

## 12

## The Grasshopper, Aristotle, Bob Adams, and Me

SHELLY KAGAN

The Grasshopper of my title is, of course, the insect made famous by Aesop in his fable concerning the Grasshopper and the Ant—the grasshopper who praises the virtues of idleness and play, and who perishes with the coming of winter because of his prior refusal to engage in the instrumentally necessary but decidedly unenjoyable task of gathering food. I focus, however, not upon Aesop's report concerning the Grasshopper's views, but rather on the less well-known, but philosophically richer, report provided by Bernard Suits, in his amazing book, *The Grasshopper: Games, Life, and Utopia*.<sup>1</sup>

In that book the Grasshopper puts forward and defends a definition of games, which he helpfully summarizes with the slogan that playing a game is 'the voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles'.<sup>2</sup> The basic idea is this: when I play a game, I am trying to accomplish some goal; but I am not trying to accomplish that goal by the most efficient means available. Indeed, I deliberately accept restrictions on how the goal is to be achieved. For example, in golf, I am trying to get balls in holes, but I do not allow myself to simply pick the ball up and place it in the hole—rather I restrict myself to getting the ball in the hole by means of hitting it with the right kind of stick. And in mountain climbing, I am trying to get to the top of the mountain, but I do not allow myself to take the helicopter to the summit; rather, I restrict myself to getting there by climbing up along the side, using only the relevantly permissible equipment. Why do I accept these unnecessary obstacles? Because doing this allows me to engage in an

activity that cannot otherwise be performed: playing the game. I accept the restrictions so as to be able to play the game. If that's my reason (or at least one of my reasons), then I have what the Grasshopper calls the 'lusory attitude'. Without it, I may look just like someone playing the game, but I am in fact simply going through the motions.

I offer this brief rendering of the Grasshopper's account of games, because it plays a central role in what I really want to discuss—some utopian speculations that the Grasshopper puts forward as well. What I really want to ask is this: just what would we do in Utopia?

In thinking about Utopia, I want to let our imaginations run wild and assume—again, following the Grasshopper's lead—that *all* technological limitations have been overcome. Computers or friendly spirits or magic dust can instantly provide whatever it is we might want. Thus, there is no *need* to do anything so as to achieve something else: no need to exercise to preserve health, no need to eat to acquire nutrition, no need to work to attain clothing (or books, or housing), no need to study or investigate to attain knowledge. There is no scarcity of any sort, so no need for accomplishments of any kind. Problems of interpersonal conflict (most of which turn on problems of scarcity, in any event) have been solved, and so there is no need for government;<sup>3</sup> problems of science and of philosophy have all been answered, so there is no need for scientists or even (gasp!) philosophers.

So what I want to know is this: what would we do in Utopia?

It would be natural to think that this question comes to the same thing as asking: what activities are intrinsically valuable? After all, what the concept of Utopia (carried to its logical limit) invites us to do is to imagine a world where we have eliminated the necessity of performing an act simply because of its instrumental value. If we do something in Utopia it isn't because we need to do it so as to get something else. Instead, if we do something, it must be because we take that activity to be intrinsically valuable—valuable for its own sake, not merely as a means to something else. That is to say, in Utopia there is no need to engage in instrumentally valuable activity (since anything we want to produce thereby can be achieved effortlessly instead).

<sup>3</sup> Arguably, many of the moral virtues—and, more generally, much of the need for morality—will have been eliminated in Utopia as well. If there is no interpersonal conflict, for example, there is no need for justice; if there is no disease, hunger, or poverty, there is little or no need for compassion, beneficence, or self-sacrifice. But the issue is complex and I won't try to pursue it here. (For example, have we also eliminated *mortality* in Utopia? If not, there may still be a place for compassion, among other things.)

<sup>1</sup> *The Grasshopper: Games, Life, and Utopia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978); citations to this edition are followed [in square brackets] by corresponding citations to the 2nd edition (Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview, 2005).

<sup>2</sup> *Grasshopper*, 41 [55].

But even in Utopia, presumably, we will want to engage in intrinsically valuable activities. So it is natural to think that when we ask what we would do in Utopia we are asking for an account of which sorts of activities possess intrinsic value. The many things that we do in the actual world but which we would not perform in Utopia must be merely of instrumental value, rather than intrinsic value.

