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Taking games seriously

Sportmanship and the paradox of zero-sum games

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Abstract

Competitive games are zero-sum games; would be sports zero-sum practices? Aurel Kolnai said that game players exhibit an odd volitional posture that turns games into paradoxes. Bernard Suits disagreed. In zero-sum games, says Suits, conflict is intentional. It cannot be paradoxical, because each player aims one identical goal, but rather two different *personal* goals. Nevertheless, Kolnai has a point, since players fall into a predicament if they *seriously* adopt the attitude of playing games with their internal aims of winning them. In the extent that games continue to be non-seriously played, they do not represent predicaments for agents. But if an agent decides to take some game seriously, her attitude becomes behaviorally paradoxical. The reason is that competitive games are zero-sum activities. But with sports it is different. Being institutionalized social practices, sports offer persistent possibilities of winning. Differently from what happens in the case of mere ludic enterprises, organized competitions allow a better distribution of wins; and in a long-standing involvement in the practice, sportsmen can accumulate good results in the long run. Sports seem to be an evolved solution for a basic human predicament: the impossibility of attaining happiness and personal fulfillment by means of mere ludic enterprises.

Keywords: Zero-Sum Games, Sports, Self-Realization, Bernard Suits, Aurel Kolnai

Resumen:

Los Juegos competitivos son juegos de suma cero; ¿Serían también los deportes prácticas de suma cero? Aurel Kolnai dijo que los jugadores muestran una postura volitiva extraña que convierte a los juegos en paradojas. No obstante, autores como Bernard Suits no están de acuerdo. En los juegos competitivos, dice Suits, el conflicto es intencional. No puede ser una paradoja, porque cada jugador tiene el objetivo idéntico de jugar, pero dos diferentes metas personales. Sin embargo, desde el punto de vista de Kolnai, los jugadores caen en un aprieto si adoptan seriamente la actitud de jugar. En la medida en que los juegos siguen siendo jugados no seriamente, no representan situaciones difíciles. Pero si un agente decide tomar algún juego en serio, su actitud se convierte en una conducta paradójica. La razón es que los juegos competitivos son actividades de suma cero. Pero con el deporte es diferente. Siendo prácticas sociales institucionalizadas, los deportes ofrecen posibilidades persistentes de ganar. A diferencia de lo que ocurre en el caso de meras empresas lúdicas, los concursos organizados permiten una mejor distribución de las ganancias; y en una participación de prácticas de larga duración, los deportistas pueden acumular buenos resultados a largo plazo. Los deportes parecen ser una solución evolutiva de un predicamento humano básico: la imposibilidad de alcanzar la felicidad y la realización personal por medio de empresas lúdicas.

Keywords: Juegos de Suma Cero, Deportes, autorrealización, Bernard Suits, Aurel Kolnai.

1. Games and paradoxes

Games are, in a sense, purely playful endeavors. Competitive games are a special kind of games, in which two or more people battle for a prize, a prize then eventually distributed in an unequal manner. There is no problem if a game is only played recreationally, aiming only to provide entertainment. But suppose someone chooses to reduce his whole life to just one competitive game. What could we say of this choice? Is it sensible? Some philosophers think that the attitude or the stance taken by some players in a competitive game is one that could not be taken seriously. Some will go even beyond that, saying that competitive games involve a paradox.

Aurel Kolnai is one of those who famously considered the attitude of players in games as if they were displaying paradoxical characters (Kolnai, 1965). Playing games (competitive ones) are contradictory double purposed activities: players concord in playing the game for mutual pleasure; nevertheless, each one aims to defeat the other. Kolnai thinks that this involves assuming an odd and paradoxical “volitional posture”.

Bernard Suits disagrees (Suits, 1978). In competitive games (zero-sum games), according to Suits, conflict is intentional. It cannot be a paradox, because each player aims one identical goal (that A and B play and enjoy the game), but with two different *personal* goals (that ‘A wins and B loses’ and ‘that B wins and A loses’). “A good game”, says Suits, “is one in which, for the winner, the aims of playing and winning are jointly realized, perhaps in terms of some kind of optimal balance” (Suits, 1978: 79).

Suits’ objections are not convincing; but he’s right in several points. Let’s remember some of Suits’ definitions. Suits states that “winning can be described only in terms of the game in which it figures, and winning may accordingly be called the *lusory* goal of a game” (Suits, 1978: 37).

Let me underline the difference between *lusory* goal and that which Suits calls the *lusory* attitude. Suits highlights three different goals in a game: the *lusory* goal (to win the game), the *prelusory* goal (the specific state of achievable things that can be perfectly described without any references to the game or its technical terms, but which can be identified and

artificially chosen as the goal of a specific game—in football, for example, the prelusory goal can be described, in general terms, as how to make the ball cross the line located below the crossbar in the opposite field), and the goal of participating in the game. The lusory attitude is the attitude to accept the rules of the game in order to make the activity possible (Suits 1978, 40-1). The rules of a game are artificially created with the aim of creating unnecessary obstacles for the attainment of the prelusory goals. To play a game, hence, is, for Suits, “to attempt to achieve a specific state of affairs [*prelusory goal*], using only means permitted by rules [*lusory means*], where the rules prohibit use of more efficient in favor of less efficient means [*constitutive rules*], and where the rules are accepted just because they make possible such activity [*lusory attitude*]” (Suits, 1978: 41, my brackets and italics).

