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Who cares about winning?

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Abstract

Why do we so often care about the outcomes of games when nothing is at stake? There is a paradox here, much like the paradox of fiction, which concerns why we care about the fates and threats of merely fictional beings. I argue that the paradox threatens to overturn a great deal of what philosophers have thought about caring, severing its connection to value and undermining its moral weight. I defend a solution to the paradox that draws on Kendall Walton's solution to the paradox of fiction, developing his idea that it be extended to games. The solution takes games to involve make-believe: in particular, players and spectators make-believe that the outcome of the game matters. I also explore how the phenomenon extends beyond games. And I explore some moral implications: in particular, my view preserves the idea that we have reason not to impede others in their pursuit of what they care about.

I do not know whether any aliens are currently observing the Earth. But sometimes I like to imagine that one is. I like to imagine that it is his task to understand human behavior; to figure out what motivates us; to make sense of our actions. His name is Joe. Much of our daily behavior makes sense to Joe. But Joe notices that humans sometimes seem to care immensely about rather odd, unimportant things. Sometimes people seem to care very much about whether an orange sphere goes through a hoop. There is often much disagreement about which hoop the sphere

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should go through: some want it to go through the hoop at one end of a court; others want it to go through the hoop at the other end. (And there are other oddities: the hoop is placed 10 feet from the ground—an awkward height to reach for those holding the sphere.)

Joe wonders: why do humans care so much about which hoop the sphere goes through? How could that matter? Is it of some hidden consequence to humans? If not, then humans must be wildly irrational to care about something of no importance! Of course, Joe's thoughts apply to games in general. Why do people care about who wins or loses? Are those who care irrational?

This puzzle about winning has been raised by several philosophers, including Kendall Walton, who compares it to the paradox of fiction.[1] My goal is to show that the puzzle threatens to overturn a great deal of what philosophers have thought about caring (Sections 1–5). The puzzle threatens the connection between caring and value, particularly the ideas that caring either tracks or bestows value,[2] and that rationally caring about something requires a rational belief in its value. It also threatens to undermine the moral significance of caring, particularly the idea that we have reason to respect what others care about.[3] Furthermore, the caring that baffles Joe is often fleeting and fickle, and thus is incompatible with Harry Frankfurt's thesis that caring must involve stable "investment" "over… [an] extended period of time."[4] Some of the humans Joe observes also seem to have a surprising amount of control over what they care about, apparently possessing the unusual ability to care, and stop caring, at will. And insofar as we can say why they choose to exercise this ability, their reasons often seem not to be considerations that concern what they care about—its value or relationship to them—but rather considerations about the effects of caring.

I argue that we should resist this pressure to abandon all these important constraints on caring. Abandoning them would leave us with an anemic conception of caring on which it is stripped of its distinctive features and its ethical significance. We should look for an alternative response to the puzzle. One response is that we care about winning because winning really is valuable, perhaps because achievement is intrinsically valuable—a popular idea in recent literature on achievement. But this strategy fails, I argue: the value of achievement cannot explain why we care about winning. Instead, we must embrace Walton's suggestion that playing games often involves engaging in make-believe according to which victory is an important outcome that we care about. On this view, we first imagine that a game's outcome is important; by doing so, we reliably cause ourselves to have a feeling phenomenologically similar to caring, "simulated caring" or "quasi-caring"; and we then imagine that this quasi-caring is genuine caring. I argue that despite phenomenological similarities, quasi-caring differs from genuine caring in numerous ways: quasi-caring is more under our control, it is less stable and less morally weighty, and it is not directly rationally evaluable.

After developing this Waltonian solution (Section 6), I defend it from several objections, including the charge that my account collapses the distinction between "striving" games like chess or tennis and games of make-believe. I respond with my own account of what separates tennis from games of make-believe: the key is that the make-believe in tennis is far less fleshed-out (Sections 7 and 8). I also explore the extent to which similar puzzles arise outside the context of games, and I argue that a make-believe solution applies in some of these other contexts too (Section 9). I conclude with a discussion of the moral significance of what others care about (Section 10).