As it happens, I believe that this natural inference is mistaken. It assumes that the intrinsic value of intrinsically valuable goods cannot be grounded in part on their usefulness. In particular, it assumes that if some activity is instrumentally valuable, then that very fact cannot contribute to the activity's also having intrinsic value. And while this assumption is very widely held, I believe it is mistaken. I think we should recognize the possibility of intrinsically valuable instrumental value.<sup>4</sup>

This means that there could well be activities in which we currently engage, activities in which we engage because we must—given current technological limitations—activities that are instrumentally valuable, and yet in part precisely because of that fact are also intrinsically valuable. If there were activities of this sort, however, then although in our actual world they would have intrinsic value, in Utopia they would *lack* intrinsic value. For in Utopia these activities would no longer have significant instrumental value, and so would lack an essential part of what currently grounds their intrinsic value. If I am right about this, then it turns out that the list of intrinsically valuable activities is broader than the list of activities we would engage in within Utopia. Oddly enough, Utopia will make certain sorts of intrinsically valuable activities impossible (or, more accurately, will strip them of their intrinsic value).

So when we ask what we will do in Utopia, this isn't quite the same thing as asking for a complete list of intrinsically valuable activities. We will have put aside those activities whose intrinsic value is based on necessity.

Does this mean that we should mourn the passing from Utopia of the no longer intrinsically valuable activities? This threatens to be a paradoxical result, suggesting that the 'ideal' of human existence (as the Grasshopper calls it) would itself be impoverished and lacking. But I am not sure how best to avoid this unhappy conclusion.

One possibility, of course, would be to simply reject my claim that intrinsic value can be grounded, in part, in necessity. Then we can insist that all genuinely intrinsically valuable activities remain possible in Utopia. This may seem the obviously sane solution to most of you, but unsurprisingly, it does not seem right to me.

An alternative proposal is suggested by some remarks made by Bob Adams in his wonderful *Finite and Infinite Goods*.<sup>5</sup> This is perhaps a good place for me to admit that I have a rather difficult time trying to read this book. Whenever I open it, I find my mind racing, overflowing, jumping off into new lines of thought. I am, rather literally, inspired. Questions occur to me that I haven't previously entertained, and I excitedly go off exploring philosophical possibilities that have been suggested to me by this or that remark in the text. When I 'come to', several minutes later, I see that I am several pages further along in the book, but I am not at all confident I have actually been reading. This is by way of confessing that although I will occasionally refer to a few of Bob's views, I won't be doing this in an appropriately scholarly way; I haven't yet been able to read the book properly enough to do that.

Anyway, the particular remark I have in mind here is the simple observation that there are many goods, and no single human life may be able to incorporate all of them.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps we could take this idea and accept it writ large (as Bob does in his discussion of liberalism<sup>7</sup>), holding that no single society—not even utopian ones—could contain all intrinsically valuable activities. If some intrinsically valuable activities have become impossible under Utopia, so be it. So long as new and better goods are available in Utopia, it may be worth the cost.

But this leads us to ask anew: just what will we do in Utopia?

The Grasshopper's own answer to this question is straightforward: we will play games.<sup>8</sup> After all, there is no need for me to do anything at all in Utopia. Whatever it is that I am trying to bring about, it could have been attained instantly and effortlessly (say, through the magic dust). If I nonetheless persist in trying to bring about some goal, I am deliberately doing this by less efficient rather than more efficient means. I am trying to see if I can

<sup>5</sup> Robert M. Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

<sup>6</sup> Where did Bob say this? I'm not sure! (Remember, I've barely read the book.) But the idea is suggested, at least, by comments on pages 57 and 292 of *Finite and Infinite Goods*.

<sup>7</sup> *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 334. <sup>8</sup> See, especially, *Grasshopper*, chapters 1 and 15.

<sup>4</sup> I have argued for this conclusion in 'Rethinking Intrinsic Value', *Journal of Ethics*, 2 (1998), 277–97.

'do it myself'—using my bare hands, or these primitive tools, or these artificially limited means. In short, whatever it is I am doing, I am setting myself some unnecessary obstacles, and voluntarily trying to overcome them. Whatever it is I am doing, I am playing a game.

