

# Suits' Utopia and Human Sports

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## 1. Introduction, Or Suits' Utopia and the Question of Sport

Recently, there has been a revival of interest in Bernard Suits' idea of Utopia as a state of game and sport playing. In Suits' Utopia, all material and other human needs are met. What makes life liveable for the denizens of Utopia is that they can fill their days by playing games. "Utopia is intelligible, and (...) game playing is what makes Utopia intelligible" (Suits 1978: 154).

[W]e appear to be left with game playing as the only remaining candidate for Utopian occupation, and therefore the only possible remaining constitute of the ideal of existence (...) Game playing makes it possible to retain enough effort in Utopia to make life worth living (Suits 1978: 154, see also 26).

For Suits, game playing is the ideal of human existence. In this essay, I will focus on sports. Sports, according to Suits, are also games (Suits 1973, 1978). This sweeping claim is modified in later work, where Suits admits that some sports are not games (Suits 1988, 1989). This modification need not worry us here, as it is immaterial to my line of inquiry. My concern is with Suits' Utopia and the phenomenon of sport.

Suits' Utopia has been presented as an ideal for the game and sport playing creature, something which one should strive for, or, at least, aspire towards (Kretchmar 2006; Holowchak 2007; Lopez Frias 2016, 2017; Vossen 2016, 2017). Other philosophers, however, have rejected Suits' Utopia as unintelligible and dismissed it on conceptual grounds (Thompson 2004; Bäck 2008; Yorke 2017). Suits himself clearly saw his argument regarding Utopia as establishing that game and sport playing would be inevitable for the Utopians. Call this *the strong view of games and sports in Utopia*. I am not going to spend much time considering the strong view. Suits underestimated the possibilities of other types of pastimes in his carefree Utopia (Hurka 2005; Hurka 2006). There might be other candidates for Utopian entertainments besides playing games and sports. However, rejecting the strong view does not mean that we must conclude that Suits' Utopia is unintelligible. Rather, there is the

option of considering game and sport playing in Utopia as possible, i.e. the Utopians might play games and sports. Call this *the weak view of games and sports in Utopia*. I see no available *a priori* arguments against the conceptual possibility of a state where all human needs are fulfilled and interpersonal problems solved, and where they still play sports. Call such possible sports *Utopian sports*. However, granting the possibility of Utopian sports does not mean that the denizens of Utopia play sports. The question of whether they do is underdetermined by the very fact that all their needs are fulfilled in Utopia, so they would have no need to play sports or no need not to play sports. The underdetermination of Suits' Utopia with regard to sports throws serious doubt on the relevance of the thought experiment for understanding and thinking about sports, as we know them. That is, sports that originate in and still thrive in our non-Utopian state of affairs. Call such sports *human sports*. In order to assess the relevance of Suits' Utopia for our current sport reality, one needs to think through the similarities and dissimilarities between human and Utopian sports, and, importantly, what a Utopian sport might look like given the psychological profile of Utopians as presented.

I will argue that Suits' Utopia is irrelevant for thinking about and understanding human sports. In order to argue that, we first need a firm and realistic grasp on human sports and what if anything, would constitute the most desired human sport experience. What would be a sport Utopia for creatures, who have not had all their needs fulfilled nor interpersonal problems solved? Without that, given the weak view of games and sports in Utopia, we are hardly in a position to evaluate the relevance of Utopian sports and the Utopian sport experience for sport activities in the non-Utopian state of affairs we call our world. I follow Joseph Kupfer in thinking of sports as having internal and external functions or purposes (Kupfer 1983: 120–123). Human and potential Utopian sports will share the same internal purpose, which is to win the sport competition, whereas they will have widely differing external functions or purposes since they are part of radically different circumstances. Looking first at human sports, we find that when playing a sport, such as handball, the various competitors aim to win the competition by outscoring the opponent. The internal purpose of handball is to win the game. The external purpose or function of sport or sports is a question of why sport or a particular sport was invented and maintained in a particular period of time. The external purpose or function of, say, handball and other human sports, I suggest is to dominate, and compete with each other, and to do so in the relatively safe sport context. We follow Suits' thinking about sports as being unnecessary and competitive enterprises. This means that even our leisure time is filled with activities where we aim at getting the better of other humans. Human competitors in human sports aim at winning against other competitors,

and we derive pleasure from the competitive element of sport, and the way in which it provides us with a ranking of competitors where some are better than others. Handball teams aim to win. Winning handball matches fulfils an external need to compete and dominate. As far as sport is concerned, this is what makes us happy or happiest. Human sports, and the reasons why we play them, are grounded in our current human psychology.

Taking our starting point in how we currently engage in our sports, then *our Utopia* with regard to sport is one where each sport competitor wins each competition that he or she participates in by beating the other competitors. One can imagine a sport experience machine that provides each individual, who finds pleasure in beating other competitors in the sort of unnecessary activities or practices that sports are, with the experience of always winning whichever sport competition he or she took part in. The sport experience machine will provide for whosoever craves the pleasure of experiencing beating other competitors. Of course, in the sport experience machine, individuals will not actually win any sport competitions, as the mental states induced by the sport experience machine is not connected to real competitions with other actual human competitors. For this reason, most will resist signing up for the sport experience machine. Humans tend to want reality. We do not only want to experience how it feels beating others in sport competitions, we want to beat others in sport competitions. The sport experience machine provides us with human sport experiences that meet Utopian conditions for us in our non-Utopian state of affairs. Yet, we want more, but not everyone can win and beat others every time, so Utopia for human sports cannot be delivered.

If Utopia for human sports and the human sport experience is impossible, then Suits' Utopia will differ on various parameters from the non-Utopian world we currently inhabit. The needs, to which human sports answer, i.e. the external functions or purposes of human sports, will not be the same for the Utopians and their Utopian sports. The human sport experience as we know it, is tied up to our psychological make-up, the Utopian sport experience would be tied up to a psychologically very different kind of breed of humans. The Utopians, who are not in the grip of the same kinds of drives that is all-important to us for our survival in our non-Utopian state of affairs, can hardly be expected to enjoy the kind of sports and sport experiences we have engineered for ourselves. None of our human aspirations and frustrations, hopes and fears, triumphs and tragedies, with flaws of character, moral dilemmas, joy and sorrow that currently dictate the manner in which we engage in and enjoy playing and watching sport, would be relevant in Utopia. This means that the Utopians would have to handle *the question of sport* in a very different manner than we do.

Whereas human sports demand winners and losers in order for them to be psychologically satisfying to us, this being a consequence of human sports' external functions or purposes being competition and domination, the Utopians, given how they differ psychologically from us, would get something different from sport were they to engage in something like that. How people engage in possible sports in Suits' Utopia will be radically different from the way we do. I try to bring out that point by considering Homer's story of Odysseus and the Phaiacian contests and I argue that in this case we are dealing with a clash of two sporting cultures. One interpretation of Homer's story is that the external function or purpose of sport for Odysseus is different from that of the Phaiacians, and because of that, the Phaiacians sporting culture is unsatisfying for someone like Odysseus. As would Suits' Utopia be unsatisfying for us. To further emphasize the difference in approach towards the question of sport we would find between the Utopians and us, I argue that whereas our notion or term of excellence in sport is a relative notion or term, the Utopians' notion or term would not be. The degree to which we judge someone as being excellent in a sport depends on him or her being better than others. This is not surprising, if the external functions or purposes of sport are competition and domination. The Utopians' notion or term of excellence in sport, on the other hand, will not be relative. The Utopians would not need to see differentiation between sport performers, i.e. winners and losers, for them to deem something as excellence in sport and, unlike us, Utopians could find interest in a sport that delivered only winners. In ending, I back up the latter claim by devising a possible Utopian sport I call eights, which could function as a sport for humans in the Utopian condition. Eights is a possible Utopian sport, but also irrelevant for understanding and thinking about human sports and the human sport experience, since eights, as envisaged, would belong to a sporting culture that is too far remote from us and our psychological profile to shed any light on our own sporting culture. Eights *qua* sport would not engage us. In conclusion, I suggest that this part of Suits' philosophy of sport can be left behind.

