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GAMES AND THE GOOD LIFE

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A HUMAN LIFE devoid of play would be a deeply impoverished one. Play in childhood is especially important, but for human beings play remains an important ingredient in the good life throughout adulthood. Stuart Brown goes so far as to claim that a "life without play is a grinding, mechanical existence organized around doing the things necessary for survival."[1] While equally strong claims about how essential playing *games* is to a good life are less plausible, it is remarkable just how many people *do* find playing games immensely rewarding. Indeed, a disposition not only to play but to play games is cross-culturally robust. Although games are perhaps "not for everyone," it remains plausible that for a large portion of humanity playing games contributes to the good life. One might naturally wonder *how* does playing games so contribute? Granted, games can be very good, but what exactly is so good about them when they are good? Although a natural starting point, this question is perhaps naive. Games come in all shapes and sizes, and different games are often good in very different ways. Chess, bridge, bingo, Chutes and Ladders, football, spin the bottle, Dungeons & Dragons, Pac-Man, Minecraft, and charades can all contribute to a good life, but each will characteristically enrich life in its own distinctive way. Some games facilitate socializing, others improve physical fitness, others promote a sense of fairness and reciprocity, while others enhance concentration and analytic skills. Asking, "What is good about games?" with the presupposition that there is a simple, unified answer is as naive as asking (in the same spirit), "What is good about fiction?" "What is good about art?" or "What is good about sex?"

However, a less naive question in the vicinity is not hard to formulate. Plausibly, much of the heterogeneity of the value of games stems from the different *instrumental* value of different games. Perhaps we should therefore ask in what ways the *activity* of playing games is characteristically good *for its own sake*. Even here there may be heterogeneity. One and the same kind of activity can be good for its own sake in different ways in different contexts. In one context, dancing might be good for its own sake in virtue of its expressive value, as in the intimate

1 Brown, *Play*, 11.

dance of two lovers, while in another context dancing might be good for its own sake in virtue of its aesthetic value, as when a professional dancer performs at the top of her game. Moreover, even a single token action can be good for its own sake in different respects. An act of kindness might be both morally good for its own sake and aesthetically good for its own sake if performed with grace and style. Even given these complications, it seems that the heterogeneity of the noninstrumental value of playing games is likely to be far more restricted and theoretically manageable than the heterogeneity of the value of playing games *tout court*. It is not crazy to suppose that playing games as such provides a reasonably restricted set of characteristic noninstrumental goods.

The two most striking candidate noninstrumental values characteristically associated with playing games are *play* and *achievement*. Here we need to distinguish "play" as used in "play a game" from "play" as used to refer to what I shall call "play (full stop)." As used in "play a game," "play" is a transitive verb that gets its content in part from its direct object (compare "play a game" with "play the piano" and "play a joke on someone"). By contrast, one can play (full stop) without playing a game or indeed playing anything else. A child frolicking on a hill is playing (full stop), but need not be playing a game. More controversially, one can play a game without playing (full stop), as in the case of a jaded footballer who plays the game just for the money. Still, it is plausible that there is a non-accidental relationship between playing games and playing (full stop). The noninstrumental value of playing (full stop) is thus a reasonable candidate for explaining the noninstrumental value of playing games. Moreover, on many influential theories of welfare, play (full stop) contributes to the good life in and of itself.[2] These theories typically pick up on the idea that welfare is plausibly understood in terms of nature fulfillment, and argue that play (full stop) is an essential element of human nature.

Achievement is also a plausible candidate for explaining the value of playing games, though. When done well, playing a game can constitute achievement, and achievements are also often plausibly held to contribute to the good life in and of themselves.[3] Moreover, we admire competitors for their achievements, and this admiration does not seem out of place. Admittedly, both these values, play (full stop) and achievement, can be found in non-game contexts. Even so, providing these goods may somehow be characteristic of why we value games, and these values may take on a special form when found in the context of games. To be clear, these candidates are not mutually exclusive, and a pluralist view of

2 Cf. Finnis, *Natural Law and Natural Rights*; Nussbaum, "Human Functioning and Social Justice."

3 Cf. Griffin, *Well-Being*; Bradford, *Achievement*.

the value of games that includes both values has much to recommend itself; indeed, I defend a form of this view here.

Unfortunately, the philosophical literature on the noninstrumental value of playing games is sparse. One of the few sustained treatments of the topic can be found in an underappreciated exchange between Thomas Hurka and John Tasioulas.[4] Interestingly, despite taking different views of what it is to play a game, they both make room for the noninstrumental value of play and achievement in game play *and* they both argue that these two goods stand in an important explanatory relation to one another. However, they take diametrically opposed views as to which of these good is more basic. Roughly, on Hurka's view, the good of achievement is more basic. The noninstrumental value of achievement explains the value of what Hurka calls "playing in a game."[5] The idea is that if something is noninstrumentally good then loving that thing is also noninstrumentally good, and that playing in a game involves loving a noninstrumentally good activity for its own sake. In this way, the value of achievement in a game *grounds* the value of playing in a game. Tasioulas takes exactly the opposite approach. He argues that there must be something independently good about playing a game that grounds the value of achievement in that game. On his view, the typical grounding good or "framing value" of games is play itself—what I am here calling "playing (full stop)."

In this essay, I argue that while both contain important insights, neither Hurka's "achievement first" order of explanation nor Tasioulas's "play first" order of explanation is fully correct. I argue instead for what I call a "variable priority" view. On the view defended here, the value of play sometimes grounds the value of achievement in a game, while in other cases the independently grounded value of achievement in a game provides further grounding for the value of play. In the latter case we have only a *further* grounding because play is plausibly good for its own sake independent of any framing value in a way that achievement argu-

4 Hurka "Games and the Good"; and Tasioulas, "Games and the Good."

5 Hurka frames his view in terms of "intrinsic value," but there is room for a distinction between noninstrumental value and intrinsic value, as Korsgaard has famously argued and Hurka himself discusses elsewhere. See Hurka, "Two Kinds of Organic Unity"; and Korsgaard, "Two Distinctions in Goodness." See also Langton, who gives the nice example of the value of a wedding ring ("Objective and Unconditioned Value"). I might value my wedding ring in and of itself, and not as a means to some further good, but it is valuable only because of one of its relational properties—its history and role in my life with my spouse. An exact replica without that history would not have the same kind of value. So we can have noninstrumental value that depends on more than the intrinsic properties of the object of evaluation, which on one way of defining "intrinsic value" means we can have noninstrumental but nonintrinsic value. For my purposes it will be sufficient to focus on the noninstrumental value of games. Whether the value is also intrinsic is a further question I do not discuss here.

ably is not. Still, this further grounding explains why play in some game contexts is good for its own sake in a distinctive way—it explains why it is good in itself in a way that not all forms of play are.