These won't necessarily be the sports, board games, and pastimes we are familiar with from ordinary life, but they will be games nonetheless. I might, for example, try to build a house using carpentry tools and lumber; but since I am voluntarily making it harder on myself (why not just order a house from the computer?) this is just playing the 'house-building game'.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, I might decide to try to solve some math problem myself—or to think through some philosophical conundrum on my own—but since I am voluntarily making it harder on myself (why not just look at the answer page, with its lucid explanation?) this is just playing the 'math game' or the 'philosophy game'.

It might be objected that I cannot possibly come to understand the math, say, without first having struggled to master it. But this reply, I think, fails to take seriously the assumption that in Utopia *all* technical problems have been solved. I can—we are to assume—not just learn the answer, but also come to have a complete and deep grasp of the underlying mathematics simply by taking a pill (or indeed, simply wishing it to be so). If, then, I nonetheless insist on studying mathematics, I am playing a game: trying to see how much I can learn 'the old fashioned way'.

The Grasshopper's claim then is that in Utopia what we will do, and all we will do, is play games.<sup>10</sup>

One might reasonably worry whether this is enough to sustain us. Can we view our lives as having sufficient value and significance, if all we are doing is playing games? The Grasshopper himself has a nightmarish vision in which the Utopians disappear, one by one, as he reveals to them that all they are doing is playing games. A life devoted to game playing hardly seems worth living.

Accepting this unpleasant conclusion does not require us to hold that game playing is not, in fact, an intrinsically valuable activity. We might

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *Grasshopper* 174 [156–7].

<sup>10</sup> Actually, the Grasshopper claims that with games as the centerpiece of utopian life, other activities—activities focused on games, as it were—become intelligible as well (see 176 [158]). It seems to me, however, that the logic of the Grasshopper's argument should nonetheless support the claim that even these further activities are themselves games (e.g., if one tries to produce by oneself artistic renderings of game playing, rather than simply 'ordering some up', one is still playing a game).

well agree that there is indeed intrinsic value in playing (well-crafted) games,<sup>11</sup> and yet still worry that in and of themselves games are not a source of sufficient value to form the essence of a good life.

Suppose that you are with me—and with the Grasshopper, at least in his darker moments—in suspecting that game playing is not a rich enough diet to make life in Utopia worth living. That's a problem, because what we set out to do, recall, was to investigate the ideal of human existence—where we have solved all the technological problems, and so can have whatever intrinsic goods there are to be had (subject only to this very technological assumption, that we can have whatever we want effortlessly). And now we find ourselves worrying that the ideal of human existence may not be all that ideal after all.

Clearly, this takes us beyond the Adamesque thought that you can't have it all—that is, everything worth having—in a single life, or a single society. Here we are saying you can't have a sufficiently good life in Utopia to be worth living. That seems decidedly odd.

Of course, it could be maintained that we erred in thinking that it was indeed a move toward *Utopia* to imagine unlimited technological solutions (so that there was nothing we needed to do). It would hardly be surprising if the imposition of a sufficiently unattractive feature upon society as a whole leaves us with only the possibility of impoverished lives.

But although this reply is coherent, I find it hard to take seriously. I find it hard to affirm the claim—and to stick with the claim—that the technological assumption is a mistaken move of this sort.

First off, in pursuing the idea of an *ideal* life it does seem reasonable to explore it under ideal conditions. For even if it is also of interest to think about the best kind of life available given certain features that we take to be undesirable, it seems plausible to think that the very *best* kind of life would be one in which those undesirable features are eliminated. This would, indeed, represent a conception of the *ideal* of human life, however unrealistic it might be. But then, second, it does seem as though our various technological limitations are undesirable features of our current situation. Admittedly, we may be driven to deny this, by virtue of the very utopian reflections in which we are engaged, but when considered directly, at any

<sup>11</sup> As Gwendolyn Bradford argues in 'Kudos for Ludus: Game Playing and Value Theory', *Noesis*, VI (available online at <[www.chass.utoronto.ca/pcu/noesis/issue\\_vi/noesis\\_vi\\_3.html](http://www.chass.utoronto.ca/pcu/noesis/issue_vi/noesis_vi_3.html)>).

rate, it seems virtually self-evident that our technological limitations are undesirable features. One need only think of the constant human striving to overcome them, a feature that would be well-nigh inexplicable if they were in fact overall *desirable* features of the human condition.<sup>12</sup> Yet if technological limitations are in point of fact (overall) undesirable, then they are features which are appropriately imagined eliminated when thinking about the ideal form of human existence.