1 | A PUZZLE ABOUT PLAYERS AND FANS

Let us get clearer on what puzzles Joe the alien. Normally, if I care about whether some outcome obtains, then I believe that it matters whether the outcome obtains, in some very broad sense of "matters." Perhaps the outcome is relevant to my well-being, or to the well-being of some person dear to me, or perhaps to the good of humankind or even the world as a whole. Or perhaps it will determine the success or failure of some important goal of mine, or of some project I have invested myself in. I normally do not care about things that I know do not matter. It does not matter whether the number of blades of grass in my yard is a prime number, and I do not care whether it is.

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Basketball fans care about whether a ball goes through a hoop. But it is often not important which hoop the ball goes through, or whether it goes through any hoops at all. And surely many basketball fans realize that it is not important.

Of course, the outcomes of games often do matter; they can affect the players' livelihoods and social standing. But in many cases the outcome does not matter. Suppose that Ginger is playing a no-stakes game of chess against Milo. During the game, she starts feeling competitive; she concentrates intently; she calculates as many moves ahead as she can; she really starts to sweat. She appears to care very much about whether she wins. Yet the outcome of the game will have virtually no effect on Ginger's life, or Milo's, or anyone else's. It truly is a no-stakes game. In a few hours, Ginger and Milo will not remember or care who won.[5] Note that there is nothing mysterious about Ginger's interest in *playing* chess. Chess is enjoyable and cognitively beneficial: these are reasons for Ginger to play chess. What is mysterious is that she cares about *winning* the game against Milo. Why would she care about winning when winning does not matter?

A second example: Daniel is watching a game of football on TV. He cheers on the Dallas Cowboys. Daniel's life will not be affected by the outcome of the game. Unlike the Cowboys' most ardent fans, Daniel will not spend any energy tomorrow lamenting a Cowboys defeat. But now, during the game, he is on the edge of his seat. Why do Daniel and Ginger each care so much about the outcomes of these games? Is it because winning really does matter? Or do they care for some other reason, unrelated to the importance of winning?

2 | VALUABLE ACHIEVEMENTS

One answer is that winning does matter. And here is one straightforward way to argue for this. A simple desire-satisfaction theory of well-being says that our lives go better when we get what we want.[6] Ginger wants to beat Milo. So according to the desire-satisfaction theory, if Ginger wins, then her life will go better. And so winning matters.

This is a valid argument. But it does not solve the problem. We want to explain why Ginger wants to beat Milo in the first place—why she cares so much about winning. We cannot say both that she wants to win because winning would make her life go better *and* that winning would make her life go better because she wants to win. Instead, we need some independent account of how winning could matter that does not appeal to Ginger's desire to win.

Recent theories of the value of achievement offer such an account. A number of philosophers, including Thomas Hurka and Gwen Bradford, think that winning at games is valuable because it is valuable to set and achieve goals, especially difficult goals.[7] A valuable achievement must be a result of one's own effort, not purely a result of luck or someone else's effort. Achievement is valuable independently of the value of what is achieved, and independently of any extrinsic benefits like fame or wealth. Successful struggles are a crucial part of a good life, even struggles aimed at goals that would not otherwise matter. When we play games, we set difficult goals for ourselves: in basketball, for instance, making baskets, blocking the opponents' shots, and ultimately scoring more points. Accomplishing these goals and succeeding at games is good. Ginger sets the goal of checkmating Milo because setting and achieving that goal would be a valuable achievement for her. And she cares about checkmating him because doing so would be a valuable achievement.

It is controversial whether something's merely being difficult makes it in some respect worth doing. But even granting that this view of achievement is right, the view does not provide a solution to our puzzle. Return to Daniel, the Cowboys fan. The value of achievement cannot explain how it could make sense for Daniel to care. Daniel does not accomplish anything if the Cowboys win. He just sits there, doing nothing to contribute. Being a fan of the victor is not much of an achievement. So Daniel does not have the opportunity to benefit in the way that, according to Hurka and Bradford, the players do. And so fans like Daniel have little or no reason to care about the outcomes of games, even if players do have reason.

