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## What are we cheering? Sport and the value of valuing

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## What are we cheering? Sport and the value of valuing

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### Abstract

Against the dismissal of sport as “only a game” not worth the deep investment that so many fans make in it, sport is often defended on the grounds that it cultivates important virtues of character that are useful in a range of real-life applications (discipline, resilience, pride, teamwork, and so on). Whatever merit these claims may have, this paper calls attention to something that has not been sufficiently previously appreciated, namely, what sport reveals about the nature of *value*. By considering the experience of the serious fan (rather than that of the player or casual spectator), the paper argues that sport illuminates important aspects of *how* to value, of the *point* of valuing, and of the *propriety* of valuing. It further argues that, even more fundamentally, the experience of the serious fan helps us to appreciate the ways in which valuing is itself a value.

**Keywords:** sport, game, value, virtues

### Resumen

Hay una visión del deporte según la cual éste es “solamente juego” no digno de la profunda inversión que tantos aficionados hacen en él. Frente a esta concepción el deporte se defiende a menudo apelando a que cultiva las virtudes del carácter (disciplina, resistencia, orgullo, trabajo en equipo, y así sucesivamente) que son útiles en diversos ámbitos de la vida real. Cualquiera que sea el mérito que estas pretensiones puedan tener, este trabajo llama la atención sobre algo que no se ha apreciado suficientemente hasta el momento, esto es, lo que deporte revela sobre la naturaleza del valor. Considerando la experiencia del aficionado serio (como distinta a la experiencia del jugador o del espectador casual), el trabajo sostiene que el deporte ilumina aspectos importantes de cómo valorar, desde el punto de la valoración, y de la propiedad de la valoración. Sostiene además, de una forma incluso más fundamental, que la experiencia del aficionado serio nos ayuda a apreciar las formas en las cuales la valoración es sí mismo un valor.

**Términos Clave:** deporte, juego, valor, virtudes

### 1. Introduction

Why does sport matter? *Does* it? Perhaps, as is often claimed, sport can impart lessons about desirable character traits of broader application (such as discipline, perseverance, teamwork, etc.), but it is only a game. Why should anyone care so intensely about winning or losing? The serious fan thinks it all matters in a way that is

grossly disproportionate to its actual significance. Sport is, in the end, a “monstrous triviality.”<sup>1</sup>

Against this familiar skeptical challenge, the question I address here is: what is the value of being a serious fan? What could justify cheering in the way that such a fan does – investing, committing, and suffering through a favored team’s ups and downs and all the associated anguish? What, if anything, is he *properly* cheering? The answer extends, I think, beyond those that are most often proposed.

The most prominent account of the value of sport claims that through training, practice, and actual competition, players develop skills that strengthen prospects for success in business, personal relationships – in a range of areas. (Again, such traits as discipline, resilience, responsibility, pride, poise under pressure, strategic ingenuity, and many others.)<sup>2</sup> For spectators, too, the qualities witnessed can be inspirational, reminders of the rewards of cultivating such qualities in their own activities. Others have claimed other benefits. One hypothesis is that sport’s artificial structure crystallizes certain features found in our “real life” quests.<sup>3</sup> While the average adult is normally enmeshed in the pursuit of multiple goals that may overlap in certain respects and vary greatly in their difficulty, duration, potential rewards and ramifications for other goals, sport typically offers a singular, all-important mission which must be attained within fixed, knowable rules and a limited time period.<sup>4</sup> In contrast to the frequently diffuse, blurry-bordered, hard-to-discern status of one’s personal assortment

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<sup>1</sup> Simon Barnes, *The Meaning of Sport*, London, Short Books, 2006, p. 14. Barnes proceeds to make plain his own belief in the positive value of sport.

<sup>2</sup> Scott Kretchmar usefully explores games (as opposed to play more broadly) as sharpening problem-solving skills in “The Normative Heights and Depths of Play,” *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* 34, 2007, pp. 1-12.

<sup>3</sup> See, for instance, Nick Hornby, *Fever Pitch*, New York: Penguin 1992, p. 168.

<sup>4</sup> The firmness of these features varies in different sports, of course. Judgment calls and style points have greater sway in some than in others. For a broadly similar perspective, see Mark Edmundson, *Why Football Matters – My Education in the Game*, New York: Penguin, 2014, pp. 87-93 and 131-134.

of goals, many find a game's self-contained clarity – decisive results, objective markers of progress throughout – therapeutic.<sup>5</sup> Others might emphasize the causality on display in sport;<sup>6</sup> others, the justice;<sup>7</sup> still others, the sheer display of excellence and the pleasure of admiration.<sup>8</sup>

Whatever the merit of these accounts (and I do think that each has merit), I do not think that they go far enough. What has not been appreciated is what sports can convey not only about virtue, but about value. Because, particularly for fans, sport isolates the activity of valuing from any independent concern for the ends sought, it reveals the way in which valuing is itself a value. The fan's experience illuminates facets

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<sup>5</sup> See Thomas Bowden, "In Praise of Spectator Sports," *The Objectivist Forum*, August 1983, pp. 8-13.

<sup>6</sup> The idea is roughly that sport is a realm that is observably ruled by the law of identity. Events unfold by and large according to the definite nature of the interacting factors. Players, balls, bats, goal posts, boundary markers, etc. can be counted on to maintain their identity and figure into the action accordingly. Chance and human error can inevitably also enter in, but planning is driven by the statistical probabilities; analyses are offered and strategies are devised based on scrutiny of the fundamental nature of the constants and the variables (e.g., this team's personnel, that coach's decision-making tendencies, that stadium's windy conditions). The greater the role of chance in determining results, the less interest people seem to take in following a sport. (Ayn Rand observes the "metaphysical absolutism" that we rely on in chess and other games in "An Open Letter to Boris Spassky," *Philosophy: Who Needs It*, New York: Bobbs Merrill, 1982, pp. 63, making related observations on 64, 65, 69.)

<sup>7</sup> While the best team does not necessarily win and officiating errors can victimize the superior performer, sport's construction of a demanding contest where success depends primarily on merit coupled with its evenhanded application of the rules to all participants reflect a commitment to the idea that people should receive their just deserts. Players earn roster spots and teams earn victories on the basis of objective measures of ability and performance. The rigorous training of referees and increasing adoption of precise measurement technologies, instant replay, and in-game appeals in the attempt to minimize the influence of chance error further testify to this devotion to justice.

Within a wide literature on the general value of sport, for a sampler of different approaches and emphases, see Jan Boxill, "The Moral Significance of Sport," *Sports Ethics – An Anthology*, ed. Boxill, Blackwell, 2003; Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *In Praise of Athletic Beauty*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006; Stephen Mumford, "Allegiance and Identity," *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*, 31, 2004; Daniel Campos, "On the Value and Meaning of Football: Recent Philosophical Perspectives in Latin America," *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*, 2010, 37, pp. 69-87.