And that brings us back to the thought that in Utopia there is nothing to do except play games, and that this may not be nearly enough.

So what else, if anything, is there to do? I throw this question out in a genuine spirit of dialogue. I am not confident of the answer, nor in fact am I confident about much of anything I am working through here today. I have a few ideas that I am intrigued by, which I will share, but I don't yet have anything close to considered views.

One move that may be helpful here would be to distinguish in a very broad way between production and consumption. In effect, what the technological assumption does is rob our productive behavior of much of its point, since there is no longer any need for us to produce anything. That appears to leave us only with the option of productive behavior that is unnecessary, and indeed harder than it needs to be—behavior that produces a goal through deliberately inefficient means: game playing. But even if that is right with regard to productive behavior, it may still leave us with various types of consumptive behavior in place. In particular, then, there may still be an array of intrinsic goods waiting for our consumption, even in Utopia. Indeed, there may be finer, and greater, intrinsic goods available for our consumption in Utopia than are available now.

Thus, there may be very little for us to 'do' in Utopia—other than playing games—if by talk of 'doing' we mean to focus exclusively on

<sup>12</sup> Bill FitzPatrick has suggested to me that since so many of the activities that currently give our lives meaning involve the overcoming of one or another kind of involuntary obstacle, the ideal of human life will indeed involve such obstacles as well—with an 'optimal' level of obstacles. But I think there is something troubling and unstable about the suggestion that even in the ideal life we would still strive to overcome involuntary obstacles: since success in overcoming these obstacles would leave us with 'too little' to overcome (less than the optimal level), we would also have to hope we don't succeed in overcoming them! (It may also be worth pointing out that FitzPatrick's suggestion implicitly assumes the existence of intrinsically valuable instrumental value, since the intrinsic value of the relevant meaningful activities depends, in part, on their role in overcoming obstacles. Of course, I don't myself take that fact to constitute any kind of objection to the proposal; but others may.)

productive activities. But we should not neglect to consider the various consumptive activities.

This talk of consumption may be somewhat ill-advised, suggesting as it does mere material consumption. It tempts us to imagine an array of finer and finer plasma TVs, or elegant houses, or exquisite foods (or who knows what technological marvel). To be sure, even this may be the source of some intrinsic value. The consumption of these various material goods would not be necessary, but would presumably still be pleasurable—perhaps even extraordinarily pleasurable. But I am surely not alone in worrying that this too may not be a rich enough diet to sustain us. A life of food, drugs, games, and TV sets need not be dismissed as altogether empty; but it still seems altogether too shallow to qualify as the ideal of human existence.

Another idea of Bob's seems helpful at this point. Bob suggests that well-being consists in the enjoyment of the excellent.<sup>13</sup> I have a less elegant mind than Bob's, so I hope I am not too far amiss in glossing this as the claim that well-being consists in taking pleasure in the possession and consumption of significant intrinsic goods. This raises two points of interest. First, and most obviously, if one takes pleasure in something that isn't genuinely good, this may make little or no contribution to one's level of well-being. But second, and less obviously, if the object of one's enjoyment is good but not significantly good, it will fall short of excellence and so, again, make little or no contribution to well-being. Both of these worries seem germane in thinking about the utopian life we have described so far. Game playing and material consumption may not be without value, but they seem to fall sufficiently short of enjoyment of the excellent to justify our concern that such a life cannot truly constitute human well-being, let alone the *ideal* of human existence.

But as I noted, I intend the category of consumption to be construed quite broadly, and we might hope to find greater goods to consume in Utopia. Here is an example. Arguably, knowledge is an intrinsic good. Given the technological assumption, of course, there is no need in Utopia for study, inquiry, or investigation to gain knowledge: everything there is to know (or, at least, everything that can be known by humans) can be known instantly, effortlessly. So the pursuit of knowledge has no place, unless, it seems, as part of an 'inquiry game'. But for all that, the 'consumption' of

<sup>13</sup> *Finite and Infinite Goods*, chapter 3, section 2.

knowledge may still be good. That is, there may be no great value in our *striving* to know, but there may for all that be value in our *knowing*.