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There are possible responses to this. One is that Daniel cares about the well-being of the players, and recognizes that achieving victory would improve their well-being. Although it is possible to care on this altruistic basis, it seems unlikely that this is what is going on with Daniel, since he is not generally invested in the well-being of the players. Alternatively, one might respond by developing a theory on which the value of the players' achievements can somehow trickle down to improve the well-being of fans like Daniel. In virtue of his long-term investment in the team's success, Daniel has played a part in that success: he has achieved something alongside them. Although such a theory might help to explain the feelings of investment of an exceptionally loyal fan—especially one who makes a contribution of some sort to the team, such as a financial contribution—I doubt that it could make sense of casual yet enthusiastic fans.

I do not think that it is promising to try to solve our problems by saying that achieving victory is genuinely valuable. Even if we could explain why victory is good for players like Ginger, I doubt we could ever explain why it is good for fans like Daniel. One option at this point would be to offer a disunified solution to the cluster of problems. Perhaps we could explain why Ginger cares by appealing to the value of achievement, but give some completely different explanation of why Daniel cares. Interestingly, however, the remaining solutions I will consider do not apply selectively to Daniel. They make sense of players no less than they make sense of fans, so we should look for an explanation of Ginger's caring that generalizes to Daniel's.

There is also a problem with explaining why players care by appealing to the value of achievement. Achievements cannot purely be the result of luck; they must involve effort, skill, or competence.[8] Winning the lottery is not an achievement, and neither is winning a game of pure chance, such as Bingo. But we can get invested in games of chance, so the view that achievement is valuable does not help to explain why we often care about whether we win games of chance. Even if the value of winning at chess explains why it makes sense to care about it, someone's caring about winning at Bingo cannot similarly be explained.

A quite different possibility is that winning does not matter, but Ginger thinks that it does: she mistakenly believes that she has reason to care. But this is implausible; players and fans are surely not so wildly and systematically mistaken about the importance of their goals. Furthermore, the claim that Ginger believes (mistakenly or not) that the game's outcome matters is hard to square with the fact that a few hours later, Ginger does not care at all who won. She does not even remember who won, and if she were reminded, remembering her defeat would not bother her. Should we think that Ginger thought that the outcome of the game was important while she was playing, but she soon forgot? Or that she changed her mind? This seems unlikely.

Despite her strong emotions, Ginger appears not to believe that checkmating Milo is of great importance. Similarly, Daniel does not believe that it matters whether the Cowboys win. This is a general problem for any explanation of their caring that appeals to the importance of winning. To explain why they care, what is needed is not that winning in fact matters, but that they believe that winning matters.[9] Ginger and Daniel seem not to believe that winning matters, so why do they care?

3 | SOME OTHER BASIS?

Perhaps Ginger and Daniel care about who wins on the basis of some quite different reason. In this section, I will explore some such possibilities. One possibility is that caring will help them have fun. Playing or watching a game is not nearly as fun for those who lack investment in its outcome, so Ginger and Daniel, realizing this, might care as a means to enjoying the game and having fun. A second possibility, for Ginger, is that caring about winning is a necessary condition for playing chess at all. Perhaps someone cannot count as playing chess without being invested at least a tiny bit in trying to achieve checkmate, so Ginger cares about checkmating Milo as a constitutive means to playing chess. A third possibility is that Ginger cares about winning in order to fulfill an implicit commitment that she and Milo made to each other when they decided to play the game—a commitment to taking the game seriously.

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I do not think that Ginger could care on the basis of these reasons. It does not make sense to say that Ginger cares about winning in order to have fun, or in order to play chess, or in order to fulfill an obligation. We can perform actions because of their expected beneficial effects, but caring is not an action. Our motivating reasons to care about something do not involve the effects of our caring about it. Instead, we care about something because we see something in it, not because we see something in our own attitude of caring. We care about something because of its features: its intrinsic value, perhaps, or our own relationship to it, not because of the beneficial effects of caring.

