

Thomas Hurka, ed. *Games, Sports, and Play: Philosophical Essays*. Oxford University Press 2019. 256 pp. \$65.00 USD (Hardcover ISBN 9780198798354).

Bernard Suits was a philosophy professor at the University of Waterloo from 1966 until his retirement in 1994. His long-term fascination with the philosophy of games yielded a curious little book entitled *The Grasshopper: Games, Life and Utopia*. First published in 1978, and currently available in its third edition from Broadview Press, *The Grasshopper* is written in the form of a Socratic dialogue with a grasshopper character borrowed from Aesop in the role of Socrates. Displaying considerable wit and flair, and decorated with original illustrations by the celebrated Frank Newfeld, *The Grasshopper* remains an armchair confection for the thoughtful reader. That it also continues to be read by professional philosophers is due in no small part to the efforts of Thomas Hurka, Jackman Distinguished Chair in Philosophical Studies at the University of Toronto, who put together *Games, Sports, and Play*, a collection of essays that critically revisit Suits' concept of games and the utopian implications that follow from it. A particularly welcome inclusion is an abridged version of the sequel to *The Grasshopper* that had remained unpublished at the time Suits died in 2007.

Some of the essays in this collection are derived from a conference held at the University of Toronto's Jackman Humanities Institute in March of 2015. These include contributions from Peter King, C. Thi Nguyen, Michael Ridge, Mitchell Berman, David Papineau, and Hurka himself. The conference papers aim a sharply focused and critical lens on the definition of games that Suits developed in *The Grasshopper*. Other essays by Leslie Francis, Lauren Bialystok, Mark Kingwell, and Shelly Kagan are included, that while referencing Suits' work, broaden the discussion beyond the definition of games to questions of value. Due to space considerations, I shall leave aside the post-conference contributions here except to suggest that they add the kind of breadth to this volume that might make it suitable for use as a textbook for a course on the philosophy of games and sports. There is also much in the collection of value to those interested in the arts of definition and conceptual analysis rather than games per se.

Since the mid-twentieth century, philosophers have generally acceded, even if reluctantly, to Wittgenstein's claim that the word 'game' is a placeholder for a collection of overlapping properties or 'family resemblances' rather than a shared essence. In *The Grasshopper*, Suits argues, contra Wittgenstein, that there are actually three properties that games have in common: 1) a 'preludory goal' that is the game's end (e.g., golf is about getting a ball into a succession of eighteen holes); 2) a set of 'lusory means,' which limits the ways in which the preludory goal can be attained in favor of less efficient means (i.e., the golfer is limited to moving the ball with a club rather than simply walking up to each hole and dropping the ball into it); and 3) the player must approach the tasks set by the lusory means with the appropriate 'lusory attitude,' which is a matter of the player embracing the artificial inefficiencies inherent in the game because they make it worth playing. This third element is important because it allows that one can play a game for reasons having nothing to do with the satisfaction that comes with meeting challenges. The definition not only succinctly captures what games have in common, but gives us an account of why games matter. We play games for the sake of triumphing over obstacles that would not exist but for the rules that make them possible in the first place. Thus, the jaded professional for whom the game has become a means to an end is no longer 'playing the game' in the Suitsian sense.

Suits' definition provides an effective way of distinguishing between games and activities that only appear game-like because they involve rules and allow for winners and losers. While one might, for example, refer to the stock market as a 'game' or diplomacy as 'the great game,' the rules,

formal and informal, that govern such activities are at least intended to facilitate the attainment of their ends. The goods that come from playing games, on the other hand, are good in themselves; they have to be because, for any real game, there will be better ways of achieving them. This is why, as Suits argues, a utopian world, conceived as a place where all non-lusory goals are met effortlessly, is a world in which games would continue to be played for the satisfaction of meeting the unnecessary challenges that they make possible.

While Hurka clearly holds Suits' definition of games in high regard, he argues that Suits' account of the lusory attitude needs a distinction between two senses of the word 'game': the personal, which requires that the player possess the kind of lusory attitude that Suits identifies; and the societal, which allows that the jaded professional athlete, for whom it has all become a matter of money, is, nevertheless, still 'playing a game.'

Peter King argues that Suits' definition errs in failing to give competition sufficient weight as a defining aspect of games. After all, what other than winning and losing might distinguish games from the myriad satisfying but pointless activities that serve as pastimes? By allowing that games need not be competitive, Suits leaves himself no alternative but to classify mountain climbing, for example, as a game, since, in most cases, there will be more efficient ways of reaching the summit of a mountain than by scaling it. Reserving the term 'game' for activities that involve competition, as King suggests, enables us to avoid a clash between Suits' definition of games and the intuition, rooted in conventional language use, that mountain climbing is not a game. However, it makes for difficulties in accommodating role-playing games: a category of games in which competition is of secondary interest or missing altogether. Suits recognizes a children's game such as 'Cops and Robbers' as a proper game, but the improvisational nature of such games tends to rule out pre-lusory goals. He solves this difficulty by classifying them as 'open games' for which the pre-lusory goal is none other than that of keeping the game going as long as possible. It is this ad hoc notion of the open game that will strike many readers as one of the least satisfactory aspects of Suits' analysis. King's appeal to competition provides a solution to the difficulty, albeit one that sets up a certain incongruity with the vernacular of children's games.

C. Thi Nguyen agrees with Suits that role-playing games are indeed games, but only based on a distinction between 'striving games' that involve winners and losers, and role-playing games that are all about the opportunity to indulge in make-believe. Some games, modern computer games being particularly instructive in this respect, allow the player to choose or alternate between what are, for the player, two distinct modes of play.

Michael Ridge suggests an amendment to Suits' definition of games that would allow for more precision in the case of multi-player games. Playing games with others, he suggests, necessarily involves a commitment on the part of the players to show up and pursue its pre-lusory goals in conformity with the rules. However, the playing of games invites a distinction between what Ridge identifies as the normative and rule-following senses in which one might playing a game. Thus, a backup quarterback who spends the game on the bench is 'playing the game' in the normative-role sense even though his bench-sitting does not involve any actual rule-following.

Working through this collection of essays, the reader may find it difficult to resist the impression that a version of Suits' definition of games, once complexified in the ways his critics recommend, will have lost a good deal of the elegance that made it so appealing in the first place. Moreover, even with the suggested amendments in place, the resulting definition may continue to be too inclusive, too exclusive, or both. Consider, for example, the game of 'tag,'—if tag is a game, it appears to be one without winning conditions. As with many children's games, it has no natural end; typically, the game is over when the participants either grow tired of playing it or adult authority

preempts it. There does not appear to be any obvious candidate for pre-lusory goal in tag, although it may consist in avoiding being made 'It.' The means by which players avoid getting tagged, running in the direction opposite the person who is it or changing direction as quickly as one can, are generally the most efficient available. Declaring tag a non-game and writing off any similarities it might have to real games as incidental remains an option. The other is recognizing that Wittgenstein had it right all along.

Richard Maundrell, Lakehead University