Of course, it would not be plausible to suggest that all instances of knowledge are equally valuable. If I happen to know the average daily rainfall in Bangkok in February 1993, there isn't likely to be much value in that. But it seems plausible to suggest that knowledge is more valuable when the truths known are themselves more *important*—when they are more significant, deep, and profound.

Suppose, then, that in Utopia I am able to know the fundamental laws of nature—not just recite them, in the way that I may be able to rattle off the laws of Newtonian Mechanics, or Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle, but to fully grasp them: I understand what the laws mean, and I can see just how they suffice to generate and explain the astonishing array of empirical phenomena. There may well be significant value in simply understanding all of this. If Utopia could provide us with that, then that might well constitute something significant to do with our lives: we could contemplate the fundamental truths of the universe.

Or we might go further. Suppose that there is a creator. Indeed, suppose that we could grasp enough about the divine nature to comprehend something significant about God's power and infinite goodness, grasp enough to see not only *that* God created the universe but also something about God's purposes in doing so, enough to grasp our place in a universe brought about and sustained by God's love. That would be significant, deep, and profound knowledge indeed. Contemplating God and God's plan for the universe might well be something that would be sufficiently worthy of our time.

No doubt in thinking about this last possibility we have moved beyond any mere Utopia, at least insofar as it is unlikely that any merely technological fix could bring us to this point. But insofar as what actually drives our discussion is a quest for a satisfying and perhaps inspiring account of the ideal of human existence, this theological possibility does not seem out of place. What would we do in Utopia? Perhaps we would contemplate the divine. Indeed, if we could, we would partake of the beatific vision (though no doubt on certain views it would take divine grace to find ourselves in a position to do so).

I find this theological possibility attractive insofar as it seems to have sufficient weight to provide part of a satisfying account of the ideal of human

existence. I imagine that Bob may find it attractive too, though he mentions the beatific vision only once, and then only in passing.<sup>14</sup> But despite this point of agreement, there is probably an important difference between us. I suspect—though to be sure, I do not know—that Bob actually believes in the possibility of this kind of mystical vision ('in this life or the next', as he puts it); I do not. (The disagreement isn't so much epistemological as metaphysical; I just don't have the requisite religious beliefs.)

Be that as it may, this discussion puts one in mind of Aristotle's claim that the best kind of life for humans would consist solely in philosophical contemplation—in particular, I take it, contemplation of the divine.<sup>15</sup> Previously I have always found this the sort of absurd claim that only a philosopher could make, a claim hopelessly and implausibly glorifying philosophy to the exclusion of everything else. But now it seems to me possible to understand the Aristotelian claim as an instance of this same general suggestion concerning the ideal of human existence. And now, I must confess, it doesn't strike me as quite so absurd. (Just like a philosopher to find such an absurd claim worth taking seriously!)

Indeed, the crucial point is to emphasize that the claim might make sense if taken as a thesis about the *ideal* of human existence. The Aristotelian claim seems most absurd insofar as it seems to overlook the variety of intrinsically good activities that we appropriately engage in as part of our ordinary, everyday lives. But our present condition is far from ideal, and as such it is open to us to insist that various activities are intrinsically valuable today—given the technological limitations of our current condition—and yet for all that would form no part of the ideal. I honestly don't know whether this is, in fact, at all faithful to the sorts of considerations actually moving Aristotle (believe me, I am no serious student of Aristotle); but it seems to me at least one way of making some sense of these claims. (Note, in particular, how it allows Aristotle to maintain that the practical or political life is a kind of second best—intrinsically good, but no part of the ideal of human existence.)

There is a somewhat different direction in which we might try to develop the proposal that at least one of the important things we will do in Utopia is to know things. Suppose we back away from the theological speculations of the last few paragraphs, and return to the idea that what we will contemplate

<sup>14</sup> *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 23.