## **2. Human Sports, Or How We Love to Needlessly Defeat Each Other**

According to Suits, "playing a game is the voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles" (Suits 1978: 55). If you add that to the requirement that the activity or practice is essentially a rule-based physical skills activity or practice, then you have the most important elements of Suits' understanding of what it is for an activity or practice to be a sport (Suits 1973: 39–45). William Morgan puts the basic Suitsian point in terms of sports following a

“gratuitous logic” (Morgan 1994: 211). Likewise, Mike McNamee, in a Suitsian vein, argues that sports are “characterised by a gratuitous logic involving, centrally, physical skills” (McNamee 2008: 19). Furthermore, sports follow a gratuitous logic that yields winners and losers. That is, sports are competitions, and with unnecessary competitions like sports come a system of ranking competitors, according to a conventionally decided procedure. In this article we will accept Suits’ understanding of sport. Our focus is not on Suits’ analysis of games and sports, but sport and the Utopian state of affairs.

A reason why the dwellers of Suits’ Utopia will be playing sports is that seemingly, sports are not about anything. Unlike various art forms, sport has no subject matter outside itself.<sup>1</sup> Whereas many works of art deal with the human condition and its various shortcomings, sports do not. In Suits’ Utopia, where all human needs are or can be met, there would be no need to make or consume such art products. Sports, however, not being about anything, will not in the same way be made superfluous in the Utopian state of carefreeness. On the difference between theatre and the various sports, Joseph Kupfer observes.

Where theatre presents real ends and activities in a pretend setting, the significance of even the ends and activities are pretended in sport (Kupfer 1983: 114).

A reason for making art is that it is a way to deal with the world and possibly change that world. Sports do not in the same way engage with the world outside the sport context. Suits holds a related view on how art and sports differ. The subject matter of art is, according to Suits, as follows.

[T]he actions and passions of men: with human aspirations and frustrations, hopes and fears, triumphs and tragedies, with flaws of character, moral dilemmas, joy and sorrow (Suits 1978: 152).

In brief, according to Suits, art addresses the human condition, whereas sports have no subject matter outside the activity itself. On the latter point, David Best claims that “the very notion of a *subject* of sport makes no sense” (Best 1978: 122). When, say, Norwegian handball player Nora Mørk after an interception in a first wave attack rushes towards the opposition’s D-zone, she is not aiming at addressing or expressing human aspirations and frustrations, hopes and fears, triumphs and tragedies, with flaws of character, moral dilemmas, joy and

sorrow. Mørk aims at scoring a goal with the further intention of winning the match she is part of. From the inside of the game, that is what all players aspire to. That is the internal purpose of sports.

In relation to what he calls competitive sports, and I have elsewhere dubbed as constructive-destructive sports, Kupfer draws a distinction between internal and external purposes or functions of sport, as follows (on constructive-destructive sports, see Borge 2010a, 2010b, 2015a, 2015b).

It is just because competitive sports have internal purposes whose final result is scoring or the thwarting of a score that we come to think of them as purposeful – aimed at winning by outscoring the opponent(s) (...) Since neither scoring nor winning is the reason or basis for competitive sport, it cannot be its purpose. Scoring/winning is not, therefore, an end which could be accomplished by some other means; consequently, it is not distinguishable from or “external” to the game itself (Kupfer 1983: 119, 120).

We need not go into Kupfer’s sport taxonomy, since the feature of sport being aimed at winning sport competitions is shared by all sports.

The argument is simple. Sports have internal purposes. That is what participants in sport events aim at. Fundamentally, sport participants aim at winning. According to the type of sport one is playing and the mechanics of that sport, one aims at fulfilling the sport-specific manners of doing well in that sport in order to beat all other competitors. In so-called competitive or constructive-destructive sports, that is done by scoring, while hindering the opponent from scoring, i.e. outscoring the opponent. Other types of sports offer other avenues that help in reaching the goal of winning the sport competitions. However, as the argument goes, when participating in sport your purpose within the confines of the sport event is to win, but the reason why humans invented sports could not be to win sport competitions, since that purpose was not available to us until the practice of sport was in place. The aim of a handball match for the participating teams is to win the match. That, however, cannot explain why humans instigated the practice of handball, as that internal purpose of winning handball matches was not available to us until the institution of handball was in place. Again, regarding the so-called competitive sports, Kupfer tells us that an “activity *exists* for the sake of its purpose” and since “we do not independently value scoring or winning and only subsequently

alight upon the playing of this game simply as a means to the score or the win” we must look elsewhere for the external purpose or function of sport (Kupfer 1983: 120).

Human sports are born out of the human condition. The human condition is to live in a non-Utopian state of affairs. Granted, in a handball match interplay between various players looking to score a goal or preventing the opposition from doing the same, they are not aiming at addressing or expressing themes regarding the human condition of the non-Utopian state of affairs. However, human sports are the product of and answer to the needs of creatures with aspirations and frustrations, hopes and fears, triumphs and tragedies, with flaws of character, moral dilemmas, joy and sorrow. When thinking about the external purpose or function of human sports, the non-Utopian state of affairs in which we live is surely the place to start looking. Sport competitions avail to humans a staged, but not scripted conflict, which yields social dramas in which the participants and spectators alike can live through various emotions and inclinations in the relatively safe compounds of the sport setting. The various type of dramas provided by the hosts of human sports, in many ways, touch upon the same subjects matters as art without having them as their subject matter or addressing them in an explicit manner. Still, the sport drama, as we know it, is a human drama, and as such it follows that in the non-Utopian condition of our lives, themes of that human condition will be part of any unfolding sport drama.

I have suggested elsewhere that competition and domination fit the bill of being the external purposes or functions of sport, i.e. human sports.

A much more plausible story is that sport came about as a venue for humans to compete with and dominate each other, and for others to watch them doing that. Competition and domination are features of the human condition that existed before and independently of sport, and as man became organised in larger social units we might envisage that the need of outlets for physical competition and domination emerged (...) [W]e see that competition and domination fit the bill of being primary purposes of sport (...) they can explain why winning over an opponent is essential within sports (Borge 2012: 405).

In the quote above, I might have stated my case somewhat too bluntly. Domination as an external purpose or function of sports sits well with constructive-destructive sports such as handball, Muay Thai boxing, ice hockey, and so on, but might seem somewhat strained when considering aesthetic sports such as ice dance, rhythmic sport gymnastics, and so on. Still, for

humans engaging in sports in a non-Utopian state of affairs, I expect that, perhaps, some sort of element of domination is also found among the latter sports. That is, any joy or pleasure of winning over others, I submit, can reasonably be subsumed under domination, no matter how non-aggressive the sport might otherwise be. The external purpose or function of domination in human sports comes in degrees. That said, I do not think there is a conceptual connection between competition and domination. In any event, sport having the function of being a venue for competition fits all sports, and sport as a venue for dominating other people fits great many human sports, perhaps all to some degree.

Humans invented sports as a venue for competing with and dominating each other. By obtaining that venue, human aspirations and frustrations, hopes and fears, triumphs and tragedies, with flaws of character, moral dilemmas, joy and sorrow, were channelled through the sport institutions and sport events these put on. Furthermore, with regard to spectator sports, great dramas were created for others to enjoy, and with it came the possibility of supporter cultures that pledge their allegiances to local, regional, national sportspersons or teams. This is the state of sport in the non-Utopian condition, these are the human sports.

### **3. Personal Utopia, Or Where the Human Sport Experience Meets Utopian Conditions**

The internal purpose of sport is to win sport competitions. Each competitor in a sport event primarily aims to win. Prima facie, in the case of humans, to win makes each competitor happy or, alternatively, at least more satisfied than losing sport competitions. After he scored against Napoli in the Champions League group stages in the 2017-2018 season, thereby not only helping Manchester City qualify for the knock-out stages of the tournament, but also becoming the club's all-time top scorer, Argentinian footballer Sergio Agüero expressed this sentiment, when he told the press afterwards that "I'm glad to have scored, but what makes you happiest as a football player is winning" (*All or Nothing: Manchester City*, Season 1, Episode 2, *Noisy Neighbours*). Given that sport participants have an urge to engage in sport, where they aim at defeating other competitors, then the human sport Utopia is one where every competitor wins every competition he or she chose to participate in. However, as pointed out by Anthony Skillen, human sports tend to supply at least as many losers as winners, and often more losers than winners (Skillen 1998). Obviously, there cannot be such a Utopia, where everybody wins every sport competition by defeating all other competitors. On the other hand, there can be a Utopia where every human who wants to experience the feeling of winning every competition by defeating all other competitors can do so.