Well, in most competitive games, a player wins the match if his score overcomes his opponent's. Each player has a personal goal to reach, that is, A aims to win over B, and B aims to win over A. Suits established that winning is an internal or *constitutive* aim of competitive games. As seen above, he called it the game's *lusory goal*.

Hence, to overcome the opponent's score is the *lusory goal* of all competitive games. But this obviously implies the odd situation remarked by Kolnai—for the lusory goal is an internal (or constitutive) goal of all competitive games, one that should be aimed equally by both players. Nevertheless, what A aims is “to win over B” and what B aims is “to win A”. Could competitive games have two different and incompatible lusory goals? That would mean that the game played by A is a different game from the game played by B—and this is obviously not true.

Actually, the only aim that competitors seem to be literally in accord is of *both* playing the *same* game. But Suits understands that to participate in a game is not properly a lusory goal, but what we should call an *external* goal. “The goal of participating in the game”, says Suits, “is not, strictly speaking, a part of the game at all. It is simply one of the goals that people have, such as wealth, glory, or security. As such it may be called a lusory goal, but a lusory goal of life rather than of games” (Suits, 1978: 37).

Hence, the *lusory goal* is a very different goal from the *ludic*. Here I will call the goal of cooperating in the accorded act of playing a game a “ludic” goal, for its intention is usually, but not necessarily, to have a common *ludic* experience. This ludic experience is connected with a particular kind of pleasure, that of playing the game (in fact, one that can be equally distributed by the game's participants). Still, this pleasure is plausibly distinguishable from

that obtained with the lusory goal's attainment, that is, victory. Winning the game plausibly enhances the pleasure of playing; but the pleasure of winning the game is not enhanced by the pleasure of playing it. It's plausible that the pleasure of playing diminishes with defeat without vanishing. But it is certain that the pleasure of winning is connected with the lusory goal's attainment.

Suits is plausibly right in saying that the "odd volitional posture" Kolnai supposedly detected is not literally paradoxical. There is no contradiction whatsoever in having both goals, namely, to play and to win (that is, have both ludic and lusory goals). There is no contradiction in the sentence "I want to play (cooperatively) and I want (individually) to win the game." Nevertheless, it can be argued that the agent is involved in a predicament if he *seriously* adopts the attitude of playing the game with its internal, but personal, *lusory* aim of winning it. It is problematic to be seriously involved in an activity at which we can be personally unsuccessful even if we do our best to accomplish its goals. If it is rational to maximize our pleasures, and since the attainment of the lusory goal enhances the amount of pleasure we can get in playing, to lose means to get much less than we want—of course, if we have taken the game seriously. The result of losing, hence, is always frustration—one that may have different magnitudes, but it is still frustration. So the question is: why not aim for victory in a game by disobeying its rules? The obvious response would be that it is not possible, unless we could make the referees and the opponent to think falsely that we obeyed the game's rules when in fact we didn't. Suits, nevertheless, remarks that cheating also means to abandon the lusory attitude. The predicament now is that the pursuit of the lusory goal with a lusory attitude seems to entail the acceptance of the possibility of being frustrated by the fact of defeat; in the face of this jam, the agent, as a gamer, cannot use his rational resources for maximizing his personal aims and wants. If he tries to use them, he abandons the lusory attitude and violates the game. Well, if he wants to continue playing the game fairly and honestly, he needs to shorten his reasoning abilities. He must accept that even if he does his best, it is possible that he may lose. He must accept that perhaps he does not become well succeeded, and not by chance. It's a difficult decision, unless he adopts a mere *ludic* attitude to games. In this case, it won't be a serious loss. He can play, for in a mere ludic adventure he is not playing for his own happiness, or with the fate being his personal success. After all, games are non-serious enterprises.

Johan Huizinga speaks of a "bewildering antithesis of play and seriousness" (Huizinga-

ga, 1949: 209). Games are aimed at essentially ludic goals, contrary to the seriousness of life. But, of course, for someone who lives life seriously and plays games just for fun, the contrast is not as disconcerting. The antithesis is only disconcerting when one imagines a person whose goal is to seriously bet his entire life in a zero-sum game. On the other hand, when you take your common life seriously and, in moments of leisure, plays in an uncompromising manner, all problems go away. The other scenario would be pure schizophrenia: to assign reality—seriousness—to what in fact is merely fantasy. But there is an onus on all that: games could never represent options of human realization. The playful element in culture would have to be an element entirely unattached to life. The burden is to live like Aesop's ants and only in fleeting moments enjoy the pleasure of experiencing the life of a cicada. Would that be an interesting form of life?

So adopting a serious attitude to games would be behaviorally bewildering. Suits seems to agree: “games”, he says, are “essentially different from the ordinary activities of life” (Suits, 1978: 39). Playing a game is the voluntary attempt to overcome *unnecessary* obstacles (Suits, 1978: 41). So, in games, individuals are not acting as “agents”, but only as “players”. Their decisions do not (and should not) affect their personal lives. In other words, in games we do not reason as agents and the players’ decisions are not *deliberations*—in a strict sense. If a player could evade himself from her lusory commitments and begin deliberating as an agent, winning would become a personal aim (in some sense, a *selfish* aim); in the end, if the agent takes that selfish goal seriously, either he will have to stop playing (if he realizes that his defeat is likely) or he’ll become a cheater. But, by cheating, the player would act on a prelusory goal with an *unlusory* attitude. This attitude, that is not his would be in itself unreasonable (at least not in subjective terms); but, by acting like that, he wouldn't be actually playing the game anymore. Thus, the only reasonable (and *coherent*) option he has got left is to simply stop playing. Hence, the only reasonable (and *coherent*) choice would be simply to stop playing.