<sup>15</sup> See, especially, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book X, chapters 7–8.

in Utopia are the fundamental truths of the universe. Among these truths, perhaps, are the following: the world is itself intrinsically valuable, and it has produced creatures like us (perhaps via various naturalistic processes), creatures who themselves possess intrinsic value. Indeed, the world may itself have intrinsic value precisely by virtue of the fact that it produces these intrinsically valuable creatures (this would be a nice illustration of an intrinsically valuable instrumental value), and the intrinsically valuable creatures produced may be intrinsically valuable in part precisely because of their ability to come to recognize and know all of this. Suppose all of this were true, then perhaps one of the most important things we would contemplate in Utopia would be the very fact that the universe is valuable precisely because of having created creatures like us, capable of contemplating this very fact.

This strikes me as being a rather Hegelian suggestion. At least I take it to be broadly Hegelian in spirit, though I can't really say (I am even less of a student of Hegel than I am of Aristotle). Perhaps, then, this talk should actually be entitled 'The Grasshopper, Aristotle, Bob Adams, *Hegel* and Me'! At any rate, I mention it because although I am far from confident that it is true, it seems to me that something like it might well be true.

But even if one is unprepared to travel these Hegelian circles, or for that matter to put faith in the earlier theological speculations, there are presumably some fundamental truths concerning the universe which we are capable of coming to know. And so it remains possible to hold that whatever these truths might be, in Utopia one of the things we will do is to contemplate them.

Nor is this the only significant intrinsic good which we are capable of consuming in Utopia. Up to this point I have said almost nothing about art and beauty. Now the Grasshopper worried that there might be no place for art in Utopia. His thought was not only the by now familiar one that there was no point in producing art (except as a game) but rather the deeper worry that given the elimination of suffering, frustration, and conflict in Utopia most of the subject matter of great art will have been eliminated as well.<sup>16</sup> (No wars, for example, means no masterpieces depicting the horrors of war.) If true, this is yet another odd implication of the concept of Utopia.

<sup>16</sup> This is surely too quick, since it is, for example, unclear whether *death* has been eliminated from Utopia (cf. n. 3, above). But let it pass.

Of course, this might just be another occasion for reminding ourselves of the Adamesque thought that even in Utopia certain goods must be done without. Indeed, the very production of Utopia may destroy the possibility of some undeniably significant goods.<sup>17</sup>

But instead of pursuing this question here, I will simply note that even if certain forms of art require suffering and strife for their subject matter, it would not be plausible to claim that all art is like this. If, for example, as seems plausible to me, moments of great joy need not involve the overcoming of obstacles, then there could presumably be great art depicting such moments, even in Utopia. And in any event the possibility of abstract, nonrepresentational art remains as well. What's more, there also remains *natural* beauty, which might be the subject of still more art—as well, of course, as being the direct object of aesthetic appreciation. And, of course, there is also the more abstract beauty to be found in mathematics as well, or in certain fundamental laws.

Still other forms of art—such as music—seem like they should be available in Utopia as well. Without trying to take on the difficult and troubling issue of the connection between emotion and music, let me just suggest that even if some music will not be available (or will not be intelligible) in the absence of struggle and failure and loss, other forms of music—including much great music—should still be possible.

All of this provides still more goods for consumption. In Utopia we will enjoy the beauty of the natural world—the Grand Canyon, the Redwoods, and the Himalayas, as well as the flash of a cardinal or a hummingbird—or the beauty of fractals, or quantum mechanics, or Monet's water lilies, or Mondrian's squares, and we will listen to music (if not much Beethoven, perhaps more Mozart).

We could, presumably, combine the consumption of knowledge and beauty, in ways that I have already hinted at. The divine may not only be profound, but beautiful; and the same could be true—less theologically—for the laws of nature. But I see no reason to think that consumption of the beautiful should be limited to the most grand. There should still be

<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, given the assumption of unlimited technology, can't we simply 'order up' some artistic depictions of suffering and conflict (even if these won't themselves exist in Utopia), and then use these works (or other technology) to learn about the nature of suffering? If so, we might both possess and appreciate such works of art after all, even in Utopia.

a place in the ideal of human existence for listening to an occasional Sousa march.

So among the things that we will do in Utopia, besides playing games, are knowing and admiring. These may not be activities in the normal sense of the word, but they may make up worthy ways to live even in Utopia.