<sup>8</sup> A feature that some find common to the enjoyment of art and of sport. See, for instance, Denis Dutton, *The Art Instinct – Beauty, Pleasure, and Human Evolution*, New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2009, p. 53. Gumbrecht discusses this in *In Praise of Athletic Beauty*. For related thoughts, see Barnes pp. 28-35. Researchers in psychology have added claims of fandom's benefits to mood and outlook. See those reported in Bill Morris, "One Way to Cheer Up: Cheer Harder," *New York Times*, March 9, 2013.

of *how* to value, the *propriety* of valuing, and the *point* of valuing. It especially exposes its affective dimension: the feeling involved in valuing. My aim here is not to prove these claims (which would require establishing the deepest foundations of meta-ethics), but to suggest that the skeptic who belittles sport as “only a game” prods us to appreciate important truths about the very phenomenon of value. My claims rely heavily on a definite theory of the basic nature of values. Yet even for those who do not share these premises, I think I can offer viable hypotheses about what we are cheering and why we should.

### *Preliminaries*

Because my thesis stands upon contested presuppositions, I should clarify several preliminaries. One cannot offer a compelling case for the value of a particular phenomenon, such as sport, without relying on premises concerning the nature of value more broadly, yet a full defense of those foundations would require a different paper entirely. Here, I will simply stipulate certain parameters and indicate the pivots in my argument’s scaffolding.

First, my subject is not players but fans, and only those of a particular type: the *serious* fan, who I distinguish from the casual fan or the occasional spectator who can enjoy a game if someone happens to suggest watching, but whose interest is fleeting and episodic. (I will use “fan” as a shorthand for this serious fan.)<sup>9</sup> The serious fan takes an active interest in a team; he *follows* it by seeking out information afterwards about a game he is unable to watch, for instance, or by reading analyses or listening to commentary between games. He considers competing views of how the team should be run or the style of play it should adopt; he discusses these issues with others from time to time. While exact degrees of engagement can vary, the serious fan typically attends to

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<sup>9</sup> I will also use “team” as a shorthand to encompass whatever it is that a particular fan might be most concerned with, be it a team or a particular sport or player. And some of my claims will apply to certain sports more readily than others, since structural and aesthetic features can affect the values involved. I will not pursue those differences here, however.

at least some behind-the-scenes-activity as well as games themselves, concerning himself with such things as coaching staffs, draft selections, injuries, leagues' rule changes. More broadly, he embraces his team's fortunes as an ongoing personal concern; its well-being becomes entwined with his own.<sup>10</sup>

Second, I am presupposing the *healthy* fan, which does not deny that plenty of people are fanatics in the irrational sense of the term. Here, I will bypass questions concerning the governing standard of health and simply stipulate that the healthy fan's attitudes and conduct evince understanding of the relative value of sport in a well-led, flourishing life; he "has it in perspective." His reactions are not violent; his identification with his team is not tribal. When his team disappoints, he does not vent his frustration by abusing his family or fall into a depressive funk for subsequent days. He is not a voyeur and does not attempt to live *through* his team; he pursues a suitable assortment of goals, roles, and activities for a person of his age and circumstances. The healthy fan does not peg his identity, his self-esteem, or the meaning of his existence on the fortunes of the Raiders or Manchester United.<sup>11</sup>

It is especially important to understand the normative nature of my inquiry. I am examining not simply why sport appeals to many people, but why it should, that is, the

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<sup>10</sup> J.S. Russell discusses this in "The Ideal Fan or Good Fans?" *Sport, Ethics and Philosophy* 6, no. 1, February 2012, p. 19. I should also distinguish the serious fan from the person who cares about a particular team's success only, for instance, for as long as his nephew is a member of that team: once Scotty graduates, his interest in the Mighty Mites evaporates. In that kind of case, the rooting is more a manifestation of the fan's support of Scotty. My subject is a different species: the fan committed to a team through transfigurations of its players and coaching staff, league re-alignment, and so on. This does not imply that the serious fan's support is unconditional; certain actions by those affiliated with the team could alienate his affection. The point, though, is that the serious fan's devotion is to a particular team as a good, rather than as a means or constituent of some independent value. Thanks to Scott Scheall for prodding me to consider this more circumscribed kind of fandom. For useful discussion of some of the larger issues here, see Nicholas Dixon, "The Ethics of Supporting Sports Teams," *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 18, 2001.

<sup>11</sup> By stipulating that my subject is the healthy fan, I am not presupposing that there is value in any species of fan, for that would beg the paper's question. I simply seek to clarify the type of fan whose value status is most worth examining. (Hooligans and misfits would be too easy a target.)

way in which it can be objectively valuable. While the two issues are closely related and while, on my view, the appeal of sport does play a role in explaining its value, the descriptive and prescriptive questions should not be conflated. Given that millions of people the world over devote a tremendous amount of time, energy, and money to serious fandom, my question, essentially, is: Should they? Is that a legitimate pastime? A worthwhile use of a given fan's resources? Correspondingly, I am not seeking to offer a causal explanation of why fans root as they do, nor to explain the motivations that lead people to pull for particular teams. Rather, I mean to explore: what is the good, if any, of their doing so?

My discussion of this issue is complicated by the fact that part of the basis for fandom's being good (when it is), I believe, lies in the fact that the fan enjoys sport and, presumably, is following it for that reason. This means that its value is not independent of a person's desires and I thus cannot disown questions of motivation entirely. Personal ends are crucial to a thing's objective value. Nonetheless, an individual's taste for a given object or activity does not *by itself* render that object good (in the sense of its being objectively valuable). Thus the distinction between descriptive analysis and inquiry into prescriptive value remains critical.

At the same time, while sport does offer objective value, in my view, it remains an optional value; a given person's life is not morally deficient, without it. The decision of whether or not to follow sport is legitimately a matter of taste: it is morally permitted, but not required. Life offers many pursuits that are objectively valuable *for those who*

*enjoy that kind of thing.* Whittling is not for me, as bird watching may not be for you.<sup>12</sup> Sport fandom falls in this category.<sup>13</sup>

Finally, I should underscore that none of this denies the existence of fans who embrace or manifest their allegiances in inappropriate ways that are antithetical to objective values. Moreover, many fans are mixed specimens on a spectrum between paradigms of health and disease, exhibiting varying complements of constructive and destructive elements. I posit the model of a healthy fan simply to explore what value fandom, in its best form, can bring to a person's life.<sup>14</sup>

Let me now address a few more substantive suppositions concerning values.

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<sup>12</sup> Moreover, fandom is not necessarily an *objective* value for anyone who is a fan, given the possibility of irrational forms of fandom. An objective value is (roughly) that which is, in fact, beneficial to an individual's life. Certain things can be objectively valuable for some people without being valuable to others because of variations in particular individuals' needs and ends. Insulin or beta-blockers might be valuable to people with certain illnesses but not to those without those conditions. Beneath such variable values and setting the boundaries of what could qualify as objectively valuable for a particular individual, however, are the most basic conditions of all human life. I shall explain this a bit further, shortly. For a much fuller explanation of optional values and of objective value, see Leonard Peikoff, *Objectivism: The Philosophy of Ayn Rand*, New York: Penguin, 1991, pp. 323-324, 241-249; Tara Smith, *Viable Values – A Study of Life as the Root and Reward of Morality*, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000, pp. 99-101, 127-128, 146; and Tara Smith, *Ayn Rand's Normative Ethics – The Virtuous Egoist*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006, pp. 27, 30, 190 note # 30.