I

Hurka's explanation of the noninstrumental value of playing games draws heavily on Bernard Suit's classic definition of "play a game." On Suits's view, playing a game has three elements: (1) the prelusory goal, which is a goal that can be understood independently of playing the game, (2) the constitutive rules, and (3) the lusory attitude, which is a matter of accepting the constitutive rules because of the activity they make possible. To play a game is to adopt the lusory attitude and seek the prelusory goal, but only in ways permitted by the constitutive rules. The easiest way to see how the view works is through an example. To play golf is to seek the prelusory goal (getting the ball into the cup), but only in ways compatible with the constitutive rules (one must use golf clubs as they are intended to be used to get the ball into the cup, rather than just dropping the ball in the cup by hand), where one accepts the rules just because they make this sort of activity possible. The constitutive rules are understood as ruling out some of the more efficient ways of achieving the prelusory goal, thus making it more of a challenge to achieve that goal. This account also allows us to make sense of the lusory goal, which is simply the prelusory goal achieved in ways permitted by the constitutive rules.

Hurka suggests that this analysis of "play a game" naturally suggests a view about what makes a game good. Games are designed to present us with challenges, so they must be difficult enough to challenge us. Thus, Chutes and Ladders and rock, paper, scissors are poor games. At the same time, they must not be so difficult as to be virtually impossible. Hurka's account of the value of playing games applies only to good games—ones that strike a happy medium between these extremes. Hurka argues that playing good games provides opportunities for achievement. On Hurka's account, achievements are activities in which one deliberately achieves a goal by overcoming some difficulty, and the greater the difficulty, the greater the achievement. Therefore, excellence in (good) games entails achievement. Hurka agrees with those philosophers who hold that achievement is a noninstrumental value, and so concludes that excellence in games is noninstrumentally good in virtue of constituting achievement. On this account, well-designed games are made to provide opportunities for achievement. As Gwen Bradford puts it in her landmark discussion, "Games are special

in that their very structure has something very close to the central elements of achievement built right in."[6]

Achievement does not exhaust the noninstrumental value of game play on Hurka's account. Hurka draws a distinction between playing a game and "playing in a game." Even a jaded professional, who plays baseball just to get a salary, in one clear sense still counts as playing the game. Such a "pure professional" still counts as playing on Suits's canonical definition because he adopts the rules to engage in that very activity—he just happens to have some further reasons for wanting to engage in that activity. Suits himself makes it clear that his use of the phrase "just because" is not meant to entail that this is the player's only reason for accepting the rules, but that it always must be among the reasons. Hurka notes that when Suits finally defends the value of playing games he implicitly shifts to an understanding of game playing on which one must accept the rules *only* for the sake of the activity this makes possible. Suits's own argument, which I discuss further in the final section of this paper, invites the reader to imagine a kind of "Utopia" in which all our instrumental goods are provided for. He argues that playing games would be the only activity we would find worthwhile in such circumstances, and that this tells us something important about the value of playing games. Hurka's point is that those who play games in Utopia must accept the constitutive rules of the games they play *entirely* for the sake of engaging in the activity itself. At least, insofar as they are rational they must accept the rules for this reason, since there could be no instrumental reasons for accepting them. Players in Utopia play their games with an amateur attitude, and this is what Hurka calls "playing in a game." This counts as playing (full stop) on Hurka's view, because to play just is to engage in an activity for its own sake.[7]

Hurka argues that playing in a game is noninstrumentally good, but this further good is *derived from* the noninstrumental good of achievement. Here Hurka draws on his other work in normative theory, where he argues that if something is itself noninstrumentally good then the positive attitude of loving that thing for

6 Bradford, *Achievement*, 183.

7 Hurka, "Games and the Good," 227. Hurka cites Suits as endorsing this view of what it is to play (full stop). Actually, Suits makes it clear that this is only "play" in an entirely stipulative sense (Suits, *The Grasshopper*, 161). On his considered view of "play" as we understand that notion in ordinary language, we must add an additional necessary condition—to count as playing (full stop) one must not merely do something for its own sake; this must also involve reallocating resources normally devoted to instrumental activities to the activity in question (Suits, "Words on Play"). Since those in Utopia have no instrumental needs, this entails that there can be no play in Utopia, which is in my view a highly counterintuitive upshot of Suits's considered view of play (full stop). However, I put this complication to one side here as I ultimately defend a different conception of play (full stop) anyway.

the property that makes it good is also noninstrumentally good. If, for example, happiness is good for its own sake, then loving happiness (that is, benevolence) is also good for its own sake. Having argued that excellence in playing games is independently noninstrumentally good, he argues that because playing in a game involves loving the activity because of its good-making property (the difficulty of the activity), playing in a game is also noninstrumentally good. The value of play in a game is on this account an entirely *derived* good—its value is derived from the value of achievement. Playing in a game is thus itself not a fundamental good, but is derived from two more basic goods in a specific way. He suggests, though, that the value of playing in a game can be paradigmatic despite not being fundamental, "because it gives the clearest possible expression of a certain type of value." His point here is that, in many other cases, achievement involves some further instrumental good, and this can distract us from the essential good of achievement as such. Because games take otherwise worthless ends and derive value from them by making them help constitute achievements, the value of achievement as such is more clearly on display in the case of games.

Hurka concludes by discussing evil achievements and achievements that involve some independently recognizable value, e.g., a moral value. He argues that the latter achievements are more valuable than achievements as in games in which the ends are in themselves worthless. This is why Nelson Mandela's achievements are more valuable in themselves than Garry Kasparov's.[8] Still, achievements that involve morally neutral ends (like checkmate) can still be genuinely valuable achievements, just less so. In the case of evil achievements, as with someone who overcomes great difficulty to commit genocide, Hurka is at least willing to allow that such achievements lack noninstrumental value. The presence of an evil end is on this view a kind of "defeating condition" on the value of achievement.[9]

Tasioulas takes a very different view. He objects to Hurka's reliance on Suits's definition of "play a game," which he argues is implausibly broad. In particular, he suggests that, on Suits's view, the infliction of justified punishment and the waging of lawful war count, quite literally, as playing games, and that this is absurd. In the case of justified punishment, we have a prelusory goal of preventing criminal behavior. We then have constitutive rules that make this more difficult by forbidding the punishment of the innocent or punishing the guilty disproportionately. Those in the criminal justice system plausibly accept these rules just so they can engage in this kind of activity—that is, justified punishment of

8 Hurka, "Games and the Good," 234.

9 Mentioned in Hurka, "Games and the Good," 225n7.

offenders.[10] He makes a similar point in the case of justified war, which aims at repelling an attack by another state (prelusory goal), but only in accordance with humanitarian laws (constitutive rules) that make the achievement of this goal less efficient.