I have been suggesting that we may find something to do in Utopia after all, once we recall that we can consume as well as produce. Even if the only productive activity worth engaging in within Utopia is to play games, there may still be other things to *do*. But I would not want to leave it here, implying that the Grasshopper is at least correct with regard to the productive side of the divide. On the contrary, even with regard to productive activity, I believe, there is more to do in Utopia than to play games.

For concreteness, let's consider the case of producing a work of art. Suppose I paint a picture of a rose. By hypothesis, of course, there are easier ways to get such a painting in Utopia; I could just order one up. So if I choose, nonetheless, to produce a painting in the traditional fashion—working with a canvas, paints, and a brush—there is certainly a sense in which I am choosing less efficient means to achieving my goal, rather than more efficient means. And so—insists the Grasshopper—I am simply playing a game: the 'art-making' game.

But at this point we should remember the Grasshopper's earlier claim that an essential part of playing a game is having the lusory attitude. You must be voluntarily trying to overcome unnecessary obstacles so as to be able to participate in the very activity that thereby becomes possible (that is, becomes possible through the undertaking of unnecessary obstacles). In effect, you must be playing by the rules so as to be able to play a game. If you act for different reasons (that is, reasons not including this one) then you are not actually playing a game at all, even though it may well look like you are to the outside world.

Well, what other reasons might one have for trying to make art the old fashioned way, if not the desire to play a game?

The natural suggestion to make, I think, is this: in painting a rose I am being creative; in ordering up a painting, I am not. (This is not to deny that one could be creative through sufficiently creative specification of the product desired—think here of a director of a movie—it is only to insist that if all you are doing is ordering up a painting, then you are not being

creative.) So perhaps my reason for doing the painting myself is that I believe, plausibly, that creative activity is itself intrinsically valuable, indeed it can be excellent.

Here another suggestion of Bob's comes to mind. Bob suggests that something is excellent if it resembles God.<sup>18</sup> Presumably then Bob would agree that creative acts can resemble the creativity of God, and thus be excellent. And there is no obvious reason to believe that creativity ceases to be excellent simply because it isn't *necessary*.

Now here too, I am not quite inclined to agree with Bob completely. I would rather turn the idea around. Bob thinks that being creative is excellent because it resembles God. I believe, rather, that it might be closer to the truth to claim that the reason we ascribe creativity to God is because we recognize its excellence. But this is a debate for another occasion. Here the point is just this: if creative activity is excellent, then I can choose to engage in the production of art, not because this is the only way to play the art game, but because this is one good way to be creative. In any event, to be creative I must do something: I must *produce* the work of art.

Thus there are reasons to produce a work of art that, so far as I can see, have nothing to do with game playing. The efficiency or the inefficiency of the means are, so far as I can see, beside the point. At any rate, I am not, in the relevant sense, voluntarily trying to overcome unnecessary obstacles. Were there better ways to be creative, I might well choose them. If the means are inefficient, I am willing to put up with this, but the inefficiency is not, in and of itself, part of the attraction. In short, I lack the lusory attitude. I am not playing a game.

Once we see this point, it seems likely that we will find it replicated in other productive activities as well. Suppose I tell my wife that I love her. Why am I doing this? The Grasshopper insists that, given the assumption of unlimited utopian technology, there must be a way for my wife to know about my love for her without any effort on my part. So if I insist on letting her know in *this* way—especially given the attendant dangers of miscommunication—I must be playing another game, perhaps the 'communication' game.

But that seems wrong. I am not merely trying to make it be the case that my wife knows I love her. I am trying to *express* my love. That is not

<sup>18</sup> *Finite and Infinite Goods*, chapter 1, section 3.

something I do if the communication of the message does not go 'through' me. The message can be received, presumably, even if it is said by another on my behalf; but it is not then said by me. And there is, arguably, value in the deliverance of the message by me. There is value in my *revealing* my love, and not only value in her knowing about it. Here too, the efficiency or inefficiency of my means is beside the point. I am willing to put up with the inefficiency, but it is not, in and of itself, part of my reason for acting. I lack the lusory attitude. I am not playing a game.

