



Philosophy: Fun & Games

2021-2022

Course Organiser: Michael Ridge; mridge@ed.ac.uk

Delivery information for this course will be posted on LEARN.

Th. 2-3:50

Lister Learning and Teaching Centre 3.2

Communication

Students are responsible for checking their University email and the LEARN page for this course regularly (at least once per week) so that they do not miss any important announcements for the course.

Course Aims and Objectives

This course investigates the philosophy of play, sport and games. Games are philosophically interesting in part because they manifest something important and distinctive about human nature. While other creatures engage in play, human beings are perhaps the only game-playing creatures. Indeed, playing games is plausibly an important part of the good life for creatures like us, and some have argued games would be the only fundamental source of value in Utopia. Moreover, games plausibly are constituted by norms and aims in a way that has made them an attractive model for numerous other philosophically vexatious phenomena which also seem somehow to be constituted by norms and aims – meaning in natural language, morality and beauty, for example, have all been analysed via an analogy with games. In this course we will investigate the concept of a game, the concept of play and the relationship between these concepts, as well as the relationship between games and sport. We also investigate the value of play and games, and the way they figure in a good life as well as their possible role in Utopia. Finally, we will investigate the concept of “gamification” and investigate the benefits and dangers of various forms of gamification.

A core text for the course is Bernard Suits’ underappreciated masterpiece, *The Grasshopper*. Written in the style of a Socratic dialogue, *The Grasshopper* attempts to turn the classic Aesop’s Fable of the ant and the grasshopper on its head. The dialogue opens with the Death of the Grasshopper, in which the Grasshopper is surrounded by his followers and explains why his ideas are worth dying for, and why the life of the ant is so deeply misguided – even paradoxical. The analogy with Plato’s *The Crito* is unmistakable, and very well done. Indeed, *The Grasshopper* is a masterpiece not only in terms of its philosophical content, but in terms of its literary style.

Suits engages directly with Wittgenstein's thesis that 'game' cannot be defined. Wittgenstein admonishes us not to just assume there must be some definition in the offing but to look and see. Suits takes him at his word and looks more carefully than Wittgenstein himself seems to have done. He systematically develops and defends his definition of 'game' against a battery of objections from his interlocutors. He then explains why the life of the Grasshopper, which consists in playing games rather than working, is superior to the life of the ant. The dialogue concludes with some discussion of Utopia, in which the Grasshopper argues that the playing of games is a kind of master value for human beings which would play a central structuring role in Utopia.

Against the backdrop of Suits' work, which is a foil for many of the other readings for the course, we will investigate the following questions (among others):

- Is life a game we are playing?
- Is 'game' a family resemblance word?
- Can 'game' and 'play a game' be reductively defined?
- Can 'play' be reductively defined?
- Is work incompatible with play?
- What interesting relationships hold between play (full-stop) and playing a game?
- What (if anything) is the opposite of play?
- Is it possible to cheat at a given game while still playing that game?
- What makes a game a good one?
- Are games well understood in terms of their functions?
- Is the set of all sports a proper subset of the set of all games? (in other words, are all sports also games?)
- Can 'sport' be reductively defined, and if so, how?
- What is the role of games in a good life?
- What is the role of games in Utopia?
- What is gamification?
- Does gamification encourage an oversimplified value theory?
- Is using gamification to "nudge" oneself to do the morally right thing incompatible with acting with moral worth?
- Is gamification an appropriate and useful tool for enhancing romantic relationships?

Intended learning outcomes:

By the end of this course students should:

- Have a grasp of fundamental issues in the philosophy of games and play.
- Be able to critically analyse and engage with literature by key philosophers in this field.
- Be able to present arguments clearly and concisely both within a classroom context and in a written essay.
- Gain transferrable skills in research, analysis and argumentation.

Outline of Topics:

Week 1	Introduction to the Course and “Is Life a Game We are Playing?”
Week 2	Family Resemblance Expressions
Week 3	<i>The Grasshopper</i> , Part One
Week 4	<i>The Grasshopper</i> , Part Two
Week 5	Work, Play and Games
Week 6	Games and Commitments
Week 7	Games, Play and Sports
Week 8	Competition and Cooperation
Week 9	Games and the Good
Week 10	Gamification, Part One
Week 11	Gamification, Part Two

Readings:

The core texts for the course are Bernard Suits, *The Grasshopper*, Broadview Press, 2005 (originally published in 1978) and Tom Hurka (ed.), *Games, Sports, and Play* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019). These are available from Blackwell’s among other places. Hurka’s book is somewhat expensive in paper form, but you can access it for free through the University’s online subscription to *Oxford Scholarship Online* [which you can find through the “databases” page]. We will also draw on chapters from Jane McGonigal’s *Reality is Broken* which is available from the Library’s Short Loan desk and is also available for purchase at Blackwell’s and various other venues.