<sup>13</sup> The value that I am attributing to sport in a serious fan's life need not be self-conscious; the fan is not necessarily aware of the value that I posit. Fans are not closet philosophers who pass the breaks between innings immersed in deep reflection on the metaphysical implications of their afternoon at the ballpark. A person need not understand the mechanics of values in his life in order to benefit from them. My subject is the fan's experience of fandom, rather than his thoughts about his fandom.

<sup>14</sup> Note that my project is not to directly engage the question, recently discussed by others, of who constitutes the ideal fan: the purist, the partisan, or a hybrid. (For the most pointed discussion of this, see Dixon, "The Ethics of Supporting Sports Teams," and Russell, "The Ideal Fan or Good Fans?" pp. 11-23.) Insofar as my focus is on the kind of fan who cares passionately about the success of *his* team, it might be thought that I support the partisan as the ideal type, but that is not entailed by anything in my discussion and I do not wish to take a stand on that question here. Russell has raised good reason to question the very notion of an ideal fan. [Russell, p. 12] By clarifying the kind of "serious fan" who I am discussing here, I mean simply to distinguish my subject from more casual fans and from unhealthy fans (who might be motivated by either purist or partisan preferences). Insofar as my focus *is* on the more partisan-inclined, however, my analysis of the value of fandom, even if it proves sound, may need to be supplemented by accounts of the value of other types of fandom.



I am grounding all of this on the moral theory of Ayn Rand's rational egoism. While I cannot take the time to defend that theory here, I should indicate its essentials simply to orient the reader.<sup>15</sup>

Rand's egoism holds that a person should act to promote his self-interest. His well-being is his highest good and, properly, the primary aim of his actions. The basis for this rests in the fact that the very phenomenon of value is rooted in living organisms' need to achieve certain ends in order to sustain their lives. That literal, existential need creates the imperative for identifying that which is *good* for an organism and that which is bad for it. If a human being seeks to live, he must act in the manner that his nature dictates in order to achieve that end.<sup>16</sup>

A value, on this account, is that which one acts to gain and/or keep.<sup>17</sup> Values span a wide range of ends – intellectual, social, emotional, as well as material. Bread, bicycles, education, confidence, a career, a marriage, or music could all qualify. The standard of value is life: that which furthers a person's life is objectively good; that which imperils or impairs it is bad.<sup>18</sup> The reason for caring about values is their impact

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<sup>15</sup> I elaborate much more extensively on this theoretical foundation in *Viable Values – A Study of Life as the Root and Reward of Morality*, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000.

<sup>16</sup> The "if" in this statement is crucial. The existence of value is conditional on a living organism's seeking to exist. And because, in the case of human beings, that seeking and the requisite actions are volitional, no set of facts can unilaterally create values. For much more on this, see Rand, "The Objectivist Ethics," *The Virtue of Selfishness*, New York: Signet, 1961, pp. 13-39, and "Causality vs. Duty," *Philosophy: Who Needs It*, pp. 118-119; Peikoff, *Objectivism*, pp. 241-249, 206-220; Smith, *Viable Values*, pp. 93-95; Smith, *Ayn Rand's Normative Ethics*, pp. 19-23; and Smith, "The Importance of the Subject in Objective Morality: Distinguishing Objective from Intrinsic Value," *Social Philosophy & Policy* 25, no. 1, 2008, pp. 126-148. Note that this is of a piece with Kretchmar's emphasis on games as centrally concerned with problem-solving, an ability that is beneficial to human beings because it is necessary for the species' survival. See Kretchmar, "Normative Heights," pp. 3, 9.

<sup>17</sup> Rand, "The Objectivist Ethics," p. 16.

<sup>18</sup> Virtues name the types of actions or action-associated traits and dispositions that, as a kind, typically fuel the achievement of values. Such qualities as honesty, justice, independence, and productiveness are among the moral virtues that Rand recognizes. See Rand, "The Objectivist Ethics," pp. 27-28. For elaboration on the fundamental virtues of rational egoism, see Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, New York: Dutton, 1992 edition (orig. 1957), pp. 1018-1020; Peikoff, chapter 8; and Smith, *Ayn Rand's Normative Ethics*.

on that person's life and happiness.<sup>19</sup> Thus a particular end might be a value in the descriptive, subjective sense that I act to gain it without being an objective value, since the object of my action is not necessarily in my genuine interest. Correspondingly, when Rand commends "self-interest," she is referring to a person's actual, objective interest. Her rational egoism should not be confused with psychological egoism, subjectivism, hedonism, materialism, or predatory exploitation.<sup>20</sup>

With this framework in place, let's turn more directly to the value of sport fandom. My discussion proceeds in four phases, considering sport's illumination of *how* to value, the *propriety* of valuing, and the *point* of valuing; it then draws lessons about exactly what we are cheering.

## 2. How to Value: Better to Have Loved and Lost ...

Given that a value is something that a person acts to acquire (or preserve), the pursuit of values requires both the selection of a specific end and correlative action, to achieve it. While value-pursuit thus unites the efforts of mind and body, it also involves

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<sup>19</sup> Rand's view is broadly Aristotelian. "Life" refers to more than sheer bodily or biological survival and encompasses happiness, as gauged by that same standard. See my explanation of this relationship in *Viable Values*, pp. 125-151.

<sup>20</sup> Importantly, Rand rejects the zero-sum model of human relationships in which one person's gains necessarily entail another person's loss. In this respect, life is quite different from a competitive athletic contest. For more on this, see Smith, *Ayn Rand's Normative Ethics*, pp. 38-46; *Viable Values*, pp. 174.-186; and "Reconsidering Zero-Sum Value: It's How You Play the Game," *Journal of Social Philosophy* 28, no. 2 (Fall 1997), pp. 128-139.

Separately, one might suspect that on the view that values are that which a person *acts* to gain or keep, the comparative passivity of a fan could not qualify. Vehemently as he might (from his sofa) implore the squad to "stiffen up" or to "be careful with the ball, goddammit," these astute instructions go unheeded by the team; the fan makes no active contribution to the outcome that he desires. (Leave aside possible contributions of home crowd cheers, when he is actually attending a game.) This conclusion would be hasty, however. While the fan who I am contemplating obviously does not undertake the same sorts of activities as the players (learning plays, training, executing the block or the bunt, and so on), he does engage in the actions of a fan – clearing his calendar for the relevant hours to watch a game, tuning in, buying tickets, reading, analyzing, emotionally investing, etc.

a person's spirit.<sup>21</sup> The fan's experience helps us to appreciate that valuing is not merely a sequence of intellectual selection followed by mechanical execution, the physical performance of the requisite deeds. Valuing is visceral, as well. It is felt in the marrow.

