, weeks, or years. Similarly, in the game of 'cops and robbers' the aim is to maintain the characters and story-line. Whilst Suits' classification of open-games has been rejected by many of his supporters as conceptually mistaken, it nevertheless provides a defence to the criticism of philosophy as having no pre-lusory goal. As such, the pre-lusory goal of philosophy- to reach a conclusion- does not prescribe a set number of moves in which they must get there. The game can go on for as long as the players want it to do so. This necessitates the lusory attitude



## The Problem of Value

The lusory attitude is the willing acceptance of unnecessary and inefficient means. Yet it also highlights the paradoxical aspect of game-playing: the issue of value. As noted, people who engage in game-playing are criticised for wasting time that could (or should) be spent on more worthy pursuits such as discovering the cure for cancer, feeding starving children and ending war. Games are an indulgence that gets in the way of more important tasks.

And yet Suits (or his main protagonist, Grasshopper) argues that this misunderstands the value of game-playing. In utopia all instrumental activities would become obsolete – there would be no need to earn money for food as whatever food we wanted would be freely available; there would be no need for medicine since all illness would be eliminated – and the only activities left would be those that are done for their own sake. According to Suits, game-playing is the only activity that fulfils this condition

The problem with this conception of utopia however is that intrinsic activities leave us dissatisfied. This is exemplified by Suits through the cases of John Seeker and William Striver, both of whom become bored at having all desires immediately fulfilled and never having to work for anything. As a result, John Seeker becomes a scientist in the attempt to discover truths for himself and William Striver becomes a craftsman who sets out to build himself a house. Both of these endeavours are unnecessary (since the former could be ‘Googled’ – to put a modern day spin on it – and the latter would appear at the press of a button on a 3D printer), but both provide these men with meaning in their lives. And so Grasshopper is forced to conclude a psychological fact:

most people will not want to spend their lives playing games. Life for most people will not be worth living if they cannot believe that they are doing *something* useful, whether it is providing for their families or formulating a theory of relativity (Suits, 2014: 196).

Meaning is found in life not through playing-games but in doing things that people believe will lead to something more worthwhile. In other words, through instrumental activities that lead to an outcome.



Yet this highlights a paradox. Instrumental activities are only valued since they lead to something which is purportedly more valued, which suggests that there is a final end that is being aspired to. And yet this final intrinsic end is dissatisfying since it lacks any further instrumental value.

Hurka stresses this point by asking us to compare 'political activity that liberates an entire nation from oppression' with 'winning a high-level chess tournament' (Hurka, 2006: 233). The former is judged as more worthy '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 [admirable] than success in equally challenging activities that produce a great good or prevent a great evil' (Hurka, 2006: 233-234).

Suits agrees by providing his case of George the dedicated golfer: George is so obsessed with golf that he neglects his wife and family. His wife complains that George has his priorities wrong. For George's wife, a game is something that should not be valued above other things in life, such as spending time with and supporting his family. As Suits says, there seems to be something particularly problematic about games in that they are trivial and unproductive. Had George's life been taken over by doing good works or finding the cure for cancer, his wife may have been more sympathetic.

Suits' definition is arguably insightful yet the lusory attitude seems to be a double edged sword. As it has been defined so far, every activity could be defined as a game if the subjective agent views it as such. For example, 'avoiding plagiarism' is an essential rule of philosophical writing. Abiding by this rule is generally accepted because it is considered morally wrong to plagiarise. But under Suits' condition, the 'game player' would not accept this rule because it is morally wrong but because it is a rule of the game and therefore must be followed in order to play it. In this sense, the lusory attitude is acceptable as long as the game being played is acceptable. Or in other words, play is only acceptable when all our



(important) work has been done. Treating something as a game when it is considered a moral (or more serious) matter suggests that it is not given the due respect that it deserves.

The problem of seriousness is further explored by Suits' case of Mario, the dedicated racing driver who takes the game of racing so seriously that he will always abide by its rules so that the integrity of the game is not compromised. Mario knows the rules (in getting from point A to point B before other the drivers) are unnecessary but holds the (lusory) attitude that to play the game, the rules must be followed. However, in the next race a child runs out in front of his car. Since Mario is a serious game-player and is determined to abide by the rules of the game, including the rule that states all players must remain on the track, the child is killed - to the horror of spectators and other 'game players' alike who believe that whilst it is right to follow rules in games, these rules do not override other moral rules, such as the rule that states we should not kill innocent children. As such, it is acceptable to play a game only when there are no more important matters to attend to.

Similarly, philosophers are often accused of being self-indulgent and of engaging in debates that have no real purpose other than to continue the discussion despite the fact that most of them would maintain that they were doing very serious and important work. Indeed, the point of Dennett's paper is to warn students against being lured into 'artifactual puzzles of no abiding significance' (Dennett, 2006: 39). Wittgenstein too, recognised the bewitching power of philosophical problems, and encouraged his students to avoid it. And yet, seeing philosophy in this way seems to devalue what is generally considered the highest form of enquiry. It would be much better to argue that philosophy is useful in that it aims to (re)solve problems in the same way that science and medicine do: it has an instrumental and therefore worthy purpose. A response to this may suggest a domain-specific approach in relation to the value of philosophy. Some domains might not have instrumental value, and these are the areas that Dennett warns against. On the other hand, areas such as applied ethics do seem to have practical significance in relation to other aspects of our daily lives and to other disciplines, such as medicine, business and education. The appropriateness of



treating philosophy as a game might depend on the philosophical domain that that is being engaged with. This may then help to explain why the identification of a prelusory goal in the game of philosophy was problematic. For an activity to be culturally valued, it must be seen as holding an instrumental purpose. It is unsurprising that professional philosophers are reluctant to admit that they are not doing serious work that holds equal value to a scientist researching the cure for cancer.