Consider Robert Nozick's thought experiment of the experience machine.

Suppose there were an experience machine that would give you any experience you desired. Superduper neuropsychologists could stimulate your brain so that you would think and feel you were writing a great novel, or making a friend, or reading an interesting book. All the time you would be floating in a tank, with electrodes attached to your brain. Should you plug into this machine for life, preprogramming your life's experiences? If you are worried about missing out on desirable experiences, we can suppose that business enterprises have researched thoroughly the lives of many others. You can pick and choose from their large library or smorgasbord of such experiences, selecting your life's experiences for, say, the next two years. After two years have passed, you will have ten minutes or ten hours out of the tank, to select the experiences of your *next* two years. Of course, while in the tank you won't know that you're there; you'll think it's all actually happening. Others can also plug in to have the experiences they want, so there's no need to stay unplugged to serve them. (Ignore problems such as who will service the machines if everyone plugs in.) Would you plug in? (Nozick 1974: 42–43).

The lesson to be learnt from Nozick's experience machine is that we would balk at plugging ourselves into it, since our aspirations in life are not only to experience how it feels to achieve various things, but to actually achieve them. We not only want to experience how it feels to, say, make friends, we want to make friends. Surely, most of us would want life to be enjoyable, but there is also a *reality requirement* accompanying our life ambitions and projects.

Now, consider a sport version of Nozick's thought experiment. In *the sport experience machine*, every wannabe competitor can experience attaining the goal of sports: Winning sport competitions. Furthermore, under the assumption that the external purposes or functions of sport are competition and domination, the sport experience machine will deliver the best results for each individual, with regard to the needs fulfilled by these external purposes or functions of sport. Winning sport competitions by beating other competitors in whatever fashion each individual finds most satisfying. For each it would be a personal human sport Utopia for anyone who is sport-inclined. Notwithstanding that some of us probably would take up the offer of at least once or twice experiencing how it feels to win in our favourite sport, given that in the outside world we would not, even under the best of circumstances, be

in the race for any sporting success at a decent level, there most certainly is a reality requirement for our sport ambitions. Top athletes and others do not merely aim at experiencing what it feels like to come out on top in various sport competitions, they aim at actually coming out on top in whichever sport they participate in. The human sport Utopia can be delivered, but only at cost of violating the reality requirement with regard to our sport experiences, i.e. that we are experiencing something real.<sup>2</sup>

#### **4. Utopian Sports, Or Odysseus Travels to Utopia and Finds It Disappointing**

Playing sports comes with the risk of losing. This can be painful. The reward is, of course, the pleasures winning gives. There is joy in competing in human sports, I suggest, because competitions give rise to ranking, and rankings can endow a participant with the status of being *the best* or *better than someone else*. Here, we find the most basic pleasures and pay-off for sport participation under the non-Utopian human condition. To speak with the ancient Greeks, the pleasures of *agon* (competition) are at the heart of the human sport experience. This does not in any way exclude other pleasures that sport might bring or contain, like, for example, the pleasures of playing a good game, even if one should happen to lose on the day. *Areté* (excellence) might be its own reward and give pleasure independently of ranking of performance in a particular sport competition. However, one does well to consider how we, in fact, conceive of excellence in an activity or practice like sport. I suspect that, for us, we treat excellence in sport, not as *an absolute*, but *a relative* notion or term.<sup>3</sup> Consider sports where it is possible to have a perfect performance. Golf would be a case in question. In a golf tournament, it is possible, though not very likely, for a competitor to only hit hole-in-ones. That would be a perfect golf performance. It could not be bettered and would certainly be judged as displaying excellence in golf. However, should it become common place in golf for players to hit perfect rounds, then I suspect that not only would we lose interest in the game, but also withdraw our judgement of perfect golf performances as displaying excellence in golf. When everybody wins, then we tend to think of no one as excellent in what they are doing. A good or interesting sport, for us, it seems, demands losers. Only then, does winning stand out as something attractive to us. A good competition and excellence in sport performances, as we judge it, follow competitions that yield enough losers. *Agon* takes precedence over *areté*, when we are talking about human sports.<sup>4</sup>

The first thing to note before we embark on the topic of Utopian sports is that there seem to be plenty of activities for the Utopians to engage in apart from games and sports.

Thomas Hurka mentions that “art can express joy”, so all kinds of art expressing joy are options for Utopian pastime (Hurka 2005: 13, see also Hurka 2006: 220). Furthermore, if you, like Peter Kivy, think there can be absolute or pure instrumental music with no semantic content, which is not necessarily expressive of emotions, then there are plenty of areas in the Western classical music tradition for the Utopians to explore (Kivy 1990, among numerous work). Apart from art, our Utopians could also play; including engaging in activities that sometimes are put under the head of games, such as *ring-a-ring-a-roses*, *London bridge is falling down*, and other similar playful practices.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, there seem to be no reasons as to why the Utopians could not have various forms of exercise on their leisure menu, not because they need it, but because of the pleasures of body movement, body control and, perhaps, synchronization of bodies. Other activities, I am sure, might also be available for the Utopians. All in all, there will not necessarily be want of things to do in Utopia, even if one does not engage in games or sports.

Returning to *sport in Utopia*, Christopher Yorke argues that the question of sport in Utopia does not arise in a sensible manner as the “post-instrumental condition appears to be unintelligible for the essentially needful entities that human beings are” (Yorke 2017: 224). That seems too quick to me. Certainly, if Utopia was attempted to be realised overnight, that is, if all material needs suddenly could be fulfilled, then most likely a proper Utopian state of affairs would fail to manifest itself as the humans could not psychologically follow suit. However, one could imagine that the Gods at Mount Olympus one day took mercy on the human race and decided through careful evolutionary engineering over numerous generations to steer us ever so gently towards a Utopia they would bestow upon us when we were ready. I see no reason why humans could not in this thought experiment be cultivated towards the possibility of becoming full citizens of a Suitsian Utopia, while retaining their human nature (if there is such a thing). However, we need to concede that the external purpose or function of sports in Utopia will be different than that which seems reasonable to credit to sport in our non-Utopian state of affairs.

Human sports and Utopian sports will have the same type of internal purposes. Basically, the internal purpose of sport is to win, and more specifically, in accordance with which sport one is engaging in, fulfil the sport-specific manners conducive for winning whichever sport competition one finds oneself in. Our concept of sport has the idea of aiming at winning at its core, so if Utopian sports do not share that internal purpose, then by our lights they are not engaging in sport. When thinking about Suits’ Utopia, our concept of sport is the starting point. The external purposes or functions of Utopian and human sports – the

reason or reasons sport got invented and practiced – will differ. The external reasons for human sports being selected as something worthwhile are that they fulfil certain human needs. Utopian sports, on the other hand, will have to function in a very different manner, since the needs, which makes human do and watch sport in the non-Utopian condition, are, by hypothesis, fulfilled in Suits’ Utopia. Our current human condition has given us human sports, but there is no reason to assume that the Utopians will be drawn to anything like our sports. On the other hand, there seems to me, no reason why the Utopians could not play sport, even though they would not need it in the same manner or for the same reasons as we have done and still do. Consider the case, where the Utopians, while conceptually exploring various physical activities that they engage in, hit upon the concept of sport. In a robust Utopia – a Utopia, where, for example, losing sport competitions would not in any way be painful or disappointing – I see no reason why they could not decide to try it out of intellectual curiosity. Should they decide not to try it due to worries about how inhabitants of Utopia would react to sport competitions, and perhaps the consequences of opening up the venue of sport, then our imagined Utopia is not robust, i.e. it would not be a proper Utopia worthy of our considerations. The internal aims of sport are the same in our current condition and the Utopian condition, while the external purposes or functions will differ. The Utopian sports might or might not be the same as ours, or at least some of our sports, but we can expect that the manner in which they are played and the way they are viewed in their social setting will differ due to differences in external purposes or functions.