In sport, people care – often passionately. The greatest players are driven. Their commitment is consuming and self-defining; it penetrates to the core of who they *are* (which is the reason why they strain to press hundreds of pounds, rise at 4:30 to run up and down stadium stairs, and train with exacting fitness gurus throughout the off-season). Yet it is the fan's relative passivity that particularly exposes the affective dimension of valuing. Although the fan simply watches (it is the players who *act* to secure victory), he takes great satisfaction in caring: anticipating, analyzing, hoping, fretting – in being invested emotionally as well as intellectually.

The virtues that we admire in the best performers – discipline, resilience, and the rest – are themselves animated by players' desires. Without desire, a person would exert no such effort. Desire is not important solely for its motivational role, however, as a catalyst to successful action. Desire is also important because it feels good. The wanting in itself is worthwhile.<sup>22</sup>

Sport fans care deeply about outcomes beyond our control and divorced from real life consequences. Don't we have better things to invest our time and money in? Our energy and emotion? Serious fans experience intense elation and dejection. The emotional reverberations penetrate. Why subject ourselves to that, given the insignificance of the stakes, if not for the fun of it? Yet: is its being fun (as it is, for some of us) simply our perversity? People get kicks from all sorts of things, after all ...

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<sup>21</sup> I do not mean anything mystical by "spirit," but simply those aspects of a person's experience that pertain to his mind or consciousness, such as his thoughts, feelings, moods, attitudes, or what we sometimes refer to as his emotional life or psychological condition.

<sup>22</sup> This is not true of all desires or of wanting *per se*. The status of the desire to relieve a pain, for example, is more complex. My immediate point concerns only the desire involved in playing and rooting in sport.

I think not. Part of what makes it fun, I would suggest, is its implicit affirmation of a truth: it is right to care. Caring, in principle, is a good thing. It is so not because it is enjoyable; clearly, caring entails suffering, at times, as when the object of one's concern does not advance as well as one hopes. Caring itself is valuable, however, in that it is a prerequisite for goal-directed action. Regardless of whether one's ends are egoistic, altruistic, utilitarian, egalitarian, or aimed at other diverse goals, a person will not be motivated to take the action that any end demands unless he truly cares about its achievement. And because caring is also vital for sustaining purposeful action over time, it is a prerequisite of efficacy: a person's efforts are likely to be half-hearted or easily abandoned unless the outcome *matters* to him. (Thus our common disparagement of the "indifferent" worker.)

My immediate point about fans is that part of what explains the fun of a fan's commitment is its reflection of the fact that it is right to care. And more: it is right to care wholeheartedly, unreservedly, surrendering oneself emotionally to the fortunes of his ends in the way that the serious fan does. When a person pursues various values, he should pursue them *like he means it*. This both deepens his potential enjoyment of values

and best positions him to succeed; it is the mode that is most conducive to the actual achievement and full realization of worthwhile ends.<sup>23</sup>

In a properly self-interested ethics, purposeful, value-pursuing action is a central value. Seeking is not an end in itself, however; goal-directed action is not busy-work. It is *goal*-directed action. The point of pursuing specific goals is to achieve ends that the agent believes will contribute to his overall well-being and that he *wants*. It is in this way that valuing is something that we feel as well as something that we choose and do. To put the point in slightly different terms: a person's success at achieving his ends is not a matter of earning credit for a performance; it is not a perspective *on* his experience. It is a quality *of* and *in* his experience (as is suggested by the distinctly agreeable atmosphere that success typically creates, the good feeling it rinses over us). An objective value in a person's life is not an externally imposed duty that he is obligated to fulfill. Properly, for a given person, an objective value is three-dimensional: the person judges rationally that he should go after this end (read this book, apply for that job, ask out that woman); he does go after it, through action; he wants to go after it. Or more precisely, he wants *it*. The fact that sports fans want ferociously without being engaged in the actions that can achieve their ends especially helps us to appreciate this.

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<sup>23</sup> In evolutionary terms, it is reasonable to suppose that human beings are "built" to enjoy caring because our survival depends on caring and on the actions that manifest it. In this general vein, Kretchmar has argued that it is in human nature to seek out artificial tests and that engaging with games' challenges carries evolutionary benefits. "Why Do We Care So Much About Mere Games? (And Is This Ethically Defensible?)" *Quest* 57, 2005, p. 183.

I am assuming in this paragraph that the values in question are rational values for the person in question, that they appropriate to his capacities, resources, and higher ends. Also, I suspect that many fans subconsciously recognize the propriety of fully committing to ends and that this underwrites their permitting themselves to indulge in this ostensibly useless enterprise. For related observations concerning a fan's surrender, see Steve Almond, "An Agreement to Live in a State of Powerlessness," *New York Times Magazine*, August 26, 2012, pp. 56-57. Simon Barnes also discusses this. "Sport depends on your ability to believe in it. You must believe that sport is important, while knowing all along that it is nothing of the kind. You must keep sport in perspective, yes, but you still have to believe in it. Or, more accurately, you have to suspend your disbelief," Barnes, p. 89. For his principal thoughts on appropriate caring alongside "keeping it in perspective" as well as on the innocence and emotional vulnerability of fandom, see Barnes, pp. 87, 89, and 194-199.

So, my thought is, like the fan: feel it. Inhabit that desire. It is good to feel it. It is healthy. It is life-advancing.<sup>24</sup> The way to value is wholeheartedly, releasing oneself into the emotion of it – both because that is what motivates the actions necessary to achieve objective values and because it feels good.<sup>25</sup>

Why does its feeling good, though, render it worthwhile (even partially)? To answer, and to underwrite the propriety of valuing in this way, we must consider the point of valuing.

### ***3. The Point of Valuing: For the Fun of It***

Why should a person value things?

Essentially, because he must.

Briefly: a person has needs which, if left unsatisfied, will result in his demise. Human beings' existence is not a metaphysical given, eternally assured, and our actions do not spontaneously meet our needs.<sup>26</sup> We must figure out the conditions of our existence, means of satisfying them, and then take the requisite actions. We must

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<sup>24</sup> We cannot direct our emotions, of course, ordering up specific feelings on demand. Emotions are automatized responses to external stimuli that reflect a person's underlying values and beliefs. Nonetheless, people do often repress their feelings, attempting to muffle their power or to deny them access to the surface of full awareness, so as to resist feeling them. Given this, recognition that experiencing the feel of our values is part of what it means to truly value things may encourage us to loosen the locks of repression. And that, in turn, can have the salutary effect of encouraging fuller examination of one's feelings' sources and of our decisions that are influenced by them. For more on the basic nature of emotions, see Paolo Costa, "A Secular Wonder," in George Levine, ed., *The Joy of Secularism – 11 Essays for How We Live Now*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011, p. 144; Smith, *Ayn Rand's Normative Ethics*, pp. 70-73; Paul E. Griffiths, *What Emotions Really Are* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); Robert C. Solomon, ed., *Thinking About Feeling: Contemporary Philosophers on Emotions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Patricia Greenspan, *Emotions and Reasons* (New York: Routledge, 1988).