Nonetheless, if one wants to compete, he cannot but assume that he can win or lose. So, Suits is possibly right in thinking that losing is not in contradiction with the lusory attitude, besides that “in losing a game, one has achieved something, even though one has not achieved victory” (Suits, 1978: 80-1); but the fact is that losing is, essentially, a not-succeeded act. And here is what is bewildering: having adopted the lusory attitude, and having assumed the lusory goal of winning the game as his personal aim, the defeated player has accomplished

his own aim in one sense, but in another he hasn't. And if all players play games for their best pleasure, this implies that the defeated player has the opposite of his best pleasure by undertaking the agreed common course of action. And since defeat is only pleasurable *in itself* for masochists, players always lose a bit in pleasure in being defeated.

The conclusion is, even though there is nothing paradoxical in playing games, the real issue is in taking games seriously. This is related to the problem of how games could offer real opportunities of personal realization to players. Games are mainly cooperative ventures. However, to win and to lose are not "cooperative" accomplishments. Success in competitive games cannot be *equally* distributed state of affairs. Well, games are pleasant; but maximum pleasure attainable by a player is winning, as well as the maximum displeasure lies in defeat. In other words, games are enjoyable; however, if we want to put games in the center of our lives, they become appalling and painful. These aspects are in fact necessary features of this type of cooperative enterprise.

Hence, being true that all games are cooperative enterprises, zero-sum games always finish with the success of only one player (if they do not end, of course, in a draw—by the way, ending a game in a draw is not to end the game successfully, unless it's a tournament and a draw is sufficient to win it), the "good" or "the best game" is something that cannot be equally distributed between the players. Accepting that happiness is related to the attainment of good achievements, a person devoted to games could reach a state of happiness only if he is well succeeded in the games he played. But since the player's happiness is only promoted by his victory, the happiness of one ever implies the misery of the others. When playing a game, a player always aims his own satisfaction, and as winning the game is his *lusory want*, all zero-sum games result in the frustration of the lusory wants or desires of the other player. It is not actually a practical paradox for each player considered in isolation; but it is paradoxical considering that games are also lusory cooperative enterprises that constitutively aim the satisfaction of players' lusory desires. How could the practice of games promote the happiness of its participants if its distribution always results in an iniquity?

If happiness is connected with desire satisfaction, playing a game cannot be the best way for promoting happiness. Unless the player's desire consists merely in playing the game, in deciding to play also for the sake of his victory, the player voluntarily puts himself in a predicament: if he wins the game, he gets what he wants; but if he loses, he ends with nothing (except again the fact that he actually played a game). If playing is to him an enterprise inti-

mately connected with his own happiness, the decision of playing a game becomes a serious bet of “all or nothing”: happiness or misery. It’s like betting our entire life in only one shot. It’s not an impossible match; but it is obviously insane. It would not be lucid, neither ludic; it would be rather ludicrous. The conclusion, then, is that it is not reasonable to take games seriously. This is why H. R. Smart was partially correct when he said that games are unessential activities and that “no game is of vital importance” (Smart, 1957). This is plausibly the reason why people normally play zero-sum games in leisure times: because in these situations their attitudes to games are truly *recreational*. The conclusion again is that it is wise not to take zero-sum games seriously.

But there is something misleading with this inference. For it is true that there are people that take games seriously. Sports are games and sports nowadays are serious matters for their practitioners. For them, especially for the sportsmen, they are serious enterprises. And it is not only because they make a living by practicing some sport. Sportsmen take their sport seriously because to them to be a sportsman is a way of living a good life. Sport for them is a *profession*, that is, an occupation ingrained with their identities and perhaps with their personal ideals. To them, to be a sportsman is a path to happiness. But how it could be possible since sportive games are zero-sum games? How sports and sportsmen can manage the issue of the internal predicament of those Grasshoperian closed-games?

2. On the distinction between games and sports

Before moving forward, let me establish a distinction that may brighten this issue. Up to this point, I had been focusing just on game. Those who have studied the subject unanimously associate game to fun, which leads us to play. But game and fun are not exactly the same thing. Many animals are able to have fun and play; but it's another thing to say they are also able to play games. Game may have even been an evolution of play. Maybe there are connections between games and agonistic activities, such as Huizinga used to think. But games are not mere adversarial ventures; much less do they reduce the practice of playing.