Tasioulas allows that playing games is sometimes good because it involves achievement, but argues against Hurka's view that achievement provides the most fundamental and distinctive good associated with playing games. He points out that many games are simply not well understood in terms of striving or achievement. Games of chance, for example, are more about "the thrill of surrendering to fate and delighting in good fortune."[11] Children playing blindman's bluff, factory workers engaged in an impromptu football match during their lunch break, or an elderly pensioner enjoying a weekly game of bingo are all further examples of games whose value is not well understood in terms of achievement. Indeed, Tasioulas suggests that finding the value of playing games primarily in terms of achievement is *ideologically* suspect—a "sophisticated manifestation of a problematic trend in modern life … the invasion of play by the rhetoric of achievement … a defence of games in the spirit of the work ethics."[12]

Tasioulas suggests that the more fundamental and more general (noninstrumental) good associated with playing games is playing (full stop).[13] He reminds us that playing is plausibly partly constitutive of welfare for creatures like us, drawing on both the work of philosophers analyzing welfare as well as documents like the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which includes a right to play.[14] Insofar as playing a game characteristically involves playing (full stop), it is the playing that most fundamentally constitutes its noninstrumental value. Play (full stop) plausibly can be found in the kinds of games Tasioulas argued were not well understood in terms of striving for achievement. However, Tasioulas does not deny that games are sometimes good because they are vehicles for achievement. When they are valuable in this way, though, he argues that this is

10 Tasioulas, "Games and the Good," 238.

11 Tasioulas, "Games and the Good," 241.

12 Tasioulas, "Games and the Good," 251.

13 Actually, Tasioulas himself does not sharply distinguish playing a game from playing (full stop), perhaps because he would deny that there is a sharp distinction to be drawn there. He may think that all play is in some sense playing a game and that all game play involves what I would call "play (full stop)." Insofar as one allows, as I argue we should, that there is a distinction to be drawn here, though, it seems clear that what Tasioulas has in mind is what I am calling play (full stop). I therefore impose this distinction on the text in the interest of clarity in the present framework.

14 Tasioulas, "Games and the Good," 241.

typically itself explained by the value of play, thus inverting the order of explanation found in Hurka.

Tasioulas argues that Hurka's account of achievements is, like his (and Suits's) account of games, overbroad. He gives the example of someone ("Joe") whose dominant pursuit in life is counting blades of grass. He tries to count the exact number of blades of grass in as many lawns of a certain size as possible within a calendar year, remembering at the end of the year how many blades were in each year and also accurately describing each yard's general condition. This is the prelusory goal of his "game." The constitutive rule that makes his pursuit of this goal less efficient is a rule that requires that the counting is done manually and without assistance, that it must continue for twelve hours per day, and that on every other day he must fast. Joe adopts these rules entirely for the sake of the activity that they make possible. The game is Joe's own creation, and it affords him a sense of fulfillment but little pleasure. Joe becomes highly proficient at this "game" and can count and accurately recall ten times as many lawns per year as a hypothetical amateur. Tasioulas argues that this constitutes an achievement on Hurka's view (he does deliberately achieve a difficult goal), but that this is a reduction of Hurka's conception of achievement on the grounds that there is nothing valuable about what Joe does, apart from perhaps the incidental value of practical and theoretical reasoning in which he engages in the course of these activities.[15]

Tasioulas argues that what this example illustrates is that overcoming difficulty per se is not noninstrumentally valuable. On his view, overcoming difficulty constitutes an achievement, and is therefore valuable, only when the activity is independently valuable in some *other* way. In the case of playing games this "framing value" is "typically" play itself.[16] The presence of some additional independent value might be understood as what Jonathan Dancy would call an "enabling condition" for the value of achievement.[17] Tasioulas argues that if we modify his example of Joe and the game of counting blades of grass case so that it begins to look more and more like it exemplifies play (full stop) then it becomes more and more plausible to suppose that his excellence in this activity does indeed constitute an achievement. In particular, if we change the case so that Joe *does* enjoy the activity for its own sake, is regarded by him as "not serious," and is done only in his free time, filling no more than seven days per year and imposing no health-endangering burdens, then the idea that what he does can constitute an achievement is more plausible. If we further add that other people take part in the activity, so that it has a social dimension in Huizinga's sense, then it becomes

15 Tasioulas, "Games and the Good," 257–58.

16 Tasioulas, "Games and the Good," 243.

17 Dancy, *Ethics without Principles*; compare McKeever and Ridge, *Principled Ethics*.

even more plausible that what he does constitutes an achievement.[18] If, for example, we add that others take part in the activity competitively and that they have an annual festival, then the idea that his prowess at counting blades of grass could ground an achievement becomes much more palatable.

We find two starkly different views of the noninstrumental value of playing games in Hurka and Tasioulas, and two different views of the nature of play and games themselves. Both agree that the noninstrumental value of playing games can involve both play (full stop) and achievement, but they differ profoundly on which of these two goods is more basic. This disagreement rests on a further disagreement about the nature of achievement and what makes it valuable. In the next section I argue that while each of these perspectives contains important insights, neither is quite right.

II

Although I do not think Suits's analysis of "play a game" is quite right, my differences with him do not matter for present purposes.[19] Indeed, the argument for a "variable priority" view of the value of play (full stop) and achievement in playing games should go through on any otherwise plausible account of playing games. That being said, I should underscore that in my view Suits is onto something important and insightful in emphasizing the way in which games characteristically provide opportunities for achievement in virtue of being constituted by rules that make the achievement of some goal more difficult. Overcoming these difficulties can constitute achievements, and in my view providing opportunities for achievements is at least one of the main *functions* associated with the concept of a game. It is not, in my view, the only function associated with the concept of a game, and some of Tasioulas's examples (e.g., games of chance) suggest that there are other relevant functions—socializing or simply playing (full stop) and having fun may be other germane functions here. Though I prefer a more functionalist analysis of "play a game," which can make room for these heterogeneous functions associated with the concept of game play, my arguments here will not rely on this. On either my own view or Suits's view, games not only can provide opportunities for achievement, their doing so is an important characteristic of games, or at least of certain forms of game play.