There is a further response to the problem of value in game-playing which focuses on the appreciation of difficulty. Suits captures two distinctive features of games, noted by Hurka: the value of difficulty and our willingness to appreciate (accept) it. First, the constitutive factors that entail a *good* game, rather than just a game, need to ensure that the level of difficulty in attaining the voluntary goal is sufficient to both motivate one to attempt it, but also to acknowledge that without effort one may fail. An impossible game is not worth playing, whilst a goal that is too easy becomes boring. The best games are those that test our mettle to the full but at which we can eventually succeed. This leads Hurka to modify Suits' concept of the lusory attitude to, 'accepting the rules not just because they make the game possible, but also because they make it difficult' (Hurka, 2006: 227). As such, Suits' first three conditions – the rules, means and prelusory goal - make games an intrinsic activity, whilst the lusory attitude makes it an intrinsically *good* activity. As Hurka puts it; 'if something is intrinsically good, the positive attitude of loving it for the property that makes it good, that is, desiring, pursuing and taking pleasure in it for that property, is also, and separately, intrinsically good' (Hurka, 2006: 227-8).

These two distinctive features are shared by playing a game of philosophy. Reading and understanding great philosophers, avoiding plagiarism, formulating complicated arguments, employing technical terms, etc., make philosophy difficult. In ordinary life, there is no need to do such things – and indeed, most people do not. Accepting that our environment is as we perceive it (rather than a form of the Matrix) or having faith in the existence of God, is more 'efficient' than providing a logical and coherent argument through reading, thinking



and arguing. Philosophers voluntarily accept these rules because they appreciate this value of difficulty in philosophy. It is doubtful that the construction of reality is as much of a persistent problem for philosophers as they would have us believe. When they are on their holidays, having their dinner, dealing with their teenage children, or checking their payslip, matters of ontology and metaphysics are not pressing concerns. As Walker Percy quipped in reference to deconstructionists who argue that words do not relate to anything in the world, 'a deconstructionist is an academic who claims that texts have no referents and then leaves a message on his wife's answering machine asking her to order a pepperoni pizza for dinner' (Percy, cited in Pinker, 2002: 209).

One way of resolving this conundrum is to employ Hurka's conception of 'modern value'. This rejects the Aristotelian or teleological version of *kinēsis* with its focus upon ends, and argues it is the means of reaching the end rather than the end in itself which is of importance: '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' (2005: 230). For Hurka, game playing is the clearest expression of this:

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 a classical view of value - because the modern view centres on the value of process. (Hurka, 2005: 17).

This is arguably also the value of philosophy, and is supported by McGinn when he argues that in philosophy, 'the journey matters as much as the destination' (McGinn, 2012: 148). Perhaps surprisingly Dennett accepts this too when he states 'chess is a deep and important human artifact, about which much of value has been written' (Dennett, 2006: 40). This highlights the paradox over that question which is, and has always been, a central concern of philosophy, that of the meaning of life. Utopia, as Suits' Grasshopper realised, is logically incoherent. Meaning in life is founded on the belief that there is something worth striving



for, and yet psychologically, humans struggle to find meaning in striving for ends which are intrinsic in themselves.

In Suits' case of William Seeker and John Striver, they needed to believe that they were doing something instrumentally worthwhile. We might say they are guilty of 'bad faith' or cognitive dissonance but that this is necessary for them to feel that their lives are worth living. Philosophy, too, may be an activity whereby we need to believe that we are doing something useful, even if ultimately we know we are not.

This returns us to the Suits' final criterion, the lusory attitude, and perhaps is where the notion of philosophy as a game is most likely to fail. To play a game, one must accept that one is playing a game. One cannot play a game accidentally. This is the key element in it being an intrinsic activity and not an instrumental one. Despite the criticisms levelled at philosophers for navel-gazing, there are many good arguments to demonstrate it can have instrumental use in making us feel as if we are solving important problems. As Mellor notes, there is no doubt that science is useful in improving agriculture, public health and medicine. But other social goods 'like the end of slavery, the protection of children, the spread of education, democracy and the rule of law, respect for human rights, fair and honest trade, and so on' are mostly owing to philosophy (Mellor, 2015: 401).

## **Conclusion**

It is perhaps therefore the lusory attitude which is the most important consideration in answering the question as to whether philosophy is a game. As in Wittgenstein's comments on the duck-rabbit illusion, whether we see a duck or rabbit depends on our perspective. Equally, seeing philosophy as a game is dependent on our (lusory) attitude towards it. Those involved in the pursuit of philosophy generally do not see themselves as engaging in a game. In the same way that Grasshopper was forced to concede that for the Strivers and Seekers, life was only meaningful if they believed that they were not playing games, we too, are forced to accept that this is also true for many in the philosophical community. Yet there are some, ourselves included, who accept the absurdity of formulating meaning in life and note



the paradox within our conceptions of intrinsic and instrumental value, and who treat philosophy as a game to be played. And arguably as soon as an activity is treated as such, it becomes one. Check (mate)!

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