Let us first see the difference between play and games. Even though *Homo Ludens* is one of the richest sources on the topic, there is a fatal confusion between playing and games. In part, this confusion is magnified as a result of mistranslation, which is noticeable from the first chapter of this book. Huizinga, who was Dutch, wrote his book originally in his mother language, but it was soon translated into German. Now, in German, it is common to use "spie-

len" both for play as in a child's play and as in playing games. Huizinga deliberately misinterprets game as play and vice-versa, so much so that he states that even dogs keep to the rule that "You shall not bite, or not bite hard, your brother's ear." It is possible that dogs know the difference between "to play biting" and "actually biting", and it is reasonable to believe that this difference is in some sense a "normative" difference. But that does not mean that they are keeping to the rules of a game. So, when I say that a game is a ludic endeavor, what I'm saying is that one of the purposes of game is to entertain its players. There is, of course, a connection between play and game, in a way that games only serve playful purposes. More than that, it is possible that games are evolutions of their ludic "primitive" versions, that is, playing. But it does not follow that every game is a game (and neither is it evidence that animals are playing *games* when they play). Huizinga main focus is the playful element in culture. Reasonably, he points out that, in his way of thinking, "play is the direct opposite of seriousness". The reader will see that it is precisely for agreeing with Huizinga's idea that I will try to argue that it is only to the extent that game becomes an organized sport that they may become a possibility of human achievement. I suspect that Huizinga sees the problem under the directly opposite light. So much so that, when Huizinga comes to "the transition from occasional amusement to the system of organized clubs and matches" (Huizinga, 1949: 196), he notes that England was the birthplace and center of the "modern sports life", noting that since the last quarter of the 19th century that games, in the form of sports, have began being taken increasingly seriously, and then further highlight: "Now, with the increasing systematization and regimentation of sport, something of the pure play-quality is inevitably lost. We see this very clearly in the official distinction between amateurs and professionals (or "gentlemen and players" as used pointedly to be said)" (...). "The spirit of the professional is no longer the true play-spirit; it is lacking in spontaneity and carelessness" (Huizinga, 1949: 197). For my part, I suggest the hypothesis that, most likely, what has been lost has not been all that matter, maybe what has been lost is precisely what was expendable, and what's left has been enough for the progress from games to sports not to be compromised by the futility of the playful.

A further distinction is between game and sport. Children play and learn to play games. But younger children don't play sports, although sports are forms of games. Older children tend to practice sports, although that does not always mean they have become sportsmen. They learn sports in school, but usually in a ludic, playful way. In other words, they practice sports as a form of fun (and also as an instrument of learning). Thus, they tend to be initiated

in any sports, which occasionally can lead to interest in the practice of an individual sport and to their joining professional teams. The initiation ritual goes therefore through several phases. Through them, is possible that any child or teenager to end up a sportsman.

What I want to advocate for—and again I tell you in advance that I suspect it might be a little controversial—is that sports, *stricto sensu*, are not mere games. Sports are activities practiced by sportsmen. It is customary to understand sports as physical dispute activities, represented by sportive games (single or collective) as well as by athletics. What I suggest methodologically beyond that also follows this general idea: If we want to know what is medicine, let's see what doctors do (so, do not confuse medical science and other forms of use of medical knowledge with the practice of medicine; in addition to laymen, medical students and scientists in general are not doctors). Another example: If you want to know what is advocacy, let's see what lawyers do (let's not mistake advocacy for other legal activities, even with people who have just graduated law school). The same, I think, should apply to sports. If you want to know what is sport in strict terms, let's see what the people who practice it, sportsmen, do.

Let's see, then, what we should understand for current sportsmanship. Let me take an example from swimming. In September 3, 2008, FINA Doping Panel (Federation Internationale de Natation) concluded that Brazilian swimmer Rebeca Gusmão, affiliated to the Brazilian Swimming Federation, committed a serious violation of the anti-doping legislation. The FINA Doping Panel banned Gusmão for life ("ineligible for lifetime") due to tampering. Banishment is the harsher punishment any athlete can suffer. In November 13 of the same year, CAS (the Court of Arbitration for Sport) confirmed Fina's decision, and newspapers were all around sporting headlines saying: "Rebeca was banned from the sport".

Gusmão actually continued practicing sports, just not swimming. After the punishment, Gusmão practiced Futsal and bench press, and she even competed in both. In a recent interview, Gusmão did not hide her pain and resentment by the sports court ruling: "I miss workouts and routine; my dreams were destroyed".¹

Rebeca Gusmão wasn't the only athlete punished with banishment, but up to this day there were only a few so severely punished. There are many minor punishments. In football, banning is rare, but suspensions are common for small or medium periods. The interesting

¹ News seen at: <http://extra.globo.com/esporte/banida-da-natacao-por-doping-Gusmao-gusmaocritica--processo-de-cesar-cielo-2580773.html>. Access in April 20, 2014.

thing is that administrative punishments, including banishment, can be used not only with athletes, but with administrators, managers and people professionally connected to the sport. It seems to me that a good explanation to this fact is that sport, in a broad, but empirically accurate sense, is not only a game practiced by players and athletes, but also a social practice that involves the activity of those who somewhat support it.

In the case of Gusmão, the decision prevents her from competing officially as a swimmer. It does not prevent her from using swimming pools ever again, obviously. She can do physical activities and even practice swimming (but no longer with the goal of perfecting herself as an athlete in official competitions). She can even test her skills by competing with acquaintances. Just as a doctor severely punished with disbarment from his professional registry is excluded from the medical profession, if we take Gusmão's banishment seriously, we should conclude that the athlete, by virtue of this determination, no longer practices *the sport of swimming*.