I also agree with both Hurka and Tasioulas that a plausible account of the value of playing games will advert both to playing (full stop) *and* achievement. However, I must briefly register that I understand play (full stop) differently from

18 Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*.

19 Ridge, "How to Play Well with Others."

Hurka. Hurka follows Suits's stipulative definition of "play" and glosses play as doing something entirely for its own sake. For Hurka's purposes, this can be read as a harmless stipulation. However, my positive account of the noninstrumental value of playing games will advert to the value of play (full stop) *as that concept is understood in ordinary thought and discourse*, so for present purposes the contours of that concept matter. In particular, it is important to my account that play (full stop) is valuable in itself; this is how it can on my account ground the value of achievement. However, I do not think that merely doing something entirely for its own sake makes that activity itself good for its own sake. This is most clear in cases in which the activity is banal or evil.

Moreover, doing something for its own sake is neither necessary nor sufficient for playing (full stop) in the ordinary-language sense of "play," though Hurka is not alone in characterizing play in these terms. Indeed, the preponderance of accounts in the literature take it to be necessary.[20] For a start, very young children and simple-minded animals may not have the conceptual sophistication needed to do something for its own sake, yet we correctly judge that they play—in fact, young children provide paradigm instances of play. Moreover, doing something for its own sake is not sufficient for playing (full stop). Suits follows his arguments where they lead and suggests that a soldier who should be defending his city but instead engages in religious contemplation for its own sake is thereby playing.[21] Intuitively, though, religious contemplation for its own sake is far too serious and contemplative to count as play. Indeed, religious adherents might well consider the characterization of such activities as mere play as sacrilege. The available empirical evidence suggests that being done for its own sake is *not* what guides ordinary speakers' judgments that some activity is play. In a study of the characteristics ordinary people use to guide their judgments of what counts as play, Smith and Vollstedt went so far as to conclude that "the association of Intrinsic Motivation with play was to be found *insignificant* and *negligible* in amount in this study, and *its status within any definition of play should be questioned seriously*."[22]

An initially tempting hypothesis is that to play (full stop) just is to do something for the fun of it. However, play (full stop) requires *activity* in a sense that goes beyond merely "doing something." Riding a roller coaster is doing something, and typically something one does for the sheer fun of it, but it would be odd to call riding a roller coaster playing. Perhaps we should instead define "play" (full stop) as engaging in an activity for the fun of it, where "activity" is spelled

20 Hurka, Tasioulas, and Suits all take this approach; see also Burke, "'Work' and 'Play.'"

21 Suits, "Words on Play."

22 Smith and Vollstedt, "On Defining Play," 1048.

out in some way that rules out passive behaviors like riding a roller coaster. This is closer to correct, but it is still too broad. Intuitively, play (full stop) also involves an element of *spontaneity.* This is why someone rolling around in the mud, wrestling, or tickling someone are such clear cases of play. These activities are in an important sense *unscripted*. We should therefore, in my view, require that an agent's behavior is *unscripted* before we conclude that he is playing. These considerations suggest the following definition:

> An agent *A* is playing if and only if (and by definition) *A* is engaged in an unscripted activity for the fun of it.

Of course, a full defense of this definition would require a separate paper. In what follows, I will implicitly rely on this definition to focus discussion. The details of this definition are *not*, however, essential to the main theses of this paper. All that is essential is the more basic idea that play (full stop) should *somehow* be understood in terms of doing something for the *fun* of it, rather than in terms of doing something for its own sake. To be clear, this is essential because the element of fun is in my view part of what explains why it is plausible to take play to be good for its own sake. This marks an important contrast with Hurka's more austere conception of play.

So much for "play a game" and "play (full stop)." Finally, how should we understand achievement and its value? Here I side with Hurka's account of the nature of achievement, but agree with Tasioulas about what makes achievement valuable when it is. On Hurka's account, achievement is constituted by deliberately achieving a goal in the face of challenges.[23] Tasioulas argues against this conception by appealing to our intuitions about the person who makes a game of counting blades of grass. His argument implicitly but crucially relies on the premise that something's being an achievement entails that it is valuable; this bridges the gap from "is worthless" to "is not an achievement." This implicit premise is dubious, though. Ordinary speakers would not hesitate to characterize an elaborately planned and flawlessly executed art heist as an achievement while in the same breath denying that it is good. Admittedly, "achievement" has the *connotation* that the activity in question is good in some way, but it would be implausible to build this connotation into the semantic content of "achievement."[24] In Gricean terms, this implication is cancellable. However, Tasioulas's

23 A much more detailed account in the same vein can be found in Bradford, *Achievement*. I return to Bradford's work below.

24 In fact, the case of evil achievements is far more complex than I can do justice to here. For useful discussion of evil achievements, see Bradford, "Evil Achievements and the Principle of Recursion." Bradford distinguishes the process and the product involved in an achieve-

evaluative thesis itself—that the counting of blades of grass in his original example is worthless in itself—seems plausible, and this is all he needs to undermine Hurka's view. In the following section, I return to Tasioulas's view of the need for a framing value for achievements to be valuable in themselves. For now, I will simply take this view as correct without further argument.

A plausible account of the noninstrumental value of playing games will ideally help explain why we have reason to play those games. The value in question should, in other words, somehow ground or reflect reasons that could and naturally would appear on the radar of an enthusiastic gamer. However, the value of achievement as such does not seem well suited to play this role. If you ask someone why they play baseball, chess, or cricket, you are unlikely to get the answer, "It is a good vehicle for achievements, and I want some achievements." Someone who is passionate about chess, for example, will instead advert to features of the game itself—the elegance of the rules, the beauty of a stunning combination, or the rich history of the game. In some cases, they might advert to more abstract considerations, including the moral or symbolic value of the game. A chess player might, for example, emphasize the inherent fairness of chess—in chess, unlike "the real world," consistently playing "good moves" will win, whereas "bullshit loses" (the contrast with, e.g., "moves" in a political debate is illustrative). Sometimes a move can be highly unexpected in a way that will strike an experienced player as funny, or even hilarious, so comedic reasons can also play a role. Purely subjective reasons can also figure in the reasons of a passionate gamer: "Playing basketball is just good fun!" The fact that some games provide an opportunity for friendly banter and other forms of socializing can also provide the right kind of reason. Finally, a whole host of instrumental reasons might figure in the reasons a passionate gamer might give for playing a given game—that it makes them more alert, more physically fit, more able to focus, better at strategic thinking in other contexts, and so on.