More strictly, I *need* not be playing a game. The Grasshopper, recall, does not insist that the lusory attitude be my only reason for taking on unnecessary obstacles. So long as it is *part* of my reason for doing this, I am playing a game. So we can allow that I might in fact be playing a game after all, if the desire to do this is indeed part of my reason for acting as I do.

But it would not then be true to say that *all* I am doing here is playing a game. It need not be my only reason for engaging in my various productive activities. It need not even be my main reason.

It is less clear to me whether we can extend this same basic line of thought to cover *inquiry* as well. Suppose that in Utopia I try to figure out something for myself. The Grasshopper insists that, given the possibility of attaining the relevant knowledge instantly and effortlessly, I must be playing a game. What other reason could I have for doing it myself in this way?

This reminds me of the famous passage from Gotthold Lessing:

If God held all truth enclosed in his right hand, and in his left hand the one and only ever-striving drive for truth, even with the corollary of erring forever and ever, and if he were to say to me: Choose!—I would humbly fall down to him at his left hand and say: Father, give! Pure truth is indeed only for you alone!<sup>19</sup>

The Grasshopper agrees, of course, that there is value in Lessing's choice. He only insists that, whether or not Lessing realizes it, in making this choice he must be choosing to play the inquiry game. This is, no doubt, a fine game to play, but a game it must be.

Is that right? Or might there be other reasons for engaging in inquiry in Utopia? Is there something intrinsically valuable about the search for knowledge itself, as opposed to the possession of knowledge—or more precisely, is there something intrinsically valuable about the search for

knowledge in a world in which such a search is no longer a necessary means to acquiring knowledge? Is there something excellent about inquiry *per se*? If there is, I have to confess, I cannot yet see what it is. (Essay question: Does inquiry resemble God? If so, how? Comment: It may be helpful to consider the rabbinic tradition that portrays God as himself engaging in the study of Torah.)

But even if it should turn out that inquiry is not one of the productive activities in which we would engage in Utopia, except as part of a game, it still seems correct to suggest that the same is not true for other productive activities. There are other things to do—in the productive sense—besides playing games. I would particularly want to emphasize the thought that even in Utopia there will still be intrinsic value in maintaining a wide range of meaningful personal relations.

The basic idea here is one that has already been suggested by my discussion of the value of telling my wife that I love her. What is of value in such a case isn't merely the state produced (that is, my wife's knowing of my love) but the *production* of such a state by me (my *telling* her). Something similar presumably holds true for a variety of personal relations.

We might put the point a slightly different way: there is intrinsic value in relationships of the right sort, but the value to be had here is not nearly exhausted by the simple fact of *standing* in those relationships; there is also value in *relating*. Thus, even if we can make sense of the idea of there being more efficient ways of coming to stand in the relevant relationship, or of preserving the fact that one stands in that relationship, that would not yet give us reason to forgo the *acts* of relating to others in the relevant ways (even if these were less efficient ways of producing the relevant state).

But there is still more to say: in many cases it doesn't seem implausible to suggest that a good deal of what it is to *stand* in the relevant relationship just is to relate to one another in the relevant ways (in a sufficiently regular and ongoing way). Thus the acts of relating are not mere means to a separable end—possibly inefficient means, in fact, to achieving the state of being related. Rather, they constitute what it *is* to be related. In such cases, the very idea of a technological fix coming along that would render the activities of relating irrelevant—except as part of a game we might choose to play—seems to be misguided. Technology cannot *improve* on the activity, if the activity itself is what has intrinsic value (and not as a

<sup>19</sup> As quoted by Kierkegaard in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*.



means to something distinct). Relating to one another is not a means to something else: it is the goal itself.

This puts me in mind of the tradition that even in the messianic era we Jews will continue to observe Passover.<sup>20</sup> I am uncertain about the sages' own reasons for thinking this, but speaking personally the reason I find the idea attractive is this: at the Passover celebration we sit around the dinner table, eating a fine meal, telling the story of the Exodus from Egypt, and arguing about its meaning. We engage in a discussion about life and death, freedom and responsibility, slavery and salvation. We talk about what is important.

This will be worth doing even when the Messiah comes, even when we enter Utopia. This too is part of the ideal of human existence: people talking with one another.

<sup>20</sup> See, for example, the Babylonian Talmud, tractate Berakhot, 12b.