That statement may seem paradoxical, because Gusmão can, obviously, use swimming pools; she can swim... If she wants. What she cannot do is taking part in official competitions. But that's all it takes to say she is no longer a *swimmer*. She can practice swimming as in the physical activity, and can do so because she likes to swim, or because she wants to keep herself in shape, or want to keep healthy. She can keep swimming in order to maintain an active lifestyle, and having a non-sedentary lifestyle is, after all, a goal with intrinsic value (Kretchmar, 2005: 235). Swimming for fun also has an intrinsic value (we saw above that having fun is sought after for its own value). Nevertheless, this experience, be it physical or playful, will always be perceived by Gusmão as less pleasurable than participating in an official competition. The maximum pleasure she can obtain by swimming in a pool are sporadic moments of pleasure and fun, and the only non-instrumental, lengthened satisfaction she can obtain is to keep herself active. However, it is not enough to say that swimming is, for Gusmão, an activity that can still provide her with personal realization and happiness. On the contrary, it is very likely that, even when she's swimming, Gusmão feels unhappy. To have the lifestyle of a swimmer represented something extremely serious and important to her. Having been banned from swimming was certainly something akin to a mortal wound for her; like a death penalty.

Note nonetheless, that happiness and personal fulfillment may not be equivalent concepts. I will not go deeper into this subject. This is one of Daniel Haybron's main claims in his marvelous book *The pursuit of unhappiness* (Haybron, 2008). But the distinction is not rele-

vant to the purpose of my arguments. See, for example, this quote from the book of Haybron: "We ought not to live in conflict with our natures, or at least the aspect of the self involving happiness, without good reason (e.g., a weighty moral reason). If this is correct, then happiness is, in an important sense, an objective good: it is good whether one values it, or would value it given all the facts etc., or not." (Haybron, 2008: 180). What Haybron is emphasizing is that our goal of self realization is not something we can simply "choose", for they are always depending on how we are, where do we live and how have we been living so far, etc. That's why the banning from sportsmanship is a radical punishment for Gusmão. She can't just choose to practice another sport without radically changing something in herself, or without experiencing some frustration. That makes sport different from game and play, too. Any person can experience the feeling of playing a game for the first time or again. But this is different in the case of sports. The connection between sport and that which provides meaning to one's life is intense.

Since happiness is associated with the satisfaction of our desires, and if happiness is, as almost all philosophers say it since Plato and Aristotle, of all the most desirable good, playing and playing games cannot be proper ways to promote happiness. If one abandons a game, it has no significant effects in the destination of one's life. So to decide upon playing a game could not have severe consequences, as we've seen. If play were a closely associated endeavor intimately associated to one's own happiness, the decision to play a competitive game would be like one of those "all or nothing" bets: happiness or misery? It would be like betting your whole life in a single shot. It would be like a Pascalian wager! Not that that isn't possible to do; but it would certainly be insane. Wouldn't be lucid, not even playful; it just would be absurd! That is why abandoning a game also has no serious consequences. Harold Smart was hence partially correct when he said games are unnecessary activities and that "no game is of vital importance" (but he could have said: "games must not have any vital importance!") (Smart, 1957). This is plausibly the reason why people play zero-sum games in moments of leisure. For it is only in such moments that these activities can have a recreational character.

But there's something misleading in this inference. Because it is clear that people take games seriously. That's exactly what occurs in the case of sports. Sports are important developments for sportsmen. For an athlete, as we seen above, sport has vital importance. Gusmão is living proof of that. Be it right or wrong, the decision to ban Gusmão from professionally

swimming wounded her deeply, no doubt of that. And not just because sport is for its practitioners a means of earning a living—as is the case not only of professional sportspeople, but also, in fact, many "amateurs". Sportsmen take their sports seriously because being a sportsman is to cultivate a lifestyle and a special way to live life. Sport has become for its practitioners something very similar to a profession, i.e., it is an occupation (exerted by means of a specific technical domain) embedded in its identities, something closely tailored to its ideals. For them, being a sportsman is a path to happiness and personal fulfillment. But how is it possible for the practice of zero-sum sports games to provide it? After all, zero-sum games, and we've seen it clearly, cannot be taken seriously; otherwise the people who do it would go nuts. How do sports and sportsmen deal with such an embarrassing situation?

3. Professionalism, perfectionism and human achievement

One could think that what makes professional sports different from games or sports played without any professional interest is that in being professionals sportsmen are able to get other aims besides the "autotelic", that is, the constitutive aims of the game as such (Suits, 1988). Aurel Kolnai defines an autotelic activity as any activity practiced in order not to get something different than the achievement of the activity itself. So autotelic activities are practiced not as "a means to something else, but as aims in its own right in some people's lives, actualized into a 'here and now' autonomous aim at times" (Kolnai, 1965-6: 113). Kolnai contrasts *autotelic* with *heterotelic* activities. These activities are, if not always, at least nearly always, "merely instrumental or almost so", that is, they are not enjoyed or appreciated in themselves. His example is taking analgesic (medications). We do not take medications because we enjoy taking them. Medications are taken in order to get some medical aim, an aim that subordinates completely the heterotelic activity. These integrated activities (medicine is an example) have an "orthotelic" structure, so that an autotelic aim subordinates other aims that are merely instrumental, that is, heterotelic (Kolnai, 1965-6: 113). Some activities, says Kolnai, are also *syntelic*, in that they are "ordained to several independent—though, very possibly, somehow mutually consonant—aims" (Kolnai, idem ibidem). One example is when a person gets a job not only in order to attain its autotelic aims, but also to have friends, an accomplishment that is not usually in tension with the autotelic aims of her job. Nevertheless, games have paradoxical aims. The paradox of games consists, according to Kolnai, in that the aim to play a game and the aim to win the same game does not conform to a syntelic, neither

to an orthotelic unity. Nevertheless, playing and winning are intimately connected, since albeit it is possible to play a game without winning it, it is impossible to win a game without playing it. Albeit playing seems to be instrumental to winning, winning is not instrumental to playing. Nevertheless, playing is an autotelic but not a heterotelic activity—Kolnai in fact concludes that the relationship of playing a game and aiming to win is of a kind he entitled "paratelic", that is, aiming the game is an internal aim autonomously "implicated" by the "primary aim" of playing the game (Kolnai, 1965-6: 116).