Consider another case: suppose that an eccentric but trustworthy billionaire promises me that if I care deeply about having a prime number of blades of grass in my lawn, then she will share her billions with me. Could I care for the reason that doing so would result in vast wealth?[10] Certainly, it might make sense for me to *cause* myself to care for the reason that caring would lead to wealth. If I somehow went about altering my psychology, so that I cared about having a prime number of blades of grass (perhaps by taking a magical pill), then my actions might be rational. But this would not help to make sense of my attitude of caring itself. My caring about something so unimportant would be no less baseless and bizarre, even though I ended up caring as a result of my own rational actions. Notice that there are two different claims we could make about my basis for caring. One is that if I cared because caring will lead to riches, then my attitude of caring would be irrational, as I would care on the basis of a bad reason. The other is that it is just not possible to care on the basis that caring would have good effects. I think this latter claim is right. It is only my action of causing myself to care, not my attitude of caring itself, that can be done on the basis of expected effects.

The same points apply to caring as a constitutive (rather than causal) means. Suppose that you convince me that only those who care about whether the United States is successful in the Olympics can count as patriotic Americans. I cannot care about this *in order to* be a patriotic American. Of course, I could take various steps to cause myself to care: I could take a magical pill, or more realistically, I could immerse myself in the Olympics, or try to argue myself into believing that American Olympic success will have long-term benefits. But if I end up caring, the basis of my caring will not be that caring is a necessary constitutive means to being patriotic.

All of this applies to Ginger too. Ginger cannot care about winning in order to have fun, in order to be playing the game, or in order to do anything at all. It *does* make sense to say that in order to have fun, Ginger somehow caused herself to care. But that still leaves us without a rationalizing explanation of why she cares. Her caring remains baseless and bizarre.

Now, one might bite the bullet, and conclude that Ginger's caring really is baseless, though she had a good basis for causing herself to care. However, there is a new problem with this position. According to this position, Ginger saw the reasons to cause herself to care, and so intentionally caused herself to care. But how? Ginger does not own any magical pills that make her care. By what psychological mechanism did she cause herself to care? One way to make yourself care about something is to convince yourself that it is important. But we have already ruled this out: Ginger suffers no delusions; she realizes that the outcome of her game is not important. Another way to cause yourself to care about something is to persistently surround yourself with it, forming an attachment to it over time. Ginger has not done this either, as she has been playing the chess game with Milo for only a few minutes. It is easy for Ginger to work up her emotions, as it is for many of us when we play games. It takes no conative wizardry or superhuman emotional control. Our solution must respect this fact.

4 | FRANKFURT AND FICKLENESS

We can explain why Ginger and Daniel might cause themselves to care, but we lack a rationalizing explanation of their attitude of caring itself. Let me now consider one such explanation. Sometimes, when I intentionally cause myself to care about something—perhaps by making a practice of fostering it as a goal—I thereby give myself reason to care about it. To illustrate, consider a serious athlete who invests her time and energy for months in winning a league, and comes to care about winning it. Plausibly, she thereby makes it matter whether she wins. Could the same

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be true of Ginger? Perhaps Ginger has reason to cause herself to care about winning. Then, by doing so, she makes it matter whether she wins, giving her reason to go on caring.

Harry Frankfurt has developed a highly influential account on which “caring about something makes that thing important to the person who cares about it.”[11] On Frankfurt's view, we “invest ourselves in” and “identify with” what we care about, making ourselves “vulnerable to losses or benefits,” and giving ourselves reason to care, even if what we care about is not independently important. Does Frankfurt's view help us make sense of Ginger's and Daniel's emotions? To some extent. Focusing on Ginger, distinguish two claims. The first, weaker claim is that winning does not matter *independently* of Ginger's investment in it. This claim is very plausible, and is entailed by Frankfurt's view. The second, stronger claim is that winning does not matter *at all*. And I think that this stronger claim is fairly plausible too: Ginger does not seem to bestow importance on winning, or make herself vulnerable to a “serious loss” of checkmate. But this is incompatible with Frankfurt's view, on which caring about winning makes winning matter. So Frankfurt's view is only partly helpful in making sense of Ginger: it accommodates the weaker claim but not the stronger claim.