The other materials, primarily journal articles, are available online through JSTOR or the library’s collection of ejournals and ebooks. In some cases, readings are provided online through the dedicated webpage for this course on LEARN – this is noted below.

Week 1: Introduction to the Course: Is Life a Game We are Playing?

- Bernard Suits, “Is Life a Game We are Playing?” *Ethics*, 1967: 209-213 [JSTOR].
- Recommended: “Play and Games: An Opinionated Introduction.” Michael Ridge, *Philosophy Compass*. 2019. [Available through University ejournal collection]: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/phc3.12573>

Week 2: Family Resemblance Expressions

- Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, sections 66-71 (available online)
- Heather Gert, “Alternative Analyses,” *Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 1995: 31-37 (https://libres.uncg.edu/ir/uncg/f/H_Gert_Alternative_1995.pdf)
- Michael Pelczar, “Wittgensteinian Semantics,” *Nous*, 34: 483-516 [JSTOR]

Week 3: The Grasshopper, Part One: Defending a Definition

- Bernard Suits, *The Grasshopper*. Chapters 1-8.
- Tom Hurka, “Suits on Games: Slightly Revised, Slightly Restricted.” In Hurka (Ed.). *Games, Sports and Play*: 13-32. [Oxford Scholarship Online]

Week 4: *The Grasshopper*, Part Two: Open Games and Utopia

- Bernard Suits, *The Grasshopper*. Chapters 9-15.
- Bernard Suits, “Return of the Grasshopper: Games and the End of the Future.” (Abridged). In Hurka (Ed.). *Games, Sports and Play*: pp. 194-230 [Oxford Scholarship Online].
- Avery Kolers, “The Grasshopper’s Error or How Life is a Game we are playing.” (https://www.academia.edu/401242/The_Grasshoppers_Error_or_On_How_Life_is_a_Game) (also on LEARN)
- Supplemental video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6dnjq7QPzGA>
- [optional] “Are There Really Games in Utopia?” Ersapmer and Ridge, *Analysis*. 2021.

Week 5: Work, Play and Games

- Richard, Burke, “‘Work’ and ‘Play’,” *Ethics*, 1971, vol. 82: 33-47 [JSTOR]
- Bernard Suits, “Words on Play,” *Journal of the Philosophy Sport*, 1977, vol. 4: 117-131 [University of Edinburgh e-journal].
- Michael Ridge, “Why So Serious? The Nature and Value of Play” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*. 2021.
- Michael Ridge, “Individuating Games” *Synthese*. 2020.

Week 6: Cheaters, Triflers and Commitments

- A.J. Kreider, “Game Playing Without Rule-Following,” *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*, 38: 55-73 [ejournal].
- Richard Royce, “Game Players and Game-Playing: a response to Kreider,” *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*, 201 [ejournal].
- “The Ethos of Games,” Fred D’Agostino, *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*, 1981, pp. 7-18 [ejournal]
- “How to Play Well with Others,” Michael Ridge. In Hurka (Ed.). *Games, Sports and Play*: pp. 74-98. [Oxford Scholarship Online]

Week 7: Games, Play and Sports

- Bernard Suits, “Tricky Triad: Games, Play and Sport.” *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*. 1989: 1-9. [ejournal]
- Tom Hurka, “On Judged Sports,” *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*. 2015: 317-325.
- “Sport as a Thick Cluster Concept.” Mitchell Berman. In Hurka (Ed.). *Games, Sports and Play*: pp. 99-121. [Oxford Scholarship Online]
- “The Nature and Value of Sport.” David Papineau. In Hurka (Ed.). *Games, Sports and Play*: pp. 12-137. [Oxford Scholarship Online]

Week 8: Competition and Cooperation

- Thi Nguyen, “Cooperation as Competition,” *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* ; this paper is also available here: [file:///C:/Users/Michael/Downloads/Competition_as_Cooperation%20\(3\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/Michael/Downloads/Competition_as_Cooperation%20(3).pdf)
- Michael Ridge, “Illusory Attitudes and the Playful Stoic,” *Philosophical Studies*. 2021.
- Supplemental video [5 minutes]: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e50yA4mXaT8>

Week 9: Games and the Good

- Thomas Hurka and John Tasioulas, “Games and the Good,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*: 2006 [JSTOR]
- Michael Ridge, “Games and the Good Life.” *Journal of Ethics and Social Philosophy*. 2021.
- Recommended: Thi Nguyen, “Philosophy of Games,” *Philosophy Compass*. 2017. [available through library ejournal collection]: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/phc3.12426>