Paratelic relationships of different aims are seen in different serious activities. Debates in lawsuits and trials are an example offered by Kolnai. Political debates seem several times to mimicry the paratelic relationship of playing and winning we see in competitive games. However, it is remarkable that these paratelic relations seem less paradoxical how much more serious the activity is. See the example of academic activities. Teaching is for the teacher (and this seems to be the case especially in philosophy) a means of earning a living, but it is also an enjoyable activity (which cannot be compared with taking a bitter analgesic); likewise, intellectual clashes may resemble competitions, although the seriousness involved in the activity represents an obstacle to describe academic discussions as equivalent to mere ludic encounters. The fact that sports are less friendly enterprises compared with their amateur siblings is not conclusive to state, as did Suits, that sports are not autotelic activities. Maybe they are not, but this does not imply that they are "instrumental". So I suggest that Kolnai is right in saying that sports are paratelic rather than "instrumental" or "heterotelic" activities. My amendment is that professional games turn those paratelic relationships of playing a game and winning productive and meaningful for all involved in the practice—even if we assume, following Suits, that in a competition sportsmen are not anymore literally *playing* a game (Suits, 1988: 9).²

Professional sports, hence, are not the mere resultant of adding to the internal aim of

² In *The Grasshopper* (1978), Suits introduced the idea that the professional sportsmen are not playing. There he said that amateurs are those "for whom playing the game is an end in itself, and by professionals I mean those who have in view some further purpose which is achievable by playing the game" (1988: 143). But since Suits account of the lusory attitude accepts that such an attitude can be associated with other reasons a player may have for playing a game—and therefore for accepting the rules of the game—without that attitude somehow being destroyed or contaminated by such an association" (1988: 144), it is possible to say that sportsmen continue to play the game in their professional activity. So Suits argue that he is not "committed to the position that playing a game for some further purpose somehow falsifies the proposition that a game is really being played." Albeit this seems to contradict his clarifications made in the lecture done in 1988, I think this is a more plausible idea. What I claim, however, is that one basic purpose (that is not personal, it is a constitutive reason of sports) of transforming games into professional sportive practices is exactly to offer the opportunity to practitioners of taking their games seriously.

playing a game the instrumental extra-goal of earning a salary or a living. Suits seems to recognize that, when he asserts that the word 'professional' is too narrow to convey what is conveyed by the words 'work', 'serious' and 'instrumental'. But he conflates amateur aims with the autotelic aims when he suggests to substitute the word 'amateur' by 'autotelic', understood, following Kolnai, as "an event or activity valued for itself" (Suits 1988, 8). Suits seems to imply that what makes a professional activity essentially different from an amateur is only the instrumental aims of professionals; coherently, he suggests also to substitute the word 'professional' by 'instrumental', since instrumental activities or events are valued not only or primarily for itself but for "some further payoff that the event or activity is expected to provide" (one example is the salary). So, in his example of Olympic games, Suits concludes that athletes do not have as their primary aim to play the game, but "getting the Gold, either for themselves or for their homelands". Suits also concludes that this is the reason why doping were crept in the Olympics. Nevertheless, to get the Gold is not exactly an external prize for winning the game. Getting the Gold is not like getting money by means of the activity; an athlete can get her salary without getting any medal. In competitive games, winning is, as Kolnai remarked, also an internal aim; and the medal symbolizes the success in accomplishing it. So, in Olympic Games, all athletes have as an internal aim to overcome their competitors; this is the same with amateur competitions or pure Grasshoperian autotelic activities (if they are competitive games). But professional activities are not valued only because they promise to sportsmen opportunities to get instrumental aims besides the pure autotelic aim of playing. Even a player of an autotelic amateurish activity can have instrumental aims in mind; for example, amateurs can practice a sport in order to be healthier, or in order to get friends, or even simply for fun. Some amateurs can even get a wage sufficient for a living. So I claim that what makes professional sports a different and valuable activity is not the instrumental aims they make possible; it is the opportunity to transform games with their paratelic aims in ways not just to make a living, but in ways of taking life activities seriously and meaningfully.

So, my conclusion is that Suits' definitions of game and sport do not capture an important attribute of those kinds of activities we presently call "sports". The reason for this omission is perhaps that Suits' main point was not exactly the social practice that involves play, but rather the pure activity of play. Another reason is that not all games are concrete social practices. People may make up games, and these made up games can just disappear after the first time they are played. Thus, the transformation of a game into a social practice is not part of

the definition of game (for games that do not become practices are still games). In a way, some games become stable practices with time. In this case, the rules of a game become conventional and, with that, the practice of game ends up taking the course of a tradition.