By contrast, "that it allows me to make great achievements" does not seem like the sort of reason a passionate gamer would naturally mention. While having some achievements plausibly contributes to having a good life, it does not seem

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ment, and argues that the process always retains some positive value, but that this can be outweighed by the negative value of the product. She also argues that the process and product can together form a kind of organic unity in Moore's sense. In the case that concerns me here, where the end is neither good nor evil but neutral (the state of affairs of a set of blades of grass having been counted), she would insist that the process is still valuable *qua* achievement. On her view this is an important point because achievement in games is typically like this—checkmate is in and of itself evaluatively neutral, e.g., as is getting a golf ball in a hole. Obviously if this view is right then premise 1 of Tasioulas's account is also in trouble. I try to explain in the text why I find Tasioulas's view more plausible.

to provide the "right kind of reason" for *first-person deliberation* about whether to play a given game or indeed whether to spend time playing games at all. This sort of consideration seems somehow at once both too abstract, not picking up on the specific features of the game the person loves, and too self-focused, almost narcissistic. Here some of Scanlon's points about the role of welfare and of achieving one's own ends in first-person deliberation seem very much to the point:

> From an individual's own perspective, taking these goals as not yet determined, we can say that a life goes better if the person is more successful in achieving his or her main rational goals (whatever these turn out to be), but the conception of well-being that can be formulated at this level is too indeterminate, too abstract, to be of great weight.[25]

None of this is to downplay the normative significance of achievement. It is instead to help locate the perspective from which that significance is most salient. In my view, the consideration, "this will facilitate achievements for Smith" is most salient not for Smith himself, in deciding what course of action to pursue, but for those who care about Smith. Perhaps most obviously, if Smith is a child then Smith's parents might choose activities for Smith in part because they will be good vehicles for achievement for Smith. Even if Smith is an adult, "that it will allow him to have some achievements" might also figure in how Smith's friends think about how to advise and otherwise direct him. If, though, we are interested in getting clear on the noninstrumental value of playing games as it figures in the deliberation of the person playing the game, then a focus on achievement as such is misguided.

However, something in the vicinity of achievement is salient from a first-person perspective. Although an avid chess player would not characteristically say that they play the game for the sake of having achievements, they might well say that they play the game because it provides an engaging challenge. Competently overcoming challenges just is achievement (I am here assuming with Hurka and Bradford, anyway), so these reasons are obviously related, but the distinction is important. Most obviously, if your reason is "this will provide me with achievements" then if you fail to overcome the relevant challenges then this reason will not justify your action. If, however, your reason is simply, "this will provide an engaging challenge," then so long as you engage with the challenge the reason can justify your action even if you fail to *overcome* those challenges.

Hurka's discussion moves seamlessly between these two kinds of reasons. He often characterizes the relevant reasons in terms of achievement, and he begins his discussion by appealing to what makes us admire elite athletes. He

25 Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other*, 133.

therefore often focuses on the value of "*excellence* in games," rather than simply playing games.[26] However, in other contexts, he appeals to difficulty rather than achievement to explain the value of what he calls "playing in a game," where this is simply playing a game with the right attitude—out of love of it for its difficulty. Since it is possible to play in a game without manifesting excellence in the game, these are clearly different objects of evaluation. With this distinction in hand, I now return to Tasioulas's view.

Tasioulas's suggestion that play (full stop) is the typical framing value for achievements in a game derives some *prima facie* plausibility from my suggestion that what makes a practice a game is its function, and one of the relevant functions is play (full stop). However, this may make play in some ways an especially characteristic framing value for achievements, in a game, but it does not follow from this that the value of achievement in games is "typically dependent on the value of play itself."[27] Even restricting our attention to other *noninstrumental* values that can be manifest in playing games, play is not the only candidate value. Other candidate noninstrumental values commonly found in game play include beauty, humor, and various forms of symbolic value. More importantly, it is not at all obvious why the *instrumental* value of playing games could not provide the needed framing value. It is the sheer pointlessness of counting blades of grass that makes achievement in that domain seem worthless. If we modify the case so that counting blades of grass has substantial instrumental value, then the idea that achievement in that domain is not valuable as such is much less powerful. Since most actual games provide all sorts of instrumental values for those who play them (physical fitness, mental acuity, self-esteem, a sense of fairness and reciprocity, etc.), these values could in turn provide the needed "framing" value to explain the value of achievement in those games. These values can, moreover, be present even when those playing a game are not thereby playing (full stop). The jaded footballer who plays just for a salary can still improve his physical fitness by playing, and can also produce beautiful plays within the game, for that matter, thus instantiating other instrumental and noninstrumental values.

Where does this leave us with regard to the contrasting orders of explanation found in Hurka's and Tasioulas's accounts? Recall that Hurka took the value of achievement as basic and explained the value of play in a game in terms of that value, whereas Tasioulas explained the value of achievement in a game in terms of the value of play (full stop) as a more basic "framing" value. I agree with Tasioulas at least this far: play (full stop) does sometimes provide the framing value for the value of achievement in a game. Sometimes, but not always. As I argued

26 Hurka, "Games and the Good," 217, emphasis added.

27 Tasioulas, "Games and the Good," 243.

above, one can play a game without playing (full stop), and such forms of game play plausibly can provide opportunities for valuable achievements. In these cases, play does not ground the value of achievement in a game, but (and here too I agree with Tasioulas and against Hurka) that value stands in need of *some* framing value. In my view, this framing value could take many forms depending on the game: it might be the beauty of the game, its symbolic value, or any of a wide range of instrumental values.

Furthermore, it can work the other way around: the value of play (full stop) can, in at least some cases, be partly explained by the value of achievement. Take a case in which the value of achievement is grounded, in part, in something other than play (full stop). Suppose someone wins a hard-fought chess game against a worthy opponent. This constitutes an achievement, and let us suppose it is valuable *qua* achievement, in part, because the winner found an elegant and beautiful combination. The beauty of this combination provides at least one of the framing values that explains why the achievement has noninstrumental value. We can allow that there will be other framing values, including the pleasure he takes in the game, for example. Crucially, once we allow that we have an achievement in virtue of the winner having done something difficult that is independently valuable in some way (beautiful and enjoyable), we plausibly have something that is noninstrumentally valuable *qua* achievement. In that case, if we agree with Hurka that it is noninstrumentally good to love something that is good for its good-making properties, then insofar as playing (full stop) in the game is partly constituted by loving the game for its difficulty and beauty, then playing (full stop) in the game will also be noninstrumentally valuable. In this sort of case, play (full stop) is plausibly noninstrumentally valuable in two ways. First, simply in virtue of being play, it is noninstrumentally valuable in virtue of partly constituting the person's welfare—or so many prominent theories of welfare contend (see references above). Second, insofar as play constitutively involves enjoyment, and in this case it is enjoyment taken in something that is itself good for its good-making properties, play is also noninstrumentally good in the same way that benevolence is noninstrumentally good—as an instance of loving the good for its good-making properties.