Week 10: Gamification, Part One

- McGonigal, J. *Reality is Broken* Vintage Books. 2011: Introduction [pp. 1-19], Chapter 2 [pp. 35-51] and Chapter 7 [pp. 119-145].
- Nguyen, “Gamification and Value Capture,” Chapter 9 of Nguyen’s *Games: Agency As Art* [on Oxford Scholarship Online]
- Ridge, M. “The Value of Value Capture.” 2021. *Journal of the Philosophy of Games*. <https://journals.uio.no/JPG/article/view/8760>
- “Playing the Good Life: Gamification and Ethics,” Miguel Sicart in *The Gameful World* Walz and Deterding (eds.) MIT Press, 2014: pp. 225-244. [available online through MIT Press Online in University Library’s online collection]
- Recommended: McGonigal’s Ted Talk: https://www.ted.com/talks/jane_mcgonigal_gaming_can_make_a_better_world?language=en

Week 11: Gamification, Part Two

- “Gamification and Post-Fordist Capitalism.” P.J. Rey, in *The Gameful World* Walz and Deterding (eds.) MIT Press, 2014: pp. 277-296 [available online through MIT Press Online in University Library’s online collection]
- “Gamification of Labor and the Charge of Exploitation” Tae Wan Kim, *Journal of Business Ethics*. 2018: pp. 27-39. [University’s ejournal collection]
- “The Quantified Relationship.” Danaher, et. al. in *American Journal of Bioethics*. 2018: 3-19. [available through the University’s online ejournal collection]
- “Relational Autonomy and the Quantified Relationship.” Martens and Brown, in *American Journal of Bioethics*. 2018: 39-40. [available through the University’s online ejournal collection]
- “I, My Love, and Apps.” Klugman, in *American Journal of Bioethics*. 2018: 1-2. [available through the University’s online ejournal collection]

- “Swiping Left on the Quantified Relationship.” Frank and Klincewicz, in *American Journal of Bioethics*. 2018: 1-2. [available through the University’s online ejournal collection], pp. 27-28.
- Kreitmair, “Phenomenological Considerations of Sex Tracking Technology,” *American Journal of Bioethics*. 2018: 31-33. [available through the University’s online ejournal collection]
- Hull, G. “The Politics of Quantified Relationships,” in *American Journal of Bioethics*. 2018: 29-30. [available through the University’s online ejournal collection]

Assessment Structure

Assessment is via a mid-term 1500-word essay worth 45% due on 21 October, by 12pm, and a final 2500-word essay worth 55% due on 9 December by 12pm. Suggested essay topics are listed below.

Alternative topics can be arranged, but they **must** have the approval of the course organizer at least one week before the essay is due.

Senior Honours students may opt to write a long essay (5000 words) in lieu of the above, as part of their dissertation requirement in Philosophy. The title must be arranged with the instructor. You must notify the Teaching Office which course you will be completing the dissertation on by 18 October by noon. You should agree a title with your supervisor (me) by then as well. The dissertation itself is due (submitted to the Teaching office) by 14 December by noon.

Feedback on all assessed work will be provided within 3 weeks, unless otherwise notified by email.

Suggested Essay topics:

Listed below are recommended essay topics. Students may, *with my explicit permission*, work on other topics, though they must be appropriately related to the content of the course. If you intend to propose an alternative topic, then please discuss it with me well in advance of the due date so that it can be agreed before you start working on it if it is an acceptable topic. Alternative topics must be agreed *at least* one week before the essays are due.

Topics for essay 1:

- Is life a game we are playing?
- Can ‘game’ be defined? If so what is the most plausible definition? Be sure to discuss why this question might matter to broader philosophical debates.
- Can ‘play’ qua play full-stop be defined? If so, what is the most plausible definition?
- Is it possible to give a unified semantics for ‘play’ when used as a transitive verb – one that will cover the wide range of objects ‘play’ can take? Note that *systematic* context-sensitivity is one form a unified semantics could take.
- Does ‘playing a game’ entail ‘playing’ (full-stop)?
- Does ‘play’ have an opposite and if so what is it?

- Is ‘game’ a family resemblance word?
- How should we understand the individuation of games?
- Can the phrase ‘play a game’ be given a plausible *compositional* semantics? What would the most plausible attempt look like and is it defensible?
- Is ‘play’ a family resemblance word?
- Could there be a game with no goal or with no rules?
- Does game playing play a privileged role in any plausible theory of Utopia? Discuss with reference to Suits’ views and arguments.
- Is Suits’ Utopia inevitable? What would this reveal about the value of playing games?
- Is the best life one led as a kind of “meta-game”?