For a stable social practice, I understand something like MacIntyre's description (MacIntyre, 2007). In MacIntyre's terms, a *practice* involves standards of excellence and obedience to rules, beyond the reach of goods. To join a practice involves accepting the authority of these patterns and the inadequacy of one's own performance as judged by them. It is to subject one's own attitudes, choices, preferences and tastes that fluently and partly define the practice. MacIntyre includes games in his list of practices: "[The] range of practices is wide: Arts, Sciences, games and politics (in Aristotle's sense), the generating and sustaining of family life, all fall under the concept" (MacIntyre, 2007: 188). MacIntyre also proposed the distinction between the practice and its institutions. Science is a practice; the University is an institution. A game is a practice; a Club, the institution that provides the conditions for their implementation. But games and sports are different "practices". I believe that the definition of MacIntyre is incomplete and misleading. Games, for example, are not practices (yet); they are only *activities*. Sports, by its turn, are practices, or better, institutionalized practices (that is, practices embedded and protected by social institutions). The lack of this distinction led MacIntyre to view the possibility of calling certain activities "practices" under a pessimistic light, as remarked by Geoff Moore (Moore, 2002).

This phenomenon of the transformation of a game into a social practice deserves adequate empirical genealogy (this is an empirical issue belonging to the fields of sociology or anthropology; it is not my business, as a philosopher). This transformation, however, is of utmost importance. It wouldn't make any sense to ask ourselves about the morality of games without recognizing that such games developed themselves by taking the final form of stable social practices. My suspicion, though, is that the remedy forged by the evolution of culture for the practical non-viability of taking games seriously lies in this social alchemy.

Sports can solve the difficulty in to adopt a posture of seriousness in games. Being institutionalized practices, sports offer to players persistent possibilities to overcome their opponents. For, even though sports are zero-sum competitions, its institutionalization allows for positive-sum outcomes. This is mainly due to the organization of games in tournaments and championships, with players and clubs in stratified in levels (according to age, gender, and degree of professionalism). This form of organization allows, first, that the practice of sport

does not get extinguished after a single match, and, second, that the competitions can be repeated indefinitely, periodically redistributing the opportunities of success. With that, everyone ends up having expanded opportunities for victory. Competitions will never cease to exist by the end of matches, not even by the end of tournaments. Nowadays, sports are activities run by leagues and federations, which allows players and rival teams to have a lasting and profitable occupation. With this arrangement, no athlete and no team represents impediment to success. Involved safely and lastingly with the practice of a sport, sportsmen and women develop their skills on a continuous basis, accumulating positive results, although also some failures. But what was once just a zero-sum game, now is a social practice in which the competitions promote positive sums.

This explains how sports became real possibilities to lead a meaningful life. By being institutionalized, sports become sensible alternatives to human achievement. It should be noted, however, that this possibility is plausible only if their social existence is antecedent to the choice of individuals. You can't fake a social practice overnight. Also, the kind of life that consists of being a sportsman cannot be something merely invented by the player (as one may make games up). For someone to be able to identify with some way of life, it is necessary that the practice that gives existence and support is equipped with a previously recognized social value.

William Morgan is the one who emphasized the emergence of the social value of sport (adapting the vision of Joseph Raz about the emergence of values and its dependence on the practices) stating that when we make practices such as sport, we incorporate values, and these values come into dispute with other values that go around in a given culture (Morgan, 2006; Raz, 2003). "Before long", Morgan goes on to say, "they assume a sacred place in this culture and thus become revered by a broad segment of its members. When we get to that point, such sporting values acquire a social, political and moral valence that they weren't getting previously, according to their newfound importance" (Morgan, 2006: 205).

I agree with Morgan, but there is something missing in his genealogical description. It is true that sports would have never achieved the importance they have in our current societies unless they hadn't become stable social practices (Morgan is certainly correct in emphasizing that); but they also would have never become stable practices without being socially *institutionalized*. The social sustainability of the sportive practice depends in a large part of its institutionalization. And this institutionalization, in the case of sport, expands the universe of in-

volved agents.

Norbert Elias was the one who famously called drew attention to the phenomenon called "desportivization", the passage of sport as hobby to sport itself—a phenomenon that would have occurred first, albeit not astonishingly, in England and then spread around the world (as Huizinga highlighted) (Elias & Dunning, 1986). Elias recognizes sport as competitive games involving physical exertion, being, however, "highly regulated". Ahead, Elias goes on to highlight that what historically distinguished the fun endeavors that began to assume the character of "sport" was the fact that they became regulated "beyond the local level", by "free federations" (initially, the "clubs"). As remarked, my task here is not sociological. My argument seeks to emphasize the ethical positive consequences of that which seems empirically evident: that what we now call sports differs from what Suits and Huizinga originally understood by "game", notably by the fact that they are widely institutionalized social practices.

Let's look at the case of football. Participants in a game of football (we could call them direct participants) are the players (divided into two teams) and the referees. Besides them, there are technicians, assistants, doctors and managers. What about the fans? If you look at the constitutive rules of the game, however, they only regard the first two types of agents. Fans do not participate in the game—and in fact there is no mention of them in the rules. However, nowadays, anyone admits that the crowd (the "local factor") exerts decisive influence in the match. Therefore, fans also take part in the match, albeit in an "indirect" way, so to speak. But there are other agents that have a less "indirect" participation. Certainly, technicians have a somewhat direct role in game. In addition, teams are organized by clubs. Clubs have members and managers. Matches are usually part of tournaments and championships organized by leagues and federations. Arbitrators are chosen by institutions responsible for refereeing the games. There are regional, national and international leagues. There are official organizations involved. And the disputes can also end up being taken at sports courts, and also to actual courts. Sports have a public dimension, unlike the typically private dimension of merely ludic practices.