Differences in external purposes or functions of sport competitions can give rise to differences in emphasis when playing sport, the context in which they take place, and how results of sport competitions are viewed. Consider Homer’s *The Odyssey* and the episode of Phaiacian contests as brought to our attention by Daniel Dombrowski (Dombrowski 2016). In the eighth book, Odysseus is invited or challenged to “try our games as well, if you know any sports” (Homer 2018: 225). After this taunt, Odysseus complies:

With that he leapt up, cloak and all, and seized  
a massive discus, heavier than that  
used by the others. He spun around, drew back  
his arm and from his brawny hand he hurled.  
The stone went humming. The Phaeacians, known  
for rowing, ducked down cowering beneath  
its arc; it flew beyond the other pegs.

Athena marked the spot. In human guise  
she spoke

“A blind man, stranger, could discern  
this mark by groping. It is far ahead  
of all the others. You can celebrate!  
You won this round, and none of them will ever  
throw further—or as far! (Homer 2018: 226).

Having shown his superior sporting prowess in discus, Odysseus goes on to challenge the Phaiacians (except for his host Laodamas) to match his throw. At the same time, he declares his willingness to take them on in any sport. Perhaps to Odysseus’ surprise, the offer is not taken up. Instead, the Phaiacians, at that point, admit to not being brilliant at sports, but that they “love the feast, the lyre, dancing and varied clothes, hot baths and bed” (Homer 2018: 228). And with these words, the Phaiacians’ contests end and instead song and dance take over as entertainment for the evening. Odysseus’ challenge: “Test my ability, let me know yours” goes unanswered (Homer 2018: 227). Dombrowski argues that the *Odyssey* reveals “the ludic character of the Phaiacian games” and of the Phaiacians he concludes that “[t]hey really liked frolic” (Dombrowski 2016: 109). This attitude towards sport stands in sharp contrast to what we know about the ancient Greeks, who were fiercely competitive in all walks of life, including athletic contests.

According to Dombrowski, the Phaiacians do not treat sport with the level of seriousness that sport deserves.

Consider the Phaiacians. (...) [T]here is something amiss in the Phaiacians’ approach to sport: initially they proclaimed themselves to be the best competitors in the world(!), then Odysseus hurled the discus much further than any Phaiacian could, and finally they declared their lack of interest in sport and started dancing. They have thus trivialized sport competition (Dombrowski 2016: 114).

If we follow Dombrowski’s interpretation of the sport proceedings at Phaiacia, we might imagine Odysseus being somewhat disappointed over how easily the Phaiacians shrugged off their defeat and went on to other leisure activities. Little time was given to Odysseus to celebrate or bask in the glory of his superior athleticism and no prizes were handed out.

However, instead of charging the Phaiacians' sport practice of not striking the right balance between seriousness and non-seriousness when engaging in sport, we should consider the idea that the external purpose or function of sport in Phaiacia is merely different from the cultures that Odysseus and we belong to. This does not necessarily mean that they trivialize sport, but it does mean that the way they engage in sport might strike us as foreign and even frustrate us. Similarly, had Odysseus washed ashore on Suits' Utopia, he would have found a sporting culture in Utopia, if there even was one, that was very different than that of his own. Most likely, he would have been disappointed with the manner in which the Utopians played their sport and the surrounding sporting culture of Utopia. The Utopians would not have anything to prove, since the competitive drives that serve humans so well in our non-Utopian state of affairs, would be absent in Suits' Utopia, and that difference in outlook on sport competitions would probably strike someone from the fiercely competitive and status-oriented Ancient Greek culture as not the right way to go about competing in athletic competitions. I suspect that most current day sport practitioners and audiences will find themselves in the same position as Odysseus had they encountered the Utopians at sport. As far as sport is concerned, Utopia would not be a very thrilling place to be for beings like us, with our cultural and evolutionary background.<sup>6</sup>

As mentioned, it is not given that we will find sports at all in Utopia. However, we cannot rule it out. The question of external purposes or functions of possible sports in Utopia is equally underdetermined. Perhaps sheer intellectual curiosity would make them try sport, if they at one point come to consider or invent the concept of sport. One might doubt whether intellectual curiosity will make them establish any sporting cultures or practices, so, perhaps, something else would be needed. Perhaps their sporting practices will be more like the Phaiacians' contests, as depicted by Dombrowski. Or else, perhaps, there could be sports where areté in, say, the form of a certain established parameter of sporting excellence will take centre stage, or aesthetic considerations pertaining to the sport movements are taken into account. Kupfer, when thinking about human sports, suggested that the external purpose or function of sports was "*how* the score/win is made" and "the aesthetic (aesthetic execution of play)" (Kupfer 1983: 121, 123). Even though that does not sound likely with human sports, given the way we play sport and our surrounding sporting cultures, it is a viable option for a possible external purpose or function of Utopian sports.<sup>7</sup>

Let us see if we can dream up a case of a Utopian sport that can fit humans as we might expect to find them in Utopia. That is, a version of humans, for whom which "all psychological problems have been solved in Utopia" (Holowchak 2007: 91). The Utopians,

Suits tells us, are not in the grip of many of the drives, which explains the behaviours and inclination of humans in our non-Utopian state of affairs.

[A]ll possible interpersonal problems have been solved by appropriate methods. Let us suppose that psychoanalysis has made such giant strides that it actually cures people, or that all the various kinds of group treatment have proven successful, or that some quite new development in socio- or psychotherapy or in pharmacology has made it possible to effect one hundred per cent cures for all psychic disturbances. As a result of these developments there is no longer any competition for love, attention, approval, or admiration” (Suits 1978: 150).

What then could possibly be pleasing to the Utopians sport-wise?

Consider figure skating competitions and the so-called short program as we find in single, pair and synchronized skating. Basically, the short program, formerly known as the original or technical program, is the first part of these competitions, where the skaters perform certain mandatory or required elements such as a double or triple axel jump, a flying spin, and so on, within a specific time duration. Consider a possible Utopian sport that structurally looks like a short program in figure skating. There is a set of, say, eight prescribed bodily movements that the athletes are to go through within a specific time duration. The movements could be done on skates, but also by other means, or merely on foot. In the latter case, we would have something that looks like a short program for the floor exercise in gymnastics. Let us call the sport *eights*.<sup>8</sup> The Utopians have a clear conception of what constitutes a perfect execution of each bodily movement of eights. There is a score system, where 10 is the top score of perfect execution of any of the eight bodily movements. A score of 80 marks a perfect competition. A score of 80 clearly constitutes excellence in eights. The eight bodily movements are not easy to get right according to Utopian standards. It takes both time and effort to attain top level and to maintain that level. Eights is a worthy pastime for the Utopians to indulge in. However, at the top level of eights competitions, the top athletes all perform perfectly and score perfect 80s. Had eights been a human sport, then eights would not have been deemed a good sport. The *sport-wrights* would most likely have made amendments to the sport by making the mandatory or required bodily movements of eights harder. The rationale for such a change would be to ensure better differentiation among the competitors, which would create more losers, thereby making winning carry more prestige or weight in the manner in which we need our sports to do. Furthermore, one can easily imagine the sport-

wrights fiddling with the time requirement, again, to make sure that perfect performances in eights do not happen frequently or are exquisitely rare. However, the Utopians do not have the need to see losers in order for them to appreciate sport and sport performances, since competition and domination are not external purposes or functions of sport in the Utopian condition. The Utopians would be perfectly happy with eights as described above and would not see a need to change it.<sup>9</sup>

The Utopians would see areté – excellence in sport performance – as an absolute. In which case, a competition with only excellent and perfect performances would indeed be something to cherish. If one perfect performance in a sport like eights is great, then only perfect performances in an eights competition is even better. The ethos of *Citius - Altius - Fortius* (faster, higher, stronger) would hold no sway over the Utopians with regard to sports like eights. The external purpose or function of eights, and perhaps other sports in Utopia, maybe all, would be excellence in performance. The reason why eights was invented and maintained as a sport would be the joy the Utopians found in excellence while performing suitably difficult bodily movements. In addition, eights might also have an aesthetic purpose or function in Utopia. The configurations of bodily movements of eights could also have been chosen on aesthetic grounds. The inhabitants of Utopia find these beautiful or pleasing to observe. Again, we find that, if all top eights athletes deliver perfect performances, then it will make the Utopian spectators' experience more enjoyable, rather than diminished. No human sports, on the other hand, are like that, and that is no coincidence. In our non-Utopian state of affairs, sports serve different purposes or functions.

