"Sport and The View From Nowhere"

Feezell

Strategy

- To take Nagel's view about the human condition—subjectivity and objectivity—and apply it to sport
- Using Nagel's dichotomy, sport is paradoxical and sportsmanship is the appropriate response
Subjectivity

• Example: An aggressive schoolchild who is asked by his teacher to consider his actions and how he’d feel.

• The Subjective Viewpoint: the internal view one has of one's own actions, one's relationship to the external world, and one's thoughts and feelings.

• The Subjective Viewpoint expresses how we see our situation or how we feel about our situation

Objectivity

• Example: The parent who feels for their child sitting on the bench but recognizes their child is terrible at basketball

• The Objective Viewpoint: The external view one has of the world and events in the world independent of one's own view or the view of any other subject.

• The Objective Viewpoint describes how we see the world independently of how we feel about it—it is detached and impersonal
Subjectivity and Objectivity

1. Subjectivity and Objectivity are not to be seen as "either – or" views, but viewpoints that are matters of degree
   - The subjective or objective viewpoint is relative

2. Abstracting from the subjective and moving toward the objective viewpoint leads us in the direction of truth
   - The objective viewpoint may seem to reflect how the world is and not how it is seen relative to some subject

Problems With "Closer to the Truth"

- Negating the subjective is not necessarily more "truthful"
  - In morality, there may be a tension between subjective moral truths and objective values
    - For example, an objective moral theory may say an action is right and yet a person might have a subjective view that says it's wrong
  - "The opposition between subjective and objective can arise at any place on the spectrum where one point of view claims dominance over another, more subjective one, and that claim is resisted" (Nagel).
Ethics and the Internal – External Tension

• "In ethics there are enormous problems that arise on the continuum from subjective to objective, because moral judgment seems to force one from a more self-centered, personal, even egoistic viewpoint to a more impersonal viewpoint that is other-directed" (fees L, 70).

• Example: As a hard-working individual I value the opportunity to vacation using my hard earned money. Considered objectively, my money could bring more value and more benefit to those who are starving, homeless, or oppressed than it would to myself.

• So, what should I do about this ethical tension between the subjective and objective?

The Paradox

• While the objective viewpoint may lead us closer to the truth, it creates a paradox

• Leaving behind our subjectivity means leaving behind our autonomy, are own mind, and personal meaning

• Moving toward objectivity means recognizing our own inability to ever understand anything purely objectively

• This failure leads to a radical skepticism, which leaves us in doubt of ever knowing the truth about ourselves, our world, and ethics
**Subjective and Objective Views of Sports**

- Just as subjectivity and objectivity apply to the meaning of life, so too it applies to sports
- From the subjective view, life seems to be importantly revealed, for better or worse, in sports
- From the objective view, sports are "just a game" and have little meaning or significance
- "The objective viewpoint claims that sport is not important. Subjective involvement resists that judgment and wants to return to its prereflective attachment unaffected by the objective perspective." (Feezell, 72)

**The Nature of Sport**

- If we are going to understand why sports seem less important than other things in life, then we first have to understand the nature of sports.
  1. Sports are games: by their nature, games are artificial creations which appear unnecessary, useless, and silly
     - Viewed objectively, games might even be absurd
  2. Playing sports is fun: despite the fact that games are artificial creations, we accept that fact when we agree to play a game because we find the game is inherently satisfying
The Absurdity of Sport

- Passionately engaging in sports leads to absurdity
  - According to Nagel, a situation is absurd "when it includes a conspicuous discrepancy between pretension or aspiration and reality" (in Feezell, 74).
  - Taking a sport seriously conflicts with our recognition that the sport is nothing but a silly game
    - "From this standpoint, sport is absurd because life is absurd…" (Feezell, 74).

The Dilemma

- "From the internal standpoint, seriousness is uncontested. The pursuit of excellence, the exuberance of play, and the satisfaction of victory gives meaning to the life of the sports participant…. Yet once the self expands to include the external point of view… the objective self returns…. If a person now finds, from an external point of view, that a significant part of his life is all objectively insignificant, how is he to deal with this?" (Feezell, 75)
Unsuccessful Responses

1. Affirm objectivity and deny subjectivity: this would lead to the complete denial of sports as significant or meaningful activity.

2. Reject objectivity and affirm subjectivity: this is as dishonest as denying subjectivity.
   - Taking an objective viewpoint is part of our humanity and will develop with respect to sport, at some point in someone's life.
   - Both Nagel and Feezell think the objective viewpoint is real and unavoidable.
   - To cut off one's objectivity is as impossible as cutting off one's subjectivity.

Playing Ironically, Humbly, and Morally

- How do we reconcile the tension between the subjective view and the objective view in sports?
  - An attitude of irony and humility and morality.
  - The combination of these two attitudes ameliorates the paradox of sports and moderates an overly competitive attitude in sports.
**Irony**

- Feezell thinks that having an attitude of irony is a way of unifying the paradoxes of subjectivity and objectivity.
- "Irony is a way to regard sports participation, including the pursuit of athletic excellence and the desire for victory, as if it really matters, while at the same time recognizing that it is relatively trivial in the larger scheme of things." (Feezell, 77)

**Humility**

- Feezell also thinks Nagel's view of the reconciling power of humility is important for the sports participant.
- "...humility in the sports world works against the athlete's natural reaction to our culture's glorification of athletic success. Humility for the sports participant realistically deflates the seeming global pretensions of our merely local athletic concerns." (Feezell, 77)
Morality

• The context of sports as rule-bound competitive activities, forces one to view oneself in relation to others.

• This awareness of the other in competitive sports brings with it an awareness of basic moral principles, like justice, fairness, and excellence.

• "What is objectively retained as significant is the moral atmosphere of sports participation: possibilities for developing sportsmanship, excellence of character, and the important attitudes that are essential to good character and sport." (Feezell, 78)

Resolving the Paradox

• While a subjective view of sports leads to one seeing sports as meaningful, an objective view leads to seeing sports as trivial.

• At the most extreme, an objective viewpoint leads to seeing all of life as meaningless and insignificant.

• But, a moral attitude is achieved by objectively considering yourself in relation to others, by standing apart from your own personal interests and seeing the interests of others.

• In this moral attitude, we can "reengage" and reconcile the paradox.

• Sportsmanship is the ideal form of resolving (in sport) the paradox of subjectivity and objectivity.
Detached Competitiveness

- Feezell considers the criticism that his solution will lead to a certain listless and detached competitiveness

- However, Feezell thinks that objective detachment does not mean that one will lack competitiveness
  
  - But, he does think that one's objective view will change how one acts in competitive sports

  - The objectively detached will exhibit more sportsmanlike qualities, hence act more ethically, in sports because will have a more realistic perspective about the nature and value of sports