On my account, then, we therefore should take a "variable priority" view of the explanatory axiological relationships between play (full stop) and achievement in a game. Sometimes, the value of play provides a framing value that partly explains the value of achievement in a game (or at least explains why it is *so* valuable—see below). Sometimes, the value of achievement is instead partly explained by other values and the value of achievement in turn partly explains the value of play *qua* loving the good. Achievement, though, is itself what is good

about excellence in a game, as opposed to playing a game at all, and is not the sort of value that would typically be cited by someone passionate about a game as their reason for playing the game. Taking on an engaging challenge is, however, closely related to achievement as a value, since someone who takes on an engaging challenge is thereby trying to do something that, if they succeed, will constitute an achievement. Moreover, the value of taking on an engaging challenge is the sort of value that could plausibly figure among the reasons a player might have for playing a game. The challenge must be an engaging one for this to provide the agent's reason for playing the game because difficulty itself requires some sort of "framing value" to provide a noninstrumental value and hence a reason to play it.

My argument in this section has relied heavily on the idea that achievements require some framing value or other to be good for their own sake. However, more needs to be said about this admittedly controversial thesis. In the following section I provide the thesis with some additional defense and then explain how a modified version of the variable priority view could survive conceding this point.

III

In the previous section I relied on the idea that achievements require some framing value to be good for their own sake, and Tasioulas's example of counting blades of grass lends some credence to this view. However, perhaps I have been too swift in my rejection of the Hurka/Bradford view that no such framing values are essential. One might allow that achievements like those of the grass-blade counter have some value while admitting their value is minimal. Moreover, Guinness World Records is filled with achievements one might think have no framing value, yet many ordinary folks seem to admire people for these achievements.[28] To take one example, as I write this, the man who held the world record for the longest fingernails has just cut them off.[29] Plausibly the state of affairs of having fingernails over 900 cm long (roughly the length of a London bus) is as worthless as the state of affairs of having counted the blades of grass in one's front lawn. Yet, it seems, many people view such achievements as valuable in virtue of their manifestation of perseverance. We seem to admire the raw grit and stick-to-itiveness manifested in such achievements.

Gwen Bradford, in her landmark discussion of achievement, provides a deeper theoretical rationale for this view of the value of achievements with no framing value.[30] She begins with the perfectionist idea that the "excellent exercise" of

28 Thanks to an anonymous referee for pressing me on this point.

29 Stubbings, "Owner of World's Longest Nails Has Them Cut after Growing Them for 66 Years."

30 Bradford, *Achievement*.

certain distinctive human capacities are themselves valuable for their own sake. She then argues that in achievements we find two distinctively human capacities, namely rationality and the will, being excellently exercised. This is because, on her view, achievements involve the competent causation of some intended outcome in the face of difficulty, where competent causation requires the use of one's rationality and overcoming difficulty requires the exercise of one's will. The excellent exercise of each of these capacities is, given perfectionism, good for its own sake. Achievement, then, is the combination of the exercise of these two capacities. Bradford further argues that when we find unity in a diversity of valuable elements that we have a Moorean organic unity—a whole whose value is greater than the sum of the value of its parts. Achievements are, on her account, just such a case of unity in diversity: diversity because it involves two different capacities, but unity because they are coherently exercised in the same rational course of action. Achievements are therefore good because they constitute the unified exercise of two diverse capacities, and the exercise of each is itself independently valuable.[31]

Crucially, *nothing* in this explanation of the value of achievements requires that there be any "framing" value, and Bradford effectively endorses this view. However, Bradford's account of the *relative* value of achievements helps accommodate at least some of the intuitions behind those who, like myself and Tasioulas, think some framing value is necessary for an achievement to be good for its own sake. She argues for a version of a doctrine she takes from Hurka, the "*amare bonum* bonus," which asserts that having a positive orientation toward something that is valuable is itself valuable for its own sake in virtue of being oriented toward the good. As applied to achievements, this means that when some framing value *is* present it makes the achievement itself more valuable for its own sake. This is because in achievement one pursues some end and "pursuit is a pro-activity" and so the kind of orientation that is needed for the application of the *amare bonum* bonus.[32] On Bradford's view, while it is not true that a framing value is *necessary* for an achievement to have *any* value at all, the presence of such framing values can make such achievements much *more* valuable for their own sake. One might reasonably suppose that this is enough to accommodate what is insightful in the view that Tasioulas and I favor.

The dialectic at this point becomes subtle, since the difference between the two views might be one on which an achievement with no framing value, like counting blades of grass, has *no value* and one on which such achievements have

31 Bradford, *Achievement*, 126.

32 Bradford, *Achievement*, 165.

very little value.[33] A full discussion of the competing virtues of these views would require too much of a tangent for present purposes. Fortunately, those more sympathetic to Bradford's view can happily endorse something that is very close to the main thesis of this paper, the "variable priority view." I return to this issue below. In the meantime, I will very briefly try to summarize my reasons for preferring the view that some framing value is essential.

Start first with the more intuitive argument that framing values are not necessary for an achievement to be valuable for its own sake—the argument from cases. Consider again what we might call the "argument from Guinness World Records." To some extent, we may here simply have a clash of intuitions. However, it is not clear how wide the range of cases is in which this is a plausible diagnosis, given the wide variety of framing values available. Many of the achievements one finds in Guinness World Records do plausibly have suitable framing values. For example, many of these achievements involve athleticism, and so are typically at least instrumentally valuable. Being the "world's oldest bodybuilder" presumably helps prevent the loss of muscle mass that naturally accompanies aging, for example. Athletic achievements, and many of the other achievements one finds in Guinness World Records, are often enjoyable—think of the "runner's high" or the pleasure a bodybuilder takes in a "good pump," not to mention the exhilaration of some of the more adrenaline-inducing achievements. Other world records involve aesthetic value.