This means that even though Suits' Utopia with regard to sport is conceptually sane, it is also of limited interest in its relevance to human sports. Surely, it serves as an antidote to any essentialism with regard to external purposes or functions of sport, but I am not sure a detour through Suits' Utopia was ever needed for reaching that conclusion. In any event, that was not Suits' motivation, when he introduced his Utopia thought experiment. Suits' Utopia is supposed to be some sort of ideal to strive towards. However, when we think through the Utopian state of affairs with regard to possible sports, we should put some care into coming up with a possible Utopian sport like eights that would fit the psychological profile of Utopians. When we do, the natural conclusion is that the possible sporting culture of Suits' Utopia and what is demanded of our human sports for them to grab our minds and imagination, are too far apart for the former to be of any relevance to the latter. I cannot see that in the foreseeable future anything like my sport of eights will come to the fore and be a



sport to be reckoned with. Suits' Utopia is irrelevant for understanding and thinking about human sports.

## **5. Conclusion, Or Back to Human Sports**

Test my ability, let me know yours, Odysseus dared the Phaiacians, only to find that the latter were fine with not needing to try to settle the score with Odysseus. How different from what we know about Ancient Greek sport and society. Only looking at the Phaiacians and their behaviour in the Phaiacian contests would not teach us much about Odysseus and his contemporaries with regard to sport contests. The Phaiacians are best interpreted as a contrast-case, showing how the Ancient Greece was not with regard to sport. Similarly, at best, Suits' Utopia can be seen as a contrast-case of how human sports and human sport experiences are not, and, as far as I can tell, will not be in the foreseeable future. Given how Suits' Utopians not only have all material needs met, but also are psychologically and interpersonally very different from humans in the non-Utopian state of affairs we currently call our world, the external functions or purposes of sports in Utopia are bound to be different than those of human sports. I have suggested that a sport like eights will fit the Utopian condition. Given the differences in external functions or purposes of sports between Suits' Utopia and our non-Utopian world, it hardly makes sense to argue that human sports should somehow be fashioned or modelled on possible Utopian sports like eights, when a sport like eights is not fit to answer the needs humans seek to fulfil when doing and watching sport. At worse, given the weak view of games and sports in Utopia, there might not even be any sports in Suits' Utopia. It is underdetermined whether there would be sports in Utopia. We have never known the action and reaction patterns of an absolute carefree generation of humans, and, most likely, we never will. Regardless of whether there would be sports in Suits' Utopia or not, the net effect of these considerations is that Suits' Utopia is not relevant for thinking about human sports and human sport experiences. Suits' Utopia is better left to its own devices, whereas the research topic of human sports – warts and all – is readily available to be explored.

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<sup>1</sup> This does not sit well with the definition of culture as the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves – a definition usually credited anthropologist Clifford Geertz. In a sport context, this line would give us; *sports are stories we tell ourselves about ourselves*. That, however, contradicts the line that sport has no subject matter outside itself. As a serious philosophical statement about sport, propositional content, assertion, communication, storytelling, etc. this definition is obviously false. A back-pass in association football does not have propositional content, rather it is a footballing action, which may or may not be a good move in the match context in which it happens, when a boxer delivers an uppercut, he or she is not actually telling his or her opponent anything, but potentially knocking him or her out, and so on and so forth *ad nauseam*. However, originally the line was never meant to be read literally and thus constitute no challenge to the line that sport has no subject matter outside itself. If we go back to Geertz and the origin of this definition, we find a sober and perfectly fine usage of the phrase “stories we tell ourselves” with regard to cultural products. Regarding the Balinese cockfights and what sets it apart from everyday practical affairs, Geertz’s line is that:

[I]t provides a metasocial *commentary* upon the whole matter of assorting human beings into fixed hierarchical ranks (...) Its function, if you want to call it that, is *interpretative*: it is a Balinese *reading* of Balinese experience; *a story they tell themselves about themselves*” (Geertz 1972: 26, my italics).

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Then, in the very next sentence, Geertz makes it clear that “[t]o put the matter this way is to engage in a bit of metaphorical refocusing of one’s own (...) [s]uch an extension of the notion of a text beyond written material, and even beyond verbal, is (...) *metaphorical*” (Geertz 1972: 26, my italics). No doubt, various sport events and the way we in our non-Utopian state of affairs set them up and interpret them have symbolic powers and can take part in building and maintaining identity. Let us shortly consider the case of association football. Football teams often function as symbols of local, regional or national pride and identity. No doubt, there are reasons to believe that part of football’s success is due to the sport’s potential in forging and reinforcing identity, but, to put it bluntly, some sort of attraction to the game of football is what made it suitable as a vessel of identity, not the other way around. There are aspects of association football, which makes it a suitable vehicle for forging and reinforcing identity. Suffice to say here, it is not because the football match or the sport as such (the football match qua football match, association football qua association football) has a subject matter outside itself, but rather because of the easily available us-against-them feature of the football set up, which not only facilitates for engagement in the sport, but also paves the way for football’s identity-making potential. Part of an identity-making and maintenance project can be to work football matches, cup tournaments or league campaigns into a broader or larger narrative. This seems especially prevalent in international football with regard to the identity-making projects of nations and nationalism. For example, supporters and media might cast an England versus Germany game as a continuation of World War I and II, or an England versus Argentina game as a continuation of the Falklands/Malvinas conflict or war, etc. Obviously, football matches are not continuous with, or even comparable in importance to, the actual wars. The co-opting of football proceedings into larger contexts or narratives is to interpret the match into a specific context or setting. This phenomenon described here might be subsumed under the notion of *extending*. One extends the significance of the match, the tournament or the campaign beyond its sport perimeters thus making it be about something more than the staged artificial sport contest of the football match, the tournament or the campaign. It is not like the football match, the tournament or the campaign tells us story about, say, the on-going disagreement about the Falklands/Malvinas between the United Kingdom and Argentina. Sport events like football matches are not communicative vehicles by which humans tell stories about themselves and the world around them and their understanding of that. However, a football match between two countries can be drafted into a narrative that is spun about a conflict between the two countries, but, of course, the basis or source of that narrative is something different from and independent of the sport proceedings themselves. When England and Argentina faced off in the quarterfinal of the 1986 World Cup, the Argentinian players clearly saw the match as more than a mere football match and extended it to also be about the Falklands/Malvinas war. Diego Maradona reports that:

[W]e said that football had nothing to do with the Malvinas War but we knew a lot of Argentinian kids had died there, shot down like little birds. This was revenge. It was like recovering a little bit of the Malvinas (...) It was more than winning a game (...) In a way, we blamed the English players for everything that happened, for all the suffering of the Argentine people. I know it seems like madness and a nonsense now but truthfully at the time that was what we felt. It was stronger than us: we were defending our flag, the dead kids, the survivors. That’s why I think my goal meant so much. Actually, they both did. They both had their own charm (Maradona with Arcucci and Bialo 2007: 127-128).

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Interestingly, Claudio Tamburrini claims with regard to Maradona's infamous handball goal in that match, which upset the English then and still has the power to rile them up – it surely did not help that Maradona afterwards gleefully commented that the goal was scored “a little with the head of Maradona and a little with the hand of God” –, that the cheating or rule violation itself had a positive effect, since:

After it took place, football matches between England and Argentina acquired a special agonistic flavour, that seems to have overshadowed the tragic inheritance of the Falkland/Malvinas war. Thus, his goal had positive effects not only for the game of football, but even for the international community at large (Tamburrini 2000: 28).