<sup>25</sup> Each and every episode within the course of valuing an end will not necessarily feel good; I am speaking of the experience as a whole. Also, this does not imply that a person should *express* his feelings with the same ferocity in all situations.

<sup>26</sup> Certain life-sustaining actions (such as breathing and digesting) are genetically coded to occur without conscious effort, but critical others are not. For human beings, the acquisition of food, clothing, shelter, medicine, and knowledge require deliberate effort. For elaboration, see Rand "The Objectivist Ethics;" Peikoff, pp. 193-198; and Smith, *Ayn Rand's Normative Ethics*, chapter 3.

identify hunger pangs, for instance, as hunger pangs – indications of a need that can be satisfied by ingesting certain substances and not others – and proceed to obtain the appropriate foods. While our needs are of differing types, scope, and urgency, this principle holds for all of them: human beings must act in specific ways to achieve the values that are necessary to sustain us. It is a fact of our nature. A person should value certain things because he must.

“Musts” only take us so far, however. All “musts” are relational: *I must ... for the sake of something else*. (I must get my application in by the deadline if I want to be eligible for the grant; I must save money now if I am to have adequate savings to pay for the vacation I’d like this summer.) Ultimately, all “musts” are grounded in a basic conditional: a human being must value certain things if he is to live.<sup>27</sup> Why should he want that? Here, reasons of the usual sort run out; the answer is of a different order. (Indeed, one’s answer is what creates the need for reasons in every other sphere of action.)

Why should a person seek to live?

Because he thinks he’ll enjoy it. Because he wants it. He likes living. It pleases him.

A person holds no inherent duty to maintain his life; he is under no divinely imposed obligation to *be*. Yet if, fundamentally, a person does wish to live, then it is crucial for him to recognize that certain paths will further that end and certain paths will work against it. This is the foundation of objective values. And this is why a person needs a moral code of values to guide him to the kinds of actions that will promote his well-being.

What all values are for, fundamentally, is the agent himself and his ability to enjoy the life that he seeks. Sport, by virtue of its artificiality and insulation – the fact that its goals are contrived and inconsequential for “real life” (my paycheck is no larger,

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<sup>27</sup> See note # 16 above.

my cholesterol no lower, and my marriage no richer, when my team wins) – brings this out in a particularly powerful way.<sup>28</sup>

Some dismiss sport as “only” a game because it seems pointless, in the larger scheme of things. In relation to many things, it is. I am not defending enjoyment of sport as the highest value in a rational person’s life; many other things should often take precedence. Yet there is something importantly right in the very frivolity of it, in the sheer fact that a person enjoys it and that it does not serve some further, “worthier” end. Enjoyment does not always need a reason. Enjoyment does not need permission. It is the ultimate reason why other things do need reasons: How will they affect my well-being? – a central artery of which is: my enjoyment, my elemental enjoyment of being. (In a like vein, Simon Barnes speculates on sports mattering precisely because it doesn't matter.)<sup>29</sup>

The characterization of something as “only” a game clearly implies its inadequacy. The activity, it declares, requires justification. The typical way to redeem sport’s value is by reference to its professed benefits for other realms, the ways it can foster qualities that are useful in business or personal relationships. Yet we can equally ask of sport’s service to other realms: and what makes those good? Consider our similar evaluations in other realms: “It’s only money.” “It’s only a job.” “It’s only a broken arm.” “It’s only a girlfriend.”

What isn't “only”?

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<sup>28</sup> As others have observed, it is characteristic of sport that players perform actions not for their expected instrumental value, but for their own sake. In his classic *The Grasshopper – Games, Life and Utopia*, for instance, Bernard Suits observes that “Playing a game is the voluntary attempt to overcome *unnecessary* obstacles.” (Suits, *The Grasshopper*, Toronto: Broadview Press, 2005 edition, p. 55, emphasis added; originally published 1978). This naturally raises the question: What good is that? Doesn't life pose enough actual hardships? Kretchmar addresses this question in full light of poverty, disease, war, and the like, in “Why Do We Care So Much About Mere Games?” While Kretchmar’s concern is with games’ value to the player more than to the observer, some of the value that he discerns could be easily seen to arise for fans, as well.

<sup>29</sup> Barnes, p. 9.



To regard something as relatively insignificant presupposes a standard of value. What is that standard? And what is its claim to our allegiance? The value of sport (however much or little that is, in the end) depends upon the source of value, more broadly. While the full engagement of that question lies beyond my purview here, the pertinent thought is this: Given that, at the base of all objective values stands the individual's desire for living, essentially, just because he likes it, the engaged sports fan, in surrendering himself so wholly to the enjoyment of valuing, is doing something that is not so different in kind and that is not in need of a special justification. His devotion reflects the truth that all values are *just for the fun of it*. Ultimately, life is for the fun of it.

Lest I be misunderstood: To say that values are "just for the fun of it" is not to imply that the test of whether a particular thing *is* a value is the question: *would I have fun doing this?* Similarly, my claim that "at the base of all objective values stands the individual's desire for living, essentially, just because he likes it" does not entail that liking is the ultimate standard of value. My point, rather, is to recognize that part of the reason for a person to pursue values and to care about morality is the fact that he seeks to flourish, that he *desires* living. And the reason that he does, typically, is his anticipated enjoyment of living.<sup>30</sup>

Rational egoism does not entail hedonism. These claims about the significance of enjoyment do not mean that a person should (or could) pursue exclusively pleasurable activities. In order for a person to achieve his ongoing happiness, he must meet all sorts of practical needs by means that are not uniformly enjoyable (scrubbing the pots, discarding the rubbish, etc.). Yet to deny oneself hours that are themselves, essentially, simply for pleasure would miss the point of pursuing all the other "more worthy"

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<sup>30</sup> Bear in mind the different levels on which a person enjoys things. Many people sincerely enjoy challenging careers, for example, without enjoying every constituent moment of the careful study, the difficult decisions, uncertainties, pressure, etc., that they demand. Many people enjoy the flavors of the rich dessert without enjoying their attendant awareness of its caloric toll.

pursuits. Those cannot be *more* worthy if the source of their worthiness is the enjoyment of one's life – and if he sacrifices that enjoyment for their sake.