What about those achievements that do not involve any such framing value? Perhaps the world's longest fingernails provide a useful test case, particularly given the costs borne by the person who holds the record, who apparently can no longer open his left hand from a closed position and is by his own account, "in pain. With every heart beat all five fingers, my wrist, elbow and shoulder are hurting a lot and at the tip of the nail there is a burning sensation always."[34] Surely if we consider this achievement to be valuable, as its inclusion in Guinness World Records arguably suggests, then achievements with no framing value cannot only be valuable, they can be quite valuable—enough to warrant significant sacrifice. I must admit that, in this case, and in other cases with a similar structure, I do not share the intuition that the achievement in question is valuable.

However, I agree that there plausibly is something valuable "in the vicinity" of the achievement. After all, it does take enormous, if misguided, perseverance

33 Actually, it is unclear whether Bradford herself can insist that such achievements have very little value, given her characterization of the way in which more difficulty and more rationality as such enhance the value of any given achievement. Still, a view very much like Bradford's could take the line mentioned in the text.

34 Stubbings, "Owner of World's Longest Nails Has Them Cut after Growing Them for 66 Years."

to achieve something like this, and I agree that perseverance is a virtue—even when that perseverance is misdirected. Crucially, though, what follows from this is that the agent possesses something valuable—namely the virtue of perseverance. However, it is the virtue *itself*, and not its manifestation, that I consider valuable in itself. It is the agent's character that is valuable in itself, and that would have been valuable even if he had not had the opportunity to manifest his virtue. It simply does not follow from the fact that an activity manifests a virtue that the activity is itself valuable for its own sake—particularly once we reject the unity of the virtues and allow that a given virtue's manifestation in a particular context might be misdirected in this way.

In some passages, Bradford moves seamlessly from "displays a virtue" to "is valuable," but this inference requires argument. This passage is a good example: "the most plausible account of why climbing a mountain has a value greater than zero is, perhaps, because it is a great display of virtue."[35] Of course, there is room for reasonable disagreement over whether the manifestation of a virtue, in addition to the virtue itself, is valuable as such; nothing is obvious here. My point is simply that my slightly more austere view of the value of achievement can *agree* that achievements are a *sign* or *indicator* of something valuable (a virtue) even when there is no framing value in play so that the activity itself is not valuable. The conflation of the value of a virtue with the value of its manifestation arguably debunks the intuitions that might seem to favor the opposing view; it at least shows that more argument is needed.

Obviously much more could be said about the intuitive case for Bradford's view, but I can only devote so much space to this issue. What, though, about the more theoretical argument—her argument from perfectionism, as we might call it? In my view there is a step in Bradford's argument that requires further support but that seems to be taken as obvious. I have in mind the move from "achievement as such involves an exercise of the will" to "achievement as such involves an *excellent* exercise of the will." It is only the latter that entails that achievement is valuable in light of the more general perfectionist framework as Bradford articulates it, but the former is all that is obvious from the proffered analysis of achievement. Here is a representative passage:

> What is valuable is the *excellent exercise* of the perfectionist capacities.... Engaging in difficult activity requires the *exercise* of the will, which, as we have seen, is among the perfectionist capacities. It follows that difficult activity ... is intrinsically valuable.[36]

35 Bradford, *Achievement*, 87.

36 Bradford, *Achievement*, 121.

As stated, the argument is a *non sequitur*. Charitably, we can assume that the suppressed premise is that, when the activity is difficult, the exercise of the will is thereby excellent in the needed sense. This is hardly obvious, though. Critical here is just what makes a deployment of one's will count as "excellent" in the relevant sense. My own view is that it is only when the will is directed at some end or activity that is itself valuable in some way that the deployment of the will should count as excellent in the sense that would make the activity valuable *qua* perfectionism. A useful comparison here might be with Kant's conception of the value of the good will, though of course one need not endorse all of Kant's theoretical machinery to think that a use of one's willpower on something that is itself worthless or even evil should not count as an "excellent" deployment of the will.

These sparse arguments hardly settle the dispute between myself and Tasioulas on the one hand, and Hurka and Bradford on the other. However, even if Hurka and Bradford are right and Tasioulas is wrong, a modified version of the variable priority thesis is defensible. Suppose for the sake of argument that a view along the lines of Hurka's and Bradford's is correct. Even if achievements do not require a framing value to be valuable *at all*, both Hurka and Bradford allow that achievements can be much *better*—and better for their own sake—in virtue of the agent being motivated by some independent value of the activity. This is the *amare bonum* bonus principle. Although these are not framing values in the sense I have so far invoked, they play a similar theoretical role. Rather than explaining why a given activity is valuable at all, they explain why it is *so* valuable. Here, too, I would defend a sort of variable priority thesis of the relationship between play (full stop) and achievement. In some cases, the value of play explains why a given achievement is as valuable as it is—the play element explains why the activity is independently worthwhile and so explains why the *amare bonum* bonus principle applies. In other cases, though, the value of achievement is more basic, and the value of loving the activity (playing in a game, in Hurka's sense) is explained by the independent value of achievement. So even if my preferred view of the value of achievement, in general, as requiring some framing value is rejected in favor of the Hurka/Bradford view, a sort of variable priority thesis is still vindicated, albeit a weaker one.

IV

Suppose that the view of the noninstrumental value of playing games I have been sketching in the preceding sections is at least broadly on the right track. One might at this point reasonably wonder what, if anything, is especially *distinctive* about the value of playing games. After all, it is not as if any of the values

invoked in the preceding discussion cannot be found in other contexts. Playing a game well can be a vehicle for achievement, and for taking on an engaging challenge, but so too can scientific research, being a good parent, writing a novel, and a host of other kinds of activities. Playing a game can be a source of play (full stop), but one can play (full stop) without playing a game. Playing a game can be a source of beauty and fun, but these values can also quite obviously be found elsewhere. Perhaps we should conclude that, although playing games is an important source of value, it does not provide a distinctive kind of value that cannot be found elsewhere.