Topics for essay 2:

- Can someone cheat and play the game in which he is cheating at the same time?
- Does ‘trifling’ entail that someone is not playing a game?
- Are all sports games?
- Can ‘sport’ be defined?
- Is ‘sport’ a thick evaluative cluster concept?
- Is “Striving Play” in Nguyen’s sense a plausible ideal for playing competitive games?
- Is it possible to play a competitive game while playing full-stop?
- Does Stoicism provide a useful framework for earnest competitive game play?
- Are games well understood in functional terms?
- Is game playing an intrinsic good, and if so is it a derivative or fundamental one? Discuss with reference to Hurka and Tasioulas.
- How are the goods of achievement and play (full-stop) related in the context of the value of games?
- Is Nguyen’s notion of “Value Capture” a convincing objection to gamification?
- Can gamification enhance the flourishing of romantic relationships? Discuss with reference to whatever you take to be the most promising version of this approach.

Feedback on drafts of essays

I will provide feedback on first drafts of essays. Although this is not a requirement of the course, I *strongly* encourage students to take advantage of this opportunity. There are few steps you can take to improve your essay which are more effective than this, assuming you make a real effort with your first draft, anyway. However, in order for me to be sure to have enough time to provide quality feedback to you in time for you to make useful revisions

based on that feedback, you *must* have a draft to me (via email) no later than 1 week before the due date for the essay in question.

Formative Work

Although not strictly required, students are strongly encouraged to provide a weekly one-page critical discussion of a specific idea or argument from one of the readings for that week. Students may use either standard forms of philosophical writing or experiment with Socratic dialogue in the style of Suits if they so choose for formative work. Such formative work should be emailed to the instructor at least 24 hours before the next class meeting.

I will also provide a crossword puzzle each week to help with revision. This incorporates an element of “gamification,” which we discuss in the last two weeks, into the course itself. You are encouraged to do both the formative work and the crossword and send them to me, ideally before your seminar, but any time during the week for the associated readings is fine too.

These elements of the course can count towards your participation grade, but class discussion and participation in the online discussion board also provide ways to fulfil this requirement – which is why these elements are not strictly required, but can help make up for deficits elsewhere as re: participation. They should also help you learn the material of course, and so indirectly help you with your essays.

If you have read this far, email me a picture of your favourite game before the first class! – Mike (mrIDGE@ed.ac.uk)

Supplemental Readings

Literary background for Suits

- Aesop’s Fable of the Ant and the Grasshopper: http://www.longlongtimeago.com/llta_fables_antgrasshopper.html
- Plato: *The Crito*: <http://www.fullbooks.com/Crito.html>
- Plato, *The Republic*, Book II: <http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/republic.3.ii.html>

General background reading

- Berne, Eric. 1964. *Games People Play*, Penguin.
- Caillois, Roger. *Man, Play and Games*. 2001. University of Illinois Press.
- Cooper, W.E. review of *The Grasshopper* in *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 1982. 409-415 [JSTOR] [an interesting critical review of Suits – probably best read only after you have read the main text]
- Rives, J. “The Defence of the Ant,” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*. 1984: 617-629 [JSTOR]. [an interesting critical review of Suits – probably best read only after you have read *The Grasshopper* in its entirety]

Defining ‘play’ and play versus playing a game

- Royce, R. 2011, *Sports, Ethics and Philosophy*, 2011, “Suits, Autotelicity, Temporal Reallocations, Game Resources and Defining ‘play’.” [available from the library’s ejournal collection]
- Gindele, N. 2015. *A Naturalistic Philosophy of Play*. PhD Dissertation in Philosophy, Duke University, (https://dukespace.lib.duke.edu/dspace/bitstream/handle/10161/9861/Gindele_duke_0066_D_12801.pdf?sequence=1).

The role of play and games in the good life

- Brown, Stuart. 2010. *Play: How it Shapes the Brain, Opens the Imagination, and Invigorates the Soul*. (this is not a philosophy book, and so is only indirectly relevant; it summarizes some potentially relevant empirical findings on play and its role in the good life, though)
- Celano, A. 1991. “Play and the Theory of Basic Human Goods.” *American Philosophical Quarterly*. 137-146.

‘Game’ as a family resemblance word

- Stone, J. “Games and Family Resemblances.” *Philosophical Investigations* (1994). [available from the library’s ejournal collection]

Sports and Games

- Papineau, D. *Knowing the Score* (Constable Press), chapter 18. [cautionary note: Papineau ignores Suits’ change in view]
- Lance, 1998, M. “Some Reflections on the Sport of Language.” *Philosophical Perspectives*.

Cheating

- Green, Stuart. 2004. “Cheating.” *Law and Philosophy*. 137-185.

Individuation of games; games as extended social practices

- *The Monopolists*, Mary Pilon, Bloomsbury, 2015.