The argument seems to be that because of Maradona's cheating or rule-violation, football matches between England and Argentina became a lightning rod for the hostilities between the two countries that otherwise, we must assume, would have manifested themselves on other more serious arenas. I will leave for others to consider whether this claim is correct. I suspect that at least in Argentina, the question of the Falklands/Malvinas is still regarded as an unresolved matter. As for the agonistic flavour of matches between England and Argentina one does well to also consider the ill-tempered quarterfinal in the 1966 World Cup in England. In this match Argentinean Captain Antonio Rattín was sent off, but refused to leave the pitch, resulting in a long delay of the match. After having left the pitch Rattín did his best to offend the British public, while England manager Alf Ramsey made sure there was no love lost between the two teams by refusing his players to swap shirts with the Argentinian players and referring to these as “animals” in the English press. One might argue that the bad blood and long-standing rivalry between the two teams starts here and not with Maradona's handball goal in 1986, in which case Tamburrini's defence of the latter loses its bite. In fact, even before the 1966 match, there seemed to be animosity between the two football nations. Jonathan Wilson reports that in that 1966 World Cup “[s]o tarnished was Argentina's reputation in England that they were booed on to the field at Hillsborough for their final group game” and David Downing concludes that “[t]he Argentinians got the message, or at least a message: the English didn't like them” (Wilson 2016: 188, Downing 2003: 99). No doubt, the possibility of extending – steer especially international sports into a larger narrative – is part of the reason why football, in particular, but also other sports enjoy such worldwide success as spectator sports.

<sup>2</sup> A critic might object that it is by no means clear that humans are happiest when they win. Indeed, our critic might continue, Robert Simon has argued against that view and instead presented a picture of sport competition as a mutual quest for excellence and that does not entail winning all the time. In replying to this objection, it is important to first note that I did not write that winning is the only way to get joy from participating in sport competitions, only that a sport experience machine designed to provide maximum sporting pleasures for its subjects will provide the subjects with the experience of winning, not losing. Also, when one actually watches sport participants in various sports at various levels, it really does look like people aim at winning, doing better than someone else, not to lose, not to be last, etc., as opposed to coming in second, doing worse than someone else, be last, etc., and this provides an explanation of and reason for why people keep on arranging or seeking out sport competitions to partake in or watch, instead of merely doing various physical activities in the company of others or in solitude, or watching others do the latter. If participants did not, in general, get joy from winning, doing better than someone else, not losing, not being last, etc., then the behaviour of humans seen at various sport arrangements makes little sense. Someone unfamiliar with the theoretical territory of philosophy of sport might find this too obvious to

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even mention, but it is worthwhile reminding readers than anyone challenging the line that a sport experience machine as described in this section would provide its subjects with the experience of winning, owes us an explanation, which makes sense of how people behave in sport competitions around the world. Also, before we turn to the Simon picture, a few words on how we win are in order. In general, part of a satisfying winning experience in sport includes that the end result of winning connects to skills, i.e. that the reason you win a sport competition is, at least in part, predicated on your skills in the sport. This points to the fact that humans do not enjoy partaking in or watching games of chance with nothing of significance on the line. You can make games of chance exciting for creatures like us by investing, say, money, etc., on the outcomes, but games of chance as such do not excite us. There are reasons for that. Games of chance cannot be influenced by us thus they provide no action alternatives. Our minds as problem solvers look for action alternatives. Without action alternatives, in the case of games of chance, where nothing is on the line, creatures like us get bored. With regard to proceedings we take to be important, if we experience being unable to influence that which goes on, i.e. see no action alternatives, we get frustrated. If we experience being subjected to processes that are wholly based on chance or circumstances that we cannot influence, we get frustrated, helpless, and in the final resort, we give up and resign ourselves to our fate. Whatever it is that excites us about playing and watching sports, part of it is having perceived achievable action alternatives as part of the equation. Without them sports would not be psychologically satisfying. Perceived achievable action alternatives entail skills. Something being a skill is here minimally taken to mean that what you achieve action-wise is partly a result of your abilities and decisions, and not merely some random process. It is a well-known psychological fact that if you trigger typical fight or flight mental states in an animal, but deprive it of possible action alternatives, then frustration and apathy follows (Overmier and Seligman 1967, see also Seligman and Maier 1967, Seligman, Maier and Geer 1968 and Seligman 1972). Not seeing any achievable action alternatives when in a fight or flight state leads to frustration and, in the final resort, resignation. Assuming that the same or something similar enough goes for humans, a sport experience machine, where victories were not based on skills, but came over as chancy or random, would not bring joy to its subjects, but, more likely, over time, indifference. In general, skills are needed to make the sport experience enjoyable. Though, regarding human sports as we know them and skills, I would like to remark that I do think that many participants and spectators quite enjoy the occasional fluke in sport competitions, and, furthermore, that we would do well to remember that most sport competitions done by adults in our world are a far cry from anything anyone would associate with excellence in whatever sport we are talking about. Returning to Simon and his idea of sport competition as a mutual quest for excellence, we find that, in fact, Simon is not presenting an argument about how sports actually are done and perceived by their spectators, rather he presents an argument for how he thinks sports ought to be in order for sport competitions to be ethically defensible. Simon tells us that his line on sport “as a mutually accepted quest for excellence through challenge” is motivated by how “sport should be regarded and engaged in”, i.e. “the ethical significance of competition conceived of as a mutual quest for excellence”, which is not how sports are actually done and conceived of, since, in fact, “[c]ompetition as the mutual quest for excellence, it must be emphasized, is an ideal” (Simon 2004: 27, 27, 32, 39). Sigmund Loland commenting on the fourth edition of Simon’s work, points out that the work is “written on the normative premise of sport as ‘a mutual quest for excellence in the intelligent and directed use of athletic skills in the face of challenge’” (Loland 2015: 334, Simon, Torres and Hager 2015). My suggested sport experience machine is not premised on any normative principles of how one wished things could be or turn out, thus the Simon picture does not make contact with the view presented in

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this section. Simon's project is different than mine and the function of the sport experience machine as a thought experiment is not threaten by the normative premise that sport competitions ought to be mutual quests for excellence in the intelligent and directed use of athletic skills in the face of challenge.

<sup>3</sup> On the difference between 'absolute' and 'relative' adjectives, see Brasoveanu and Rett 2018: section 2.2.1.

<sup>4</sup> Keith Thompson considers the example of the perfect golf round taken from Julian Barnes. Barnes writes "One day I would play a round of golf in 18 shots (...) and then what?" (Barnes 1989: 297, quoted in Thompson 2004: 63). Thompson concurs; "And then what indeed! In time he realizes that what seems ideal is totally boring" (Thompson 2004: 63). I agree with Barnes and Thompson with regard to human sports – the sports we play, the way we play them and the reasons why we like to play and watch these sports –, but Thompson's conclusion that "[t]he concept of utopia implodes because of its own contradictions" does not follow (Thompson 2004: 63). What follows is that in Suits' Utopia the notion of excellence in sport will be an absolute, not a relative term.

<sup>5</sup> Note that Suits begged to differ with regard to the linguistic practice of calling these activities games (Suits 1978: 164).

<sup>6</sup> When considering various versions of Utopias, Thompson argues that "the essence of the utopia is endless pleasure and delight, sport is not allowed because it has losers. In these utopias, by definition, all should be winners all the time" (Thompson 2004: 61). He does consider that one might seek "to reinstate play and games by means of the casual, the playful, the noncompetitive (...) [b]ut it has little if anything to do with sport" since "unless games have a sharper edge, boredom soon sets in with added maturity" (Thompson 2004: 61). The value we put on sports, it seems to Thompson, clash with that of Suits' Utopia, since "lovers of sport want "real sport" in their ideal states" (Thompson 2004: 61). Setting aside Thompson's comment about non-competitive games, translated to the sport case, we might imagine that Thompson's argument would be that Utopia might offer sports that are casual and playful, but that we want so-called "real sports" with sharper edges. As a consequence of the clash between the value of casual and playful pastime sports in Suits' Utopia and the value we put on so-called "real sports" with sharper edges, "[t]he concept of utopia implodes because of its own contradictions" (Thompson 2004: 63). That does not follow. A carefree Utopia of pleasure and delight might very well have sports that yield losers as long as losing in sport does not infringe or destroy that pleasure and delight. What follows is that human sports – the sports we play, the way we play them and the reasons why we like to play and watch these sports – do not sit well with Suits' Utopia. We, lovers of sport in our non-Utopian condition (like Odysseus in Phaiacia) will probably find Suits' Utopia a disappointment sport-wise. Note that we need not worry about the fact that Thompson thinks that any conception of a Utopia will be incoherent because value pluralism is true. That might very well be the case, suffice to say here, the sport case is not what will bring down the concept of Utopia.