This is right as far as it goes, but we must be careful not to overlook other ways in which games might be distinctive sources of value. One way is to provide a value that cannot be found, or cannot easily be found, elsewhere, but that is not the only way. Games might instead be an especially *resilient* source of a given value, and this may itself be an important point. Indeed, I take this to be the main point of Bernard Suits's classic discussion of the role of games in Utopia. The groundwork for this point was laid in book 1 of *The Grasshopper,* where Suits (in the guise of the Grasshopper) argues that prudence is self-defeating:

> Prudential actions (e.g., those actions we ordinarily call work) are self-defeating in principle. For prudence may be defined as the disposition 1/ to sacrifice something good (e.g., leisure) if and only if such sacrifice is necessary for obtaining something better (e.g., survival), and 2/ to reduce the number of good things requiring sacrifice—ideally, at least—to zero. The ideal of prudence, therefore, like the ideal of preventative medicine, is its own extinction.[37]

Many of the activities we find worthwhile in daily life are done only out of necessity—for the sake of some greater good. Insofar as we could get those greater goods in some other way, these activities would be pointless. Suits's discussion of Utopia at the end of *The Grasshopper* puts this point into sharp relief by inviting the reader to imagine a world with no scarcity of any kind. Not only is there no scarcity of material resources, there is no scarcity of information or knowledge. Suits argues that many of the activities we find worthwhile in the actual world would seem pointless in Utopia. The production of material goods and scientific investigation, for example, would be pointless since by hypothesis all our material needs are already provided for and all knowledge has already obtained and can be had instantaneously from computers that store it. Suits argues that the playing of games would remain as the only intrinsically valuable activity in Utopia, since its value to us depends in no way on any sort of scarcity. Even in Utopia we

37 Suits, *The Grasshopper*, 8.

could voluntarily impose constraints upon ourselves to overcome them just for the sake of overcoming them. The instrumental values of games might no longer be salient, but the noninstrumental value of achievement and of taking on an engaging challenge would remain intact. Hence the distinctive value of games rests not in their providing a value that cannot in principle be found elsewhere, but in their providing the relevant values in an especially *resilient* manner. Indeed, Suits argues that we could reintroduce many of the activities that here and now are primarily instrumental activities *as games*.

This resilience reflects something almost magical about games. With games, we can take some end that otherwise has no intrinsic value—a checkmate position in chess, getting a golf ball into a hole—and transform it into something valuable by incorporating it in the right way in a well-designed game. This ability may tell us something important about the kind of agents we are. We find it easy to enjoy engaging with challenges. This enjoyment can be undermined or tempered if the stakes are too great, of course. Overcoming a challenge when your life is at stake will be stressful rather than rewarding. However, in the context of a game, we are, in the ideal case, anyway, able to lose ourselves in the game and enjoy the challenge it presents. Indeed, we are sometimes even able to enter into "flow states":

> Human development scholar Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi … has argued that people at play frequently attain a level of experience he calls "flow," when they become so deeply involved in what they are doing that they lose track of such typical concerns as time of day, external happenings, personal anxieties, and even the sense that they are separate from the activities in which they are acting … a satisfying experience that results when the player's skills and commitments mesh almost perfectly with the situations in which they find themselves. Players … are enticed—and entranced—by appropriate levels of challenge.[38]

On some accounts, this ability to become absorbed in the challenges is distinctive of our species, and can be given an evolutionary explanation. As we moved from being hunter-gatherers, we had a lot of time on our hands. At the same time, our evolution as hunter-gatherers had primed us for solving puzzles. Kretchmar suggests this intriguing possibility:

> Our ancestors during that era had unprecedented amounts of time on their hands.… Increased efficiency produced needs that could not be fully mental by natural forms of play.… Because play is so powerful and

38 Henricks, "The Nature of Play," 162.

> central to good living, we needed to fortify play at some point in our evolutionary history. We did so, in part, by gaming up life in intellectually impressive and unmistakably provocative ways. Games, in this sense, stand as an enduring tribute to the significance of play.[39]

It is not hard to see echoes of Suits's hypothesis about the resilience of games as a source of value in Kretchmar's account of the origin of games as a cure for boredom in the face of reductions in material scarcity, a point not lost on Kretchmar himself. Other theorists, drawing on the work of Nietzsche, have gone so far as to suggest that agency itself is partly constituted by a drive not simply to achieve ends, but to achieve ends in the face of obstacles of some kind. This is how Paul Katsafanas, for example, understands Nietzsche's view of the "will to power." Katsafanas even explicitly notes the connection to Suits's account of the value of games.[40]

Whatever the explanation of our ability to relish delicious challenges turns out to be, there can be no doubt that it is an important part of our nature, and that adds to the plausibility of Suits's account of the role of games in Utopia and the associated resilience of games as sources of values. There is something fundamentally hopeful about this account of the value of playing games. Here I find it useful to juxtapose Suits's account with one of the classic responses in philosophical theology to the problem of evil. It is sometimes argued that without the adversity we face as human beings that life would inevitably seem boring or pointless. The natural evils with which we must wrestle on this account provide a cure for boredom and provide our lives with rich meaning. Suits's account of the resilience of the value of games in a world with none of the adversity we face in the actual world provides a powerful counterpoise to this line of argument. There is something depressing and pathetic about a species of creatures so dependent on evils to overcome that they could not have a happy or worthwhile life in a world entirely devoid of such adversity. The point is reminiscent of a chilling line from the film *The Matrix*, in which one of the "agents" explained why the first version of the Matrix failed:

> Did you know that the first Matrix was designed to be a perfect human world where none suffered—where everyone would be happy? It was a disaster. No one would accept the program. Entire crops were lost. Some believed that we lacked the programming language to describe your per-

39 Kretchmar, "The Normative Heights and Depths of Play," 9.

40 Katsafanas, *Agency and the Foundations of Ethics*, 175n50.

> fect world. But I believe that as a species, human beings define their reality through misery and suffering.[41]

Suits's account provides a much more positive and hopeful vision of us—one of agents who can create valuable activities to make our lives worthwhile without any need for the horrors of disease and natural disaster. Although the account of playing games and its value developed here differs from Suits's account as well as Hurka's and Tasioulas's accounts, it still coheres well with this profound point in Suits about the resilience of the value of playing games and what it tells us about humanity.

V

In this paper, I have argued that Suits, Hurka, and Tasioulas are right that playing games can have noninstrumental value, and that achievement, taking on an engaging challenge, and play (full stop) all have a role to play in explaining this value. I have further argued that we need to more carefully distinguish the value of achievement from the value of taking on an engaging challenge, as these provide different but related values, each of which appropriately plays a role in different normative contexts. I have argued that both Hurka's view and Tasioulas's view of the explanatory relations between the value of achievement and the value of play (full stop) are oversimple. Neither play nor achievement is without qualification the more fundamental value. Rather, we should endorse what I have called a "variable priority" view of the relation between these values. This more complex view may still leave it a mystery how, if at all, games are an especially distinctive source of value. I have argued that they are distinctive, but not in providing a kind of value not available (or not easily available) in any other context, but instead because they are an especially *resilient* form of value. I concluded by remarking on how to this extent I agree with Suits, and how this provides a more hopeful vision of humanity than one that did not recognize this resilience.[42]

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41 Wachowski and Wachowski, *The Matrix*.

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