But there is also a clearer reason why Frankfurt should be baffled by Ginger. Frankfurt emphasizes that caring involves investing ourselves, which takes time: “a person can care about something only over some more or less extended period of time.” “Caring,” according to Frankfurt, “implies [a] consistency or steadiness of behavior; and this presupposes some degree of persistence.”[12] Yet Ginger's emotions, intense as they are, are fleeting and fickle. Ginger stops caring about checkmating Milo shortly after they stop playing, and she never pays it a thought again. She does not invest herself in winning in a persistent or stable way. Ginger is not disposed to continue caring—quite the opposite: she is disposed to stop caring as soon as she is done playing chess. By his own lights, Frankfurt should doubt whether Ginger really cares about winning.

The fickleness of Ginger's emotions contrasts with the stability of genuine caring.[13] Of course, caring is not *that* stable: it is common for our feelings to disappear abruptly. During a trek through the desert, I may desperately care about finding water, yet pay water no thought once my thirst has been quenched. And I might suddenly stop caring about something if I acquire unsettling information about its likely effects or moral worth, or if I realize that I have no chance of getting what I want (though this may take more time and reflection, and leave a rueful aftereffect).

But Ginger's emotions are far fickler than mine. Hers may disappear without being satisfied, without any unsettling information reaching her, and without any realization that she cannot win. Of course, after the game ends in her defeat, Ginger will realize that she cannot win that very game. But even during the game, her feelings of investment may disappear if she glimpses an attention-grabbing news headline on her phone; and if she decides she is done with chess for the day, they will not return. If Milo defeats her, she does not look back with regret at her loss, or obsess over the possibility of defeating Milo in their next game. Of course, some chess players do exhibit longer-lasting investment. But a view like Frankfurt's cannot make sense of players like Ginger (and fans like Daniel).

5 | WHAT REMAINS OF CARING?

I have considered some views about what it takes to care, and argued that Ginger's emotions look bizarre on each of them. She fails to satisfy some of the most plausible proposed necessary conditions for caring. One possible reaction to this is to conclude that Ginger is simply a counterexample to the major theories of what it is to care. By pointing to Ginger, we refute the thesis that caring about an outcome requires seeing something of value or importance in the outcome, as well as Frankfurt's claims that caring about something bestows importance on it, and that caring requires constancy.

The problem with these denials is that they leave us without much of a conception of caring. What *does* it take to care? There are other plausible necessary conditions still available. One is a practical condition: if we care about some outcome, then we must (all else equal) be disposed toward acting to bring about the preferred outcome, insofar

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as it is within our power. Ginger clearly satisfies this condition: she is disposed to act in ways that are (as best she can tell) conducive to checkmating Milo. Daniel arguably satisfies it too, for although he does nothing to assist the Cowboys, this is merely because he lacks the power to do so. He is presumably disposed (very weakly) to help them. Being a true fan, if he were given the opportunity to arrange for the Cowboys to play in conditions favorable to them, at no cost to himself, then he would do so.[14]

Although this practical condition goes some way toward singling out what it takes to care, on its own it leaves us with an anemic conception of caring. (For one thing, more needs to be said to distinguish caring from other mental states that dispose us toward action, such as intending and wanting.) A further problem is that although Daniel himself satisfies the practical condition for caring, we can imagine very similar characters who do not satisfy it. Consider Daniel's friend Samuel, who is not a Cowboys fan, and who even sometimes pokes fun at Daniel for his love of football. One day, while Daniel is watching the Cowboys, Samuel sits down next to him, begins watching the game, and perhaps to his own surprise, starts to root for the Cowboys. Samuel finds himself having the same emotional reactions to the game that Daniel does. Yet Samuel is not at all disposed—not even in that moment—to act to bring about a Cowboys victory (given the power to do so and the absence of contrary incentives). Samuel would scoff at the idea of assisting the Cowboys. Despite sharing Daniel's emotional responses, Samuel fails to satisfy the practical condition.[15]

In Section 10, I will consider one other necessary condition for caring—a moral condition—that if someone cares about something, then we have reason to take seriously what they care about. I will argue that Ginger and Daniel also fail to satisfy this moral condition.