<sup>7</sup> Scott Kretchmar argues that for Suits' logic to go through – Suits writes that "Utopia – must consist fundamentally, if not exclusively, in the playing of games", where "it is games which give us something to do when there is nothing to do" –, we must first according to Kretchmar assume that there lingers on one instrumental activity and a need it addresses; "[t]hat one remaining human need is the elimination of boredom" (Suits 1984a: 197-198, 1978: 159, Kretchmar 2006: 71). Similarly, I suspect that this is what Holowchak is after, when he asks; "[o]ne may reasonably ask why people would play games if all psychological problems have been solved in Utopia" (Holowchak 2007: 91). Kretchmar's remark is reasonable. However, I am not sure it is the right thing to say, when we consider the possibility of playing games or sports in the Utopian condition. The problem when thinking about Suits' Utopia, is that it is



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unclear exactly what sort of humans we would find there, i.e. how the psychological make-up of humans that would be happy and content in this Utopia would look like. So, it seems underdetermined whether or not they will play games and sports in the Utopian condition. I do not see it as a conceptual necessity that for someone to decide to do something else than what they are doing at that point, like for example, switching from, say, idly basking in the sun to start playing a game or sport of some kind, they must be bored with first activity. Certainly, some kind of curiosity and appetite for experiences seem needed for game playing and sport events to be invented and take place in Suits' Utopia, but I do not see why boredom or the threat of boredom would necessarily be needed. Why would not curiosity and appetite for experiences do the trick; why must it be boredom that moves the denizens of Utopia to play games or sports? I cannot see that boredom is necessarily forced upon us, as part of this line of argument, curiosity and appetite for experiences will do. With regard to Suits' line of reasoning, Kretchmar correctly points out that; "[a] second problem can be traced to Suits's equivocal use of the phrase "nothing to do". What he actually meant when employing these words is that there would be "no problems to solve"" (Kretchmar 2006: 72). Having something to do does not reduce to having problems to solve. So, even if there are no problems to solve, there might be plenty to do in Suits' Utopia. Whether that is a problem or not, if it was the case that there would be no problems to solve in Utopia, depends on the psychological make-up of the Utopians and that, as pointed out, is underdetermined. Granted, humans in our non-Utopian condition are problem solvers per excellence. I am happy to go along with Kretchmar's anthropological philosophy and the claims that "we find significance in negotiating problems, and we cannot live happily without the meaning that is thereby derived" and that "Utopia, from the standpoint of anthropology, has been conceptualized as a slowly emerging reality" (Kretchmar 2006: 73, 74). However, Kretchmar's aims of showing that Suits' "notion of Utopia (...) is (...) [not] lacking in utility" and that "[a]nthropological philosophy helps us see how and why solving artificial problems became a sine qua non of "the life most worth living"" do not succeed (Kretchmar 2006: 67). Whether this future breed of Suits' Utopia will engage in all absorbing things to do and whether those things will be games or sports seems underdetermined. Maybe the Utopians at root will be problem solvers, somewhat akin to what we are, but then, maybe not. Furthermore, there will be things to do for the problem solving minds in Utopia without the introduction of games or sport. A not unreasonable interpretation of Suits' Utopia is one where all practical problems regarding our material wellbeing, but also various psychological needs have been solved, thus there would be no need to engage in instrumental activities addressing such concerns. However, disciplines like mathematic, logic and metaphysics are still available for our Utopians. Certainly, at least the first two disciplines can be applied to good practical purposes in our non-Utopian state of affairs. The instrumental usage or employment of these disciplines would fall by the wayside in the Utopian state of affairs, but the disciplines as such can survive Suits' Utopia and still offer intellectual challenges to engage with in a world where every material and personal and interpersonal emotional needs are met. Doing mathematics for the joy or fun of it seems a viable option even when all material and central psychological needs have been met. Suits might respond that anything that is not instrumental activities count as playing games – be that mathematics, logic, metaphysics, pure music, abstract art, dance, etc. –, making his Utopia a game playing place by default should the above-mentioned undertakings occur in it. At this point, we are allowed to mount what Holowchak calls the stipulation objection, and argue that if every activity or practice, which we prima facie in our non-Utopian state of affairs would not call games or sports, but which nevertheless seem like viable options in Suits' Utopia, is either deemed to count as games or sports by default or else, somehow discounted, say we are told that the Utopian already know all there is to know

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about mathematics, logic and metaphysics and so will not engage in these disciplines, then it seems like Suits has reached his conclusion of a game and sport playing Utopia by stipulation (Holowchak 2007: 92-93). Furthermore, should one opt for this latter argumentative strategy, then it must also be admitted that Suits has moved too far away from our concepts or understanding of games and sport for his Utopia to be of any utility with regard to illuminating the non-Utopian condition and state of affairs and our games and sports.

<sup>8</sup> According to Suitsian standards, to play a game is to voluntarily attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles, and one might worry that eights does not count as a game, since there are no obstacles to be found in the way the sport is done (see Berman 2013). One can meet that worry by tweaking the sport design of eights slightly. In order to comply with the obstacle requirement of Suits' formulation of what it is to play a game, let the movements of eights be confined to a certain limited performance space, wherein that space there is a given number of obstacles (perhaps akin to the obstacles for running that you find in steeplechase), which makes it harder to get the bodily movements of eights right. So this version of eights stand in the same relationship to the old one as, say, steeplechase stands to other footraces. I will leave for others to figure out whether these two versions of eights are indeed versions of the same sport or two different sports. Nothing in the argument presented in this section depends on that.

<sup>9</sup> In the literature on Suits' Utopia, writers, including Suits himself, are suspiciously silent on the question of how games and sports in Utopia can or will look like. A notable exception is Deborah Vossen, who has made an attempt to approach this question. Vossen's starting point is some of Suits's remarks about his Utopia needing:

[S]ports and games unthought of today; sports and games that will require for their exploitation – that is, for their mastery and enjoyment – as much energy as is expected today in serving the institutions of scarcity. It behoves us, therefore, to begin the immense work of devising these wonderful games now (Suits 1978: 158-159).

In Utopia, “we will have all kinds of absorbing things to do. And I mean *really* magnificent games; games so subtle, complex, and challenging that their inventors will be seen as the ludic Einsteins of the future” (Suits 1984a: 208, see also Suits 1984b: 23-24). Vossen reasonably interprets this as meaning that “the Grasshopper is not advocating for a state of affairs wherein people derive a sense of productivity from the inconsequential challenges we normally call games”, thus the need “to be playing really magnificent *games of significance*” (Vossen 2016: 261, 263, my italics). I suspect that Suits and Vossen would reject my sport of *eights* as not being magnificent enough, not subtle, complex and challenging enough for it to fulfil the need of the Utopians to have something to do, which is deemed of enough significance to render life meaningful. Eights would not live up to a billing of being *a game of significance*. Suits and Vossen would be wrong and their rejection of eights would build on a certain equivocation we find in Suits' work with regard to the picture of the Utopians' psychological make-up. In order to get his picture of Utopia off the ground, as already quoted in the main text, Suits describes the Utopians as very different than us:

Let us suppose that psychoanalysis has made such giant strides that it actually cures people, or that all the various kinds of group treatment have proven successful, or that some quite new development in socio- or psychotherapy or in pharmacology has made it possible to effect one hundred per cent cures for all psychic disturbances. As a result of these developments there is no longer any competition for love, attention, approval, or admiration (Suits 1978: 150).