In the case of sports such as football, there is also the involvement of journalists and press organs. Sports occupy nowadays a significant part of the media. There are products and brand trades and every form of financial investment in athletes, from beginning to renowned ones. Everything somehow is part of what we nowadays understand by football. "Football" is therefore still, on one side, only a game; but the same word designates an institutionalized so-

cial practice of indefinite contours, in which a wide variety of social agents are involved. The passage of a game to organized sport is, therefore, a sociological phenomenon with quite intricate human connections. But the center of this phenomenon lies in the social practice of sport by its main agents: the sportsmen. And the type of transition that interests me here is the one from the playful activity of players to this modern form of professional or semiprofessional activity represented in modern sports, among which football is one of the most typical examples.

Sport means thus something more than the way of life, highlighted by Morgan, aimed at the development of moral perfectionist qualities. The perfectionist model devised by Morgan still holds the exaltation of amateurism. The relevant fact is that, nowadays, sports are widely professionalized; even the so-called "amateur" sports are somehow professionalized or in the process of professionalization. For example, college sports in the United States, United Kingdom and Australia have, in recent decades, turned into professional or semi-professional occupations. Ronald Smith is one of the people who have highlighted this phenomenon. Until the mid-19th century, says Smith, between the British, the word 'amateur' was used with positive value, as opposed to 'professional'. "Amateur" meant good and high; "professional", bad and degraded" (Smith, 1998). But he points out that this was the result of Victorian elitism. David Young points out even more emphatically that the exaltation of amateurism in sports among the ancient Greeks derives from a myth (Young, 1985). According to Young, in the heart of amateurism is the biased exclusion of rich Victorian English people against poor workers. There are no evidences in favor of amateurs having or having not been more virtuous than professionals. There are, however, indications that professionalism proved itself to be fairer and less elitist than amateur sports practices (such as those who characterized sporting amateurism in the Victorian period) (Smith 1998). Regarding the moral perfectionism advocated by Morgan, the relevant fact is that in order to achieve excellence, the professional model has proven itself far superior to the amateur model (Smith, 1998).

However, it can be misleading to classify the occupation of sportsmen as a professional occupation. Not all occupations are professions. Eliot Freidson famously called "professions" only those occupations that exert a legal monopoly over their practice, acquiring a position of status from the ruling elites; professional powers differ from the legal licenses legally granted to other occupations that are partially or completely subordinated to the authority of professions (Freidson, 1980). However, sports, to the extent that they become institutionalized

practices, also acquire some of the qualities of these traditional professions (such as medicine, magistracy, teaching, among others). For practicing sports is something more than the performance of certain perfectionist traits; it also involves the performance of behavior skills pertaining to social practices exercised in community albeit legally regulated. In addition, sportsmanship involves not only identifying with the game—thus causing what Suits called *lusory attitude*—, but also identifying with the social practice itself. As with professionals (see the example of medicine), sportsmen also defend and protect the virtues of their sport, and organize themselves for that. The preoccupation in taking care of sport involves care with the role of the sportsman himself, a social role protected by independent institutions, but also by specific, national and international laws. With that, modern sports have become practices with a legally protected "positive morality" (making free usage of concepts introduced by John Austin (Austin, 2001 [1832]) in the 19th century). Seems quite plausible to sustain, with that, that sportsmanship took over important traits of professionalism that are characteristic of occupations that Freidson described as typical of closed occupations, occupations whose members wield monopoly on the exercise of a technique. There is, of course, a significant difference between professions and the sportsmen activity, since it is not athletes and players who exert control and power over their own activity, but sport-related managers and/or connected somehow to the institutions that support it (such as clubs or sponsors). This difference should deserve attention from sociologists, since it differs significantly from what occurs with professions. In fact, one of the main subjects studied by Freidson concern the advantages and disadvantages of the existence of professions in free societies (see, for example, part IV of his book). By comparison, in the case of sports, sportsmen don't have the same dominance over the normativity of their practice as compared with the domain that doctors, lawyers and magistrates have of their own occupation. Someone could even quickly infer that in sports there is greater participation and "external control" than in those professions. But this conclusion is plausibly misleading. To say that, in sports, there is more external participation than in traditional professions would be to neglect the fact that the influences and decisions in the sports world are now under the control of institutions and their agents, not exactly under the public domain, the fans, or even of members of participating clubs.

But what matters to point out here above all is the difference made to sportsmen by the fact that their activity is socially institutionalized. Maybe that makes a difference to the public too. The fact that sports are perfectionist activities has a connection to the theme of personal

achievement and the pursuit of happiness; but there would be no search for perfectionism if the sports activity were to be reduced to just a playful activity. Sports are perfectionist practices; and perfectionism and seriousness go hand in hand. However, as the playful practice of games cannot and should not be taken seriously, it takes another form of human practice to give seriousness to perfectionism linked to sports.

No wonder, therefore, that sports professionalism has become the perfectionist model for contemporary sports. Football is one of the best examples. No amateur football player is remembered as a model by professionals; as well known, nowadays, what occurs is exactly the opposite. And there's no reason to have missed any time (or mythical story) in which amateur or recreational activities practitioners were idolized. What we must recognize, anyway, is that without the emergence of professionalization, sports games could never have become real options, and loved ones, of personal achievement and for the pursuit of happiness.

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