6 | MAKE-BELIEVE AND QUASI-CARING

Let me turn to the solution I endorse. In this section, I elaborate an idea from Kendall Walton, using machinery he employs to solve the paradox of fiction.[16] As Walton suggests, this machinery can be used to solve the problem about winning.[17] I provide a defense of the view in the subsequent sections.

The solution comes in two parts: first a negative thesis, and later a positive thesis. I think that Ginger and Daniel do not care about winning. In general, players and fans who appear to care about a game's outcome often do not really care. This is suggested by the fact that Ginger and Daniel (and especially Samuel) violate so many plausible necessary conditions for caring.

Of course, it feels to them as if they care. Consider Ginger: she really is in a state that is phenomenologically and physiologically very similar to caring. She starts to sweat when Milo initiates an attack on her king. But there are telltale signs that Ginger does not really care: consider again the fact that hours later, she might have forgotten who won. And as I said before, I think that Ginger does not believe that it matters whether she wins. But it is plausible that caring about something requires believing that it matters.

Say that someone "quasi-cares" if she is in a state that is phenomenologically and physiologically similar to caring. (The "quasi" terminology is from Walton: he famously distinguishes quasi-fear from real fear.[18]) Ginger clearly quasi-cares. The negative part of the solution is that Ginger does not genuinely care about winning.

Here is a question: how did Ginger end up in this state of quasi-caring? What caused her to have this phenomenology? Usually when people have the phenomenology of caring, it is because they see something of importance or value in it. Not so for Ginger, I claim. So why does she quasi-care? The answer is that rather than believing that winning matters, Ginger imagines that it matters. As she plays chess, Ginger creates a make-believe according to which it is important for her to checkmate Milo. And engaging in this make-believe causes Ginger to quasi-care. This is the positive claim.

It rests on a general point. Sometimes, if believing that p typically leads to some attitude that comes with a certain phenomenology, then imagining that p will lead to similar (though usually fainter) phenomenology. Here is an example from Walton (paraphrased).

> Right now, I am imagining that I am spelunking in a cave. I find myself trapped. My flashlight has gone out, and it is totally dark, so I cannot see anything. I cannot crawl forward, and I cannot crawl backward. The cave may become my tomb. As I imagine this terrible scenario, I really start to sweat. I feel something like claustrophobia. But is it really claustrophobia? No. I don't really feel trapped. What I feel might be called "simulated claustrophobia," or "quasi-claustrophobia." It is phenomenologically similar to claustrophobia, though fainter. It comes with some of the usual physiological signs of claustrophobia. But I do not feel genuine claustrophobia, since I don't really believe that I am trapped.[19]

Something very similar is going on with Ginger and Daniel. They imagine that the outcome of a game is important. They create a make-believe according to which winning matters. This causes them to have various feelings: they quasi-care, and they are quasi-anxious when the game is close. Daniel may feel quasi-disappointment if the Cowboys lose. It is not surprising that imagining that the outcome of the game is important would cause them to have these feelings. Believing that an outcome matters, and focusing on it, often leads to feelings of investment. Imagining that an outcome matters often leads to that same phenomenology.