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Note that Suits prefaces the sentence about unthought of sports and games with the observation that he envisages Utopia as “a culture quite different from our own in terms of its *basis*” and even though he at that point in *The Grasshopper* has reintroduced “admiration and sharing (...) love and friendship (...) re-introduction of the emotions associated with striving”, there are no indications that Suits now regards his Utopians as being psychologically the same as humans in our non-Utopian condition (Suits 1978: 158). The Utopians are presumably still very different than us psychologically. Following Vossen’s interpretation of Suits, these so-called magnificent sports and games *of significance*, seem to me to presuppose that the Utopians will have a need to feel that what they do is of some sort of significance and importance. However, that looks like a psychological need or tendency we would normally associate with ourselves, the current day crop of humans, and I see no reason to suppose that the Utopians after their group treatment, socio – or psychotherapy, or pharmacological treatment, etc., would necessarily crave or need that. Most people in our non-Utopian state of affairs, I suspect, find fulfilment of the need to be or do something of significance or importance, i.e. feel that one makes a difference, in one’s everyday dealings with the world, ranging from trying to save the planet from ecological disaster, participating in a war, talking care of one’s children, helping one’s students to grow intellectually, taking the garbage out for the old lady next door, writing Christmas cards to relatives and friends, and so on and so forth. The existential abyss of the futility of human existence is kept at bay by these various instrumental activities, which in an imperfect world are all-important for survival, making a good or decent life, etc., and it is no wonder that our wellbeing derives so much from such instrumental activities by way of giving life a direction, purpose or meaning. Evolutionary it makes good sense for a creature to feel well about and seek out activities that somehow or another enhances that creature’s fitness. Of course, in Suits’ Utopia, enhancing fitness is not on the agenda, so the need to be or do something of significance or importance will not serve any such evolutionary function. It looks like Suits took his starting point in our non-Utopian need for significance and importance, tried to envisage a carefree Utopia filled with sports and games, and then found our sports and games, i.e. humans sports and games, wanting. Humans sports and games, Suits seems to tell us, according to Vossen, cannot provide the same sense of significance and importance as various instrumental activities do in our non-Utopian condition. The reason, Vossen tells us, is because human sports and games are inconsequential challenges. Thus the call for magnificent sports and games unthought of. However, this call should be resisted. Suits made the thought experiment of Utopia work by envisaging denizens of Utopia with a different psychological profile, than that which you find among us the non-Utopians, and I see no reason to think that Utopians in this sense would not be happy with eights and other games and sports of no particular consequence or importance. However, if you reintroduce the full psychological make-up of non-Utopians in Suits’ Utopia, then surely, our Utopians would have a lot of other things to get busy with – in-fighting and various power struggles are the most obvious ones – apart from playing sports and games, no matter how magnificent these latter activities and practices are dreamt up to be. In the latter case, our Utopians might fulfil the need for significance and importance by striving to reach the top, or as high as possible, in the hierarchy of Utopian society, a hierarchy, which one should expect would form very quickly, if the Utopians were psychologically like us the non-Utopians. Then, of course, they might not psychologically need these so-called magnificent sports and games of significance, since a feeling of significance and importance might be gained by the strive and struggle to get a good or the best position in Utopian society. Now Suits’ Utopia is not a place exclusively committed to doing sports and games. If Suits then replies that in his Utopia the Utopians have been clenched of such tendencies towards rivalry,

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hierarchy building, etc., then we are back to square one, since, again, we must ask why that version of the Utopians have a need for significance and importance in their being and doing. Why the need for sports and games unthought of, why the search for magnificent sports and games of significance? Either, Suits' whole conception of Utopia as a sport and game playing place goes, in which case the whole detour through the Utopia thought experiment was pointless, or else, the sports and games of Utopia might very well look like my sport of eights. Setting that aside, let us still consider Vossen's view on how games in Utopia could look like. Vossen seeks "to discern at least one Utopian game of significance" (Vossen 2017: 316). In the end, it turns out she cannot, as her suggested game for Utopians to play, is; "Utopians may be engaged in goal-directed pursuits instrumental in 'raising Grasshoppers'", i.e. showing or teaching non-Utopians how to be Utopians (Vossen 2017: 319, see also Vossen 2016: 264). If the Utopian existence is deemed better or more valuable than the non-Utopian life, then being part of what makes someone go from being a non-Utopian to being a Utopian is no game or sport. Raising Grasshoppers, i.e. the making of the Utopians and the Utopian mind-set can hardly be seen as overcoming unnecessary obstacles, and does not count as a game or a sport. That activity is at heart an instrumental activity aimed at making the world a better place. Vossen's magnificent Utopian game of significance is not a game at all. Vossen sees this, but thinks the problem is that "Suits' definition of game-playing is too narrow inasmuch as it excludes really magnificent Utopian games of significance" (Vossen 2017: 325). That conclusion should be resisted. Sports and games in Utopia? Yes, why not! Sports and games in Utopia that *are* of the same significance as instrumental activities are for us in our world? No, you cannot have that, because if you did, then it would not be a Utopia, but just another imperfect world. Note that I take Vossen to mean that we need games that are of significance in the same way as instrumental activities in our non-Utopian state of affairs are and not merely games that are felt to be of significance. The former being a requirement for such games to not merely be inconsequential challenges. Equivocation between various conceptions, views or outlooks on the Utopian state of mind, i.e. the presumed psychological make-up of Utopians, also carries over to discussions of skills in sports and games, and Suits' Utopia. A careful reader might have realized that I, for pedagogical reasons, smuggled in a requirement in my description of eights as a Utopian sport, which is not necessary. I wrote that eights is not easy to get right and that it would take both time and effort to reach and maintain a top level of the sport, thus making it *a worthy pastime* for the Utopians. This resonates with the orthodox line taken in philosophy of sport of good sports and games requiring high levels of skill for one to play them well. No doubt, this is what Suits is after when he describes his Utopian sports and games as requiring as much energy for their mastery and enjoyment as we today put into serving the institutions of scarcity. The same motif is found in Hurka, who emphasizes that "[i]t is characteristic of good games to be not only more difficult than they might be but also in absolute terms reasonably difficult" and that "reflection on our intuitive understanding of the value of achievement suggests (...) difficult activities are as such valuable" (Hurka 2006: 220-221, 221). That is the right thing to say with regard to non-Utopians and human sports and games, but it is certainly not clear that it would also be the case that the Utopians' intuitions on the matter would line up in a similar manner. Hurka claims that good games "cannot be so difficult that no one can succeed at them, but also cannot lack all challenge; they must strike a balance between too much and too little difficulty" (Hurka 2006: 221). If we take seriously the idea that the Utopian mind-set will be very different than ours, then that would not follow with regard to Suits' Utopia. When thinking about sports and games in Utopia, we must be careful to not import or rely on our non-Utopian mind-set of thinking about what a good sport or game is. It does not follow, that eights must be hard, involve hard-earned skills, for it to be a good sport in Utopia, though the

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requirement makes it easier to persuade philosophers of sport that eights would have been a good sport in Utopia. How the ratio between difficult/easy, skill/luck or chance, etc., with regard to performance and success in a Utopian sport would have to be for the Utopians to enjoy doing and watching it seems underdetermined. The Utopians after their group treatment, socio – or psychotherapy, or pharmacological treatment, etc. might, for all we know, delight in sports and games, which are easy to get perfect, not care much or at all about getting good in the sports and games they play (after all, to practice in order to compete or perform in sports and games is much more ant-like, than grasshopperesque), prefer sports and games, where chance plays a much more prominent role than it does in human sports and games, and so on and so forth. Furthermore and importantly, pointing out this equivocation in Suits’ writings and how it finds its way into other writers’ thinking about Utopia – you cannot both get Suits’ Utopia picture of a place consisting of game and sport playing off the ground, while at the same time using intuitions grounded in the non-Utopian condition, when thinking about those possible games and sports –, shows that idealization projects like the one presented by Francisco Javier Lopez Frias, who considers Utopia as “*a Kantian regulative idea*”, which “primary purpose is to uncover the possibility conditions of game playing and present an *ideal realization towards which we must converge*”, are misguided (Lopez Frias 2017: 143, second italics mine, see also Lopez Frias 2016: 52). There is no reason to think that what fits fine with the temperament and inclinations of the Phaiacians will necessarily suit Odysseus and his fellow travellers. As writers on Suits’ Utopia has yet to present a picture of what Utopian sports and games might look like, with the notable exception of Vossen who pushes Suits’ thinking to the brim and ends up rejecting Suits’ understanding of sports and games, thus leaving us in the dark about what our subject matter is, the relevance of Suits’ Utopia for understanding human sports and games, remains an un-argued article of faith. For Suitsians to forge a relevance relation from Suits’ Utopia to our world with our human sports and games, they would need not only to get specific about their Utopian alternative, they would also need to face human sports and games as actual practices as they have emerged throughout human history, and not merely as failed, imperfect, non-ideal versions of the nondescript hypothesized Utopian sports and games, where inconsistencies between what humans actually do and what Suits writes that they ought to do cannot be explained away or dismissed by appeal or reference to Suits’ Utopia or some other nondescript ideal.