To be clear: In a particular hour, it could be more appropriate that a person forgo the pleasure of a ballgame to tend other needs or a particular need's urgency. The fact that the desire for pleasure plays an integral role in the generation of values does not entail that every opportunity for pleasure trumps every opportunity to advance a value other than pleasure. Enjoyment's value has limits – for the egoistic reason that enjoyment is not a reliable test of what is genuinely in a person's interest. Rational egoism rejects hedonism because it recognizes that pleasure is not a sound measure of human well-being.<sup>31</sup>

My point, however, is that to deny oneself pleasure as a matter of policy – routinely to subordinate enjoyment to more instrumentally useful tasks on the premise that “sport is only fun; it isn't worthy” – would invert ends and means, treating means as intrinsically valuable and forgetting what they are for and what gives them value.<sup>32</sup>

#### ***4. The Propriety of Valuing: The Fan's Implicit Egoism***

The propriety of valuing is tightly entwined with the point of valuing. In our society, self-sacrifice is widely presumed to be the moral good. “The measure of our character is our willingness to give of ourselves to others.” While the words were John Kerry's in 2004, the sentiment is confidently expressed by a long trail of political leaders from across the ideological spectrum (e.g., George Bush senior and son, Mitt Romney,

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<sup>31</sup> Russell's discussion of extreme sports brings out the fact that enjoyment is not a sufficient criterion of value. See “The Value of Dangerous Sport,” *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*, 32, 2005, pp. 1-19.

<sup>32</sup> The fact that enjoyment of one's life is pivotal to the birth of objective values in a person's life does not render enjoyment the standard of value. Nor does it equate value or happiness with that which produces the highest possible peak on a pleasure-meter in any given hour. For more on the relationship between the purpose of value and the standard of value, see Rand, “The Objectivist Ethics,” pp. 27 and 31-33; Peikoff, pp. 213-220; and Smith, *Viable Values*, chapter 5; and *Ayn Rand's Normative Ethics*, pp. 28-33.

Barack Obama), who routinely call on Americans to “give back to the community.”<sup>33</sup> Commencement speakers from all walks of life (novelists, inventors, film directors, entrepreneurs) annually urge college graduates to use their education to serve something “larger than themselves.” Conservatives and Progressives increasingly champion mandatory national service;<sup>34</sup> Michelle Obama lectures that “service is the rent we pay for living.”<sup>35</sup>

Against this background, sport is a sanctuary in which participants are encouraged to pursue their own interested ends. It is widely accepted that when it comes to the athletic arena, the proper way to play or to root is to commit to *your* side full-throttle, unshakably and unapologetically. It is this type of steadfast dedication that drives the most successful players to take the countless actions that contribute to their success. Our standards for fans, too, expect unwavering devotion. The fair-weather fan is, by definition, not a good fan. The true fan wouldn't think of rooting for a rival; the idea is inconceivable. (I have heard of many inventive forms of Lenten sacrifice, but never this. *Could* a true-blue Red Sox fan root for the Yankees? To suggest that he could would reveal a complete failure to understand who that person *is*.)<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> One hears it often from political figures, I think, precisely because it is not perceived as controversial; it is a safe applause line.

<sup>34</sup> Senator John McCain, General Stanley McChrystal, and Arianna Huffington are among its well known supporters. See Huffington praising it from the National Service Summit [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/arianna-huffington/franklin-project-national-service\\_b\\_3492226.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/arianna-huffington/franklin-project-national-service_b_3492226.html) or the website of Americorps: <http://www.nationalservice.gov/programs/amicorps>

<sup>35</sup> Michelle Obama, Commencement address given at University of California, Merced in the spring of 2009. Mrs Obama was quoting Marian Wright Edelman – transcript at: [http://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/16/us/politics/16text-michelle.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/16/us/politics/16text-michelle.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0)

<sup>36</sup> I leave aside, obviously, rooting for a rival for instrumental reasons, such as when its victory in a particular game would benefit one's own team's playoff eligibility. Russell's observation that a fan's ongoing support of a team is not so much a matter of loyalty to something regarded as an external, independent good, as a matter of the fan's self-identity, is of a piece with this. See Russell, “The Ideal Fan or Good Fans?” p. 19.

Firm commitment to any of one's ends has its value, one might agree, but why should a person care so fervently about something this inconsequential? The answer, I think, helps us to home in on the egoism of valuing.

Most people's allegiances in sport are, at base, arbitrary. While some fans adopt teams for philosophical reasons (a team owner's religious or political affiliations, for instance, or a school's policies on student athletes), the vast majority "inherit" their teams from a city or family or other happenstance.<sup>37</sup> ("We Sheehan's have always pulled for Newcastle.") Moreover, this is regarded as perfectly reasonable. "Because I grew up in Pittsburgh" is a silly reason to adopt religious conclusions; it is the epitome of reason, in explaining devotion to the Steelers. So, the question is: Why indulge these arbitrary preferences and applaud such fierce devotion to them?<sup>38</sup>

Our doing so, I think, reflects recognition that a person's life is an end in itself and that it is right for him to treat it as all-important, as his highest good. That is, by accepting that the reasons for his devotion need rest no further than the fact that *he* wants this team's success – by treating that desire as all the justification he needs – we are implicitly affirming the propriety of his achieving what he seeks for no purpose other than his enjoyment of that. We are endorsing his enjoyment as an end in itself,

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<sup>37</sup> Cf. Hornby, p. 127.

<sup>38</sup> Strictly, preferences are neither arbitrary nor non-arbitrary; it is conclusions or decisions that can be assessed by that metric. Frequently, a decision is rendered arbitrary because it is based on an inappropriate indulgence of personal preference. Yet in some circumstances, indulging a preference is perfectly reasonable (such as in choosing a flavor of ice cream, other things being equal). What is important for my purposes is the fact that the serious fan acts on the basis of sheer preference. And in this arena, we regard as adequate reason for action the kind of reason that in many other contexts would be distinctly inappropriate (such as in hiring decisions or choosing a course of medical treatment for a serious illness). Again: Why indulge these arbitrary preferences and applaud such fierce devotion to them?

crediting personal gratification in a way that altruism could not abide.<sup>39</sup> Egoism is allowed, in sport. Indeed, it is encouraged.<sup>40</sup>

Note the intensity of the serious fan's emotional responses to his team's fortunes – the deep dejection, the celestial soar produced by triumph in the big games. Sport carries an astonishing power to seize a person's global sense of well-being, of whether things are fundamentally right with the world.<sup>41</sup> Many fans testify that all-out emotional investment is part of what they enjoy, well aware that episodes of disappointment may outnumber those of triumph. When they tamp down their engagement ("watching" a game while really doing other things, for instance, or deliberately detaching emotionally, so as not to be "burned again"), the returns are diminished. Rooting – and rooting wholeheartedly, along with the surrender to fortune that that entails – is much of what makes sport rewarding.<sup>42</sup>

My suggestion is that this strength of emotional response stems from the unusually personal, self-interested quality of the desire. It is precisely the fact that the games' outcomes do not matter to the larger framework of "real" values that allows us to see – and allows the fan to feel – how nakedly it is *him*, and his getting what he seeks, that are

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<sup>39</sup> To regard something as an end in itself is not to attribute intrinsic value to it. For full explanation, see my "Intrinsic Value: Look-Say Ethics," *Journal of Value Inquiry* 32, no. 4, December 1998, pp. 539-553. For clarification more specifically of the difference between objective value and intrinsic value, see my "The Importance of the Subject in Objective Morality: Distinguishing Objective from Intrinsic Value," *Social Philosophy & Policy* 25, no. 1, 2008, pp. 126-148.