One idea from Walton is that people naturally use their own feelings as "props" in their make-believe, to embellish it. Now that Daniel quasi-cares, he imagines of his quasi-caring that it is genuine caring about who wins. If the Cowboys lose, Daniel will feel quasi-disappointment; he will then imagine that his quasi-disappointment is genuine disappointment about a terrible outcome. He also pretends of his physiological responses—his sweating, or his subconscious inching forward to the edge of his seat—that they are responses to the importance of whether the Cowboys score the next touchdown. And his verbal and physical behavior also contribute to the make-believe. When Daniel cheers out loud at a field goal, or pumps his arm triumphantly, these are, make-believedly, responses to events of the utmost importance.

Ginger and Daniel create this rich make-believe in which winning is an important goal toward which the players are striving. And they pretend of their own responses to this pretense that they are responses to the importance of winning. Notice that at every stage, Ginger and Daniel have good reasons for their actions and attitudes. They have reason to play or watch the game: doing so will be enjoyable. And they have reason to imagine that winning is important: doing so will facilitate their enjoyment. Imagining that winning is important causes certain feelings—quasi-caring and quasi-disappointment, for instance—as well as physiological responses. These phenomenal and physiological responses are not attitudes. Like headaches, they are arational feelings. There is no such thing as a reason for or against quasi-caring, and quasi-caring is no more rationally evaluable than a headache is. Ginger and Daniel continue imagining more and more, about what happens in the game, and also about their own responses. They have good reasons to do so: it makes their experience more exciting and entertaining.[20] And they have good reasons for the various enthusiastic verbal and bodily actions that they perform intentionally: pumping a fist or cursing after a bad play embellishes the make-believe further.

Many players and fans are like Ginger and Daniel: they engage in make-believe according to which winning matters. Not all players and fans: sometimes there is no need to engage in make-believe. Sometimes winning really does matter. Wealth, fame, or pride may be on the line for professional athletes, and non-professionals may stand to gain or lose the esteem of their peers.[21] Players in such situations normally realize that winning matters. Also, sometimes people irrationally believe that winning matters. Fans who riot after a game, destroying property or getting into fights with fans of the other team, have gone well beyond the point of mere make-believe. Clearly, they really care. Of such fans, we should say exactly what we should not say in general: their attitudes really are irrational. Their make-believe gets out of hand, turning into genuine irrational belief. But these irrational fans are nothing like the casual yet enthusiastic players and fans who engage in make-believe while keeping their wits about them.

This make-believe is a central aspect of games. If you want to play a game, and you do not already see some reason why winning matters, what you do is make-believe that it matters. The same goes for fans. If you want to be an active spectator, rather than a dispassionate, disengaged onlooker, what you do is pick a team to root for, and pretend that it is important that that team wins.

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Even in games where winning is not possible, we find a similar make-believe. Pinball, for instance, only has losing conditions. In pinball, the players make-believe that it is important to delay losing as long as possible, and to score as many points as possible before losing. Also, sometimes players make-believe not just that winning matters, but that doing well in other ways matters. If you are in a race, and you have some really steep competition, and you are unlikely to be the first place winner, then you might make-believe that coming in the top 10 is the main thing that it is important to do.

Let us return to the puzzle and look at the solution. Focus on Daniel. Daniel does not care about whether the Cowboys win. Here is a question: why was it tempting to think that he cares? There are a few closely related reasons. For one, Daniel quasi-cares. He has the phenomenology of caring; from the inside it seems to him like he cares. He also exhibits physiological signs—he is sweating and gritting his teeth. And Daniel is engaging in make-believe according to which it is important that the Cowboys win. Daniel exhibits certain behavior to embellish and sustain this make-believe: cheering, pumping his fist, maybe yelling a little bit at the TV. Such behavior is the kind of behavior typically exhibited by people who really care about what they are reacting to, so it is not surprising that we (and Daniel himself) would think that Daniel cares about winning.

7 | HOT POTATO

No one doubts that many games involve elements of make-believe. Children playing hot potato toss around a ball while imagining that it is painfully hot. They participate in a make-believe in which it is hot. It does not take much of a stretch to conclude that it is also a part of their make-believe that winning matters. In this case, it is make-believe, first, that it is important not to be holding the ball when a round ends, and second, that this is important because the ball is hot and will burn you.

