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# Play as an Autotelic Activity

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## Résumé

### Play as an Autotelic Activity

In his paper ‘Words on Play’, Bernard Suits famously defines *play* as an autotelic activity (Suits 1977, 124). This assumption has often been criticized. Stephen Schmid even pointed out that the concept of autotelicity – as it is currently employed in the literature – is too unclear to serve as a defining feature of play, at all (Schmid 2009). Specifically, it is unclear how one can engage in an activity *both* autotelically – that is, for its own sake – and for ‘further’ intrinsic reasons, as it often seems to be the case (idem 2011, 155; also see Royce 2011, 99-100). Due to this fact, Schmid later dismisses autotelicity as a defining feature and rather opts for a definition of play simply in terms of the player’s engagement in an activity for intrinsic reasons (Schmid 2011).

In this talk, I clarify the concept of autotelicity and defend the notion of play as an autotelic activity against Schmid and other critics.

First, I define autotelic activity as an activity that an agent engages in for its own sake. Then, I show what it means for an activity to be engaged in for its own sake and argue that an activity’s autotelic nature is not in conflict with its internal instrumental structure. Finally, I argue that the engagement in an autotelic activity is also not necessarily in conflict with the existence of intrinsic reasons. This argumentative approach is largely inspired by the action-philosophical work of Candace Vogler (2008). Focusing on pleasure, I show that the relation between the agent’s engagement in an activity and the pleasure she acts *from*, as Vogler puts it, is not an instrumental but itself an intrinsic relation. For this reason, at least some activities can be engaged in *both* from pleasure and for its own sake.

### References

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**Mots-Clés:** Play, action, autotelicity, instrumentality, intrinsic reasons