<sup>40</sup> That athletic success is routinely celebrated in formal award ceremonies, the annual issuing of prestigious All-Star lists, and select players' installation into Halls of Fame all testify to the considerable dignity that society accords to these pursuits, pointless though they may be in conventional utilitarian terms.

<sup>41</sup> Hornby is especially good at capturing this; see pp. 217-223 for his account of an emotional trajectory with which many fans will identify.

<sup>42</sup> Barnes addresses this calibration of investment on pp. 167 ff. Also note that this bears certain affinities with Russell's claims that human beings are meaning-seeking animals who find meaning in the sorts of narratives and self-identifying attachments that sport fandom can offer. See Russell, "Ideal Fans...", p. 16-19.

on the line. There is a piercing “mine-ness” to *my team*, a wholeness and unfiltered purity to my identification with it. That is why the team’s success or failure registers with such profound, percussive impact. (Some part of every person is subconsciously aware, I would speculate, that he must seek his own well-being and that behind and through many of the specific objects he seeks, he is seeking what he deems beneficial *for him*. Note: “Many” of his actions and their objects, not all; I am not retreating from my rejection of psychological egoism. People obviously often act in ways detrimental to their interest – sometimes accidentally, sometimes deliberately. Many believe that they should subordinate their interests to those of others. My point is that sport is an enclave in which players and fans alike are liberated to pursue their perceived self-interest without apology. And my conjecture is that that egoism is much of why it feels right, to fans.)

Earlier, I argued that the point of valuing is personal enjoyment. Beneath all other why’s and wherefore’s, ultimately, “just because I like it” stands as the most basic reason why one should pursue or do anything; that desire is pivotal to the existence of values.<sup>43</sup> Sport offers a vibrant illustration of this. Further, though, it is an instance of it.

Much as we might draw lessons from sport about virtues and values that carry useful application to other realms, an implication of what I have been arguing is that sport offers value in itself. Sport is not merely a metaphor or a proxy for “real” life; it is not simply a laboratory or a rehearsal space, offering instruction for the parts of life that matter. It *is* life, consuming this June afternoon or that fall ‘08 season of the finite interval of which a particular fan’s life is made. And if a person enjoys that – not in a way that impairs his ability to achieve other things that objectively matter more for his

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<sup>43</sup> To be clear, the fact that desire is “pivotal” to the existence of values does not mean that it is sufficient, or that the sheer experience of desire *by itself* confers value on the object sought or the desire itself. A person’s “likes” are not value-generators on a like-by-like basis. The purpose-standard distinction noted above is crucial. Correspondingly, I should not be read as implying that all desires are, by nature, egoistic. *Who* it is that wants something and *what* it is that a person wants are distinct questions, and the egoism of a pursuit depends on the latter – more exactly, on what is sought and on why it is sought.

overall well-being and subject to all the conditions set by the standard of value – then that is a good. That is valuable. We are all “on the clock,” after all. As one sage fan has observed, sport may not be real life, but it isn't make-believe, either.<sup>44</sup>

Sport does impart lessons that apply to many spheres of human activity. Yet among the truths it affirms is that, quite simply, enjoyment matters. Indeed, the desire to enjoy is what makes “mattering:” it gives rise to the possibility of anything’s being objectively a value, or “required,” or “right” for a person. Correspondingly, sport is a value (for those who enjoy it), in one important respect, just because they do.<sup>45</sup>

This is the quiet wisdom of the serious fan. His experience (however unwittingly) displays important aspects of how to value, of the point of valuing, and of the propriety of valuing. A person must invest in his ends wholeheartedly in order to act as required to attain them and more, in order to enjoy them. What the fanatic gets right is that *this* is the way to care and to go after things: unabashedly, passionately, heart and soul – and that this is the way to experience them. A person should value not only because his existence depends on it, but because his enjoyment depends on it. That is his reason for being.

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<sup>44</sup> Scott Simon, *Home and Away – Memoirs of a Fan*, New York: Hyperion, 2000, p. 38.

<sup>45</sup> In an appraisal of the likely lasting effects on London of having hosted the 2012 Summer Olympics, an *Economist* column is duly philosophical: “Longevity is not the only measure of value: Usain Bolt won the 100 meters in under ten seconds, but those seconds were quite exciting. The life of a country, like a person’s, is made up of moments, and the golden ones can be cherished even if they change nothing.” “Glory and Hope” (*Bagehot* column; no author given), *The Economist*, August 11, 2012, p. 52. For broader philosophical probing of the role of enjoyment in value, see Harry Frankfurt, *The Importance of What We Care About*, 1988, and John Kekes, *Enjoyment – The Moral Significance of Styles of Life*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.

The propriety of valuing, then, rests in its egoism. Valuing serves the purpose for which the phenomenon of value arises, namely: each individual's well-being. *His* happiness.<sup>46</sup>

(My contention, it should be clear, is not that sport implies egoism because the character traits that it fosters are egoistic. Many of those traits are useful for efficacy in achieving a variety of goals, not exclusively self-interested ones. The egoism is entrenched, rather, at a deeper level, in the sanctioned pursuit of such a conventionally useless end. Seeking one team's success in the way that the serious fan does, given that such success will promote no independent value in anyone's life, honors the pursuit of selfish pleasure as an end in itself. Investing in an outcome for no reason beyond your fancy is an extravagant expenditure of energy that could only be sanctioned by the fact that you enjoy it. *That* is what bespeaks egoism. Egoism is implicit in the reasons that underwrite the legitimacy of the pursuit, in other words, rather than in the skills conducive to success at that pursuit (though many of the same skills will be important to successful egoism).)

## 5. Cheering

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<sup>46</sup> Colin McGinn, in a book that focuses on playing sport rather than the fan's experience, sounds a similar theme at one stage, but he offers little explanation. See McGinn, *Sport*, 2008, Stocksfield, England: Acumen, p. 102.

Many fans enjoy the sense of belonging and camaraderie that they derive from fandom; by adopting a certain team, they affiliate themselves with a group of people who are often passionate about the same end and whose company can enhance their own experience. (For discussion of this aspect of fandom, see, for instance, Hubert Dreyfus and Sean Dorrance Kelly, *All Things Shining*, New York, Free Press, 2011, pp. 190-202, and Michael Chabon, *Manhood for Amateurs*, New York: Harper Collins, 2009, pp. 293-297.) These facts are perfectly compatible with the egoism of sport. For rational egoism is neither solipsistic nor anti-social and the enjoyment of an activity is not one and the same as the self-interest of that activity, since enjoyment is not the standard of interest (as I explained earlier). The egoism of fandom, accordingly, does not turn on whether a given fan enjoys following his team more in the company of others or in solitude (as some fans prefer, particularly for watching especially significant games). Further, to enjoy something with others (or even: to enjoy something more when the experience is shared with others) does not mean that *what* one enjoys is others. My principal contention, again, is simply that society's acceptance of sport fandom betrays an implicit endorsement of the pursuit of personal gratification as an end in itself. Thanks to Emrys Westacott for prodding me to address this social dimension of the value of sport, for many people.