I think that this extends to all kinds of games. In games like hot potato, the make-believe includes a reason why winning matters. You should avoid ending up with the ball in your hands because it is hot enough to burn you. Such games are easily seen to involve make-believe. In other games, like basketball, the make-believe is less fleshed-out. The make-believe of basketball does not include a reason why it is important to win. Basketball players imagine that it is important to put the ball through the hoop, but there is nothing that they imagine to be a reason why it is important to put the ball through the hoop.[22] The make-believe only says that it is important. Because the make-believe of basketball is less fleshed-out, it is easy to miss basketball's make-believe element.

One worry is that this overestimates the similarity between hot potato and basketball, and more generally between make-believe and more "serious," abstract goal-oriented play. Can I account for the deep and intuitive distinction between make-believe and goal-oriented play? I think I can. This will be the focus of the remainder of this section.

Thi Nguyen has recently suggested a classification of gameplay into two "forms." One is make-believe play. Playing House and playing with dolls or legos are "pure" cases of make-believe. The other is "striving" play, which involves taking on unnecessary goals and working to bring them about.[23] A typical chess game is supposed to be a fairly pure example of striving play: players take on the goal of checkmating the opponent, and (according to Nguyen) do not engage in make-believe. Most sports are pure cases of striving. Nguyen argues that many games are "mixed": they involve aspects of both striving play and make-believe. Playing a videogame might involve striving to beat the final boss, as well as imagining being in a castle or a forest.[24] And hot potato normally involves trying to avoid holding the ball, while also imagining that it is too hot to hold.

On my view, chess and racing involve make-believe, and therefore are not cases of Nguyen's "pure striving." Nguyen may view this as a problem: I should be able to capture the intuitive distinction between make-believe games like House, abstract games like chess, and mixed cases like videogames and Hot Potato. But I have a slightly different way of capturing the distinction. I say that what distinguishes abstract games is that they involve make-believe with minimal content. The content of the make-believe of chess is that it is important to checkmate the

opponent (or at least to draw) while following the rules, and that our emotions and actions are reactions to this importance. That is just about all there is to the make-believe. In particular, the make-believe does not include any story providing reasons why checkmate is important. Hot potato and most videogames, by contrast, provide a story about why winning is important.

What separates playing House from the rest is that its make-believe does not come with any goals or rules. Where Nguyen sees "pure striving," I see minimal make-believe without an explanation of why winning matters, and where he sees "pure make-believe," I see make-believe without clear rules. So I am equally able to capture the same intuitive distinction.

But my way of drawing the distinction even has an advantage over Nguyen's. Nguyen points out that his two forms of play are ruined or "broken" in different ways. Striving play is broken by cheating—by breaking rules. Make-believe play is different:

> "[M]ake-believe play is broken by the spoilsport, who shatters the imaginative immersion of make-believe play… When children are playing House, and somebody pauses to ask what the rules are, the others might become frustrated, for the question has shattered their absorption in the imagined world."[25]

Pure make-believe cannot be broken by cheating, according to Nguyen. And pure striving cannot be broken by spoilsports:

> "When two people are playing chess… and one player pauses to ask for a point of clarification about, say, the rule of en passant pawn capture, this cannot break the imaginative immersion of play, for there is no imagination to break."[26]

Here I disagree with Nguyen. Chess *can* be broken by spoilsports. Suppose Ginger has mounted a fierce attack on Milo's king, and she is calculating whether she can checkmate him. Suppose that Milo, realizing that the game is going poorly for him, points out that the game's outcome does not matter, and that Ginger need not work so hard to defeat him. That could easily shatter Ginger's imaginative immersion, spoiling it in much the same way that inquiring into rules spoils House.

If spoilsports are a sign of make-believe, then chess appears to involve make-believe. Specifically, what can be spoiled is the make-believe that checkmating Milo matters. And this applies to basically any game: to basketball and pool, as well as Monopoly and Hot Potato. These all can be broken by spoilsports, and thus appear to have an element of make-