So, then, what are we cheering?

Many things. While my focus in this paper has been on only certain values, sport undoubtedly offers several types of rewards. At one level, it offers those personal qualities frequently cited: perseverance, strategic acuity, poise under pressure, and so on. It offers excellence: the exemplary display of talents, skills, and execution of intention. It offers efficacy and success: winners, who best the other contestants. Sport offers heroes who deliver in the clutch or who, over seasons, are consistently the finest performers in their roles – some, who raise the level of their sport. It is an arena for admiration.<sup>47</sup>

And at a more telling level, I believe, we are cheering purposeful effort – the simple phenomenon of human beings wanting things and striving to get them. Quitters are booed. The insulation of sport and the artificial nature of its game's goals – the fact that its ends are of no external, practical consequence – suggest that part of what the fan cheers is the display of deliberate, thoughtful, goal-directed action – value-pursuit as such.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Barnes discusses the allure of greatness quite powerfully on pp. 32 ff, 129 ff, 181 ff.

<sup>48</sup> This is broadly similar to Bernard Suits' contention that because, in games, the goal is without value (apart from its being the goal of that specific game, that is), the value of the enterprise lies in the process of value-pursuit and in the achievement of challenging ends. See Suits, pp. 82-83 and Thomas Hurka, "Introduction," *Grasshopper*, p. 17. I do not subscribe to Suits' further thesis, however, that in man's ideal condition of utopia, instrumental activity would be obsolete and people's primary activity would be game-playing. (Suits, pp. 150-160, and Hurka, p. 15) For such a scenario eliminates the very conditions that make value-pursuit possible and that make it objectively valuable and, thereby, that render it capable of providing enjoyment to either agent or observer. Without purpose – more fundamentally, without the needs that mandate man's pursuit of purpose – the very concept of "value" (and correlatively, that which is "harmful" or "threatening") would be incoherent. (For explanation of this, see my *Viable Values*, pp. 83-123.) It is precisely because human beings do have "worlds to conquer," in other words (to use one of Suits' terms, p. 155), that we can enjoy the quest that is highlighted in sports. This fact is not a sufficient explanation of some people's enjoyment of sport, either as player or as serious fan, but it is a necessary condition.

“The most exciting thing in life is winning,” it has been said. “And the second most exciting thing is losing.”<sup>49</sup> Being *in it* can be a thrill.<sup>50</sup>

Sport showcases the human will in action, physicalized and perceptible. The clarity of a game’s mission, the great significance with which this end is imbued, alongside the absence of wider life-affecting impact all suggest that it is the process of seeking goals that fans enjoy.<sup>51</sup> The high failure rate in sport also supports this: the best baseball batters make outs more often than they reach base; “successful” teams (in many sports) typically lose a lot of games, over a season; each contest leaves as much frustration, on one side, as satisfaction, on the other. (A rising Crimson Tide sinks a lot of other boats.) Fans enjoy not only ultimate success, but the quest.<sup>52</sup> And much of what fans enjoy about the quest is what it feels like. We are not agents in the pursuit of victory, after all, but onlookers. We throw ourselves into the caring and reap deep

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<sup>49</sup> Barnes attributes this line to “an American gambler,” p. 172. Also see his discussion on pp. 174-175.

<sup>50</sup> Consider the thudding falloff in interest when one’s team has been eliminated from postseason contention – or the gleeful surge that greets news that you haven’t been eliminated, after all. In a related vein, both Almond and Joe Posnanski suggest that fans are cheering on our own lives. See Almond, p. 57, and Joe Posnanski, “3000 Reasons to Party,” *Sports Illustrated*, July 18, 2011, p. 47.

<sup>51</sup> In a similar vein, see Suits, pp. 156-160. One wonders whether the aesthetic allure of the image of a tiger flying through its paces in chase may be a reflection of this: Living organisms *gotta go for* the goods that sustain them.

<sup>52</sup> A related phenomenon is what psychologists refer to as “hard fun,” the satisfaction afforded by “overcoming obstacles in pursuit of a goal.” Nicole Lazzaro, quoted in John Tierney, “On a Hunt for What Makes Gamers Keep Gaming,” *New York Times*, Science section, December 7, 2010. Many people enjoy games that require difficult problem-solving, such as challenging crossword puzzles, for that very difficulty. Kretchmar discusses closely related thoughts in “Normative Heights,” pp. 3, 9.

satisfaction from feeling all the ups and downs of our goal's course. This investment is an affirmation of trying – value-pursuing action.<sup>53</sup>

## 6. Conclusion

In winding down these reflections, I should underscore that a reader need not subscribe to egoism or Rand's theory of value for this proposal to be worth contemplating. Sport's fan base consists of people of widely divergent philosophical persuasions; their political, moral, and metaphysical beliefs occupy every corner of the intellectual and spiritual landscape. A bond uniting these people's enthusiasm for sport, I think, is the enjoyment of witnessing purposeful effort. The reason that people enjoy this is that we all engage in this type of activity every day (however modest or momentous the various ends that we pursue) and more, that we must engage in successful value-pursuit; we must be efficacious in advancing our goals. Correspondingly, human beings need to regard purposeful effort in a positive light and to believe that it is a viable path to achieving our values. Following sport can, at least on a subconscious level, help to satisfy these needs and reinvigorate fans' own value-pursuits.

The fan's experience, by shedding light on how to value (unreservedly; in thought and action and viscera), on the propriety of valuing (for its service to one's personal happiness), and on the point of valuing (joy in living), helps us to appreciate

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<sup>53</sup> In a related vein, people frequently remark upon the hopefulness inherent in sport. Its ethos is emphatically: Dreams can be realized; effort pays off. *Wait till next year.* We allow ourselves to be teased and hurt, yet invest afresh with each face-off and "batter up." Failure is treated not as a permanent fate so much as a sign that we haven't succeeded yet. The subtext? *But we will.* Or at least: *We can.* Which is why we try. Hope is implicit in trying to do something. The premise of such effort: "This might do the trick, this could help to bring about my end."

Separately: my emphasis on the activity of valuing as a value is not meant to aggrandize pursuit over achievement, nor to attribute equal value to the two. Certainly, for many or most values, achievement is more valuable than the process undertaken to achieve the relevant end. Nonetheless, my point is that valuing as such – desiring and trying to get – is valuable. It is an important constituent of a fulfilling, flourishing life rather than merely an instrument. Life is in the living.

that valuing is a value. It is so, fundamentally, because it is life-advancing. Valuing is necessary as *motivation* to do the things that life requires. It is necessary as *means*, insofar as valuing requires actions aimed to achieve sought ends. And: it's fun. If one wants to live, enjoy it – enjoy the living – which consists of: ongoing valuing.

Sport for the serious fan is simply fun. Subject to the usual conditions imposed by the standard of value, that is all the warrant it needs. This is what the fan at some level knows. He reminds us that living – pursuing, the joy of the quest – is the point.<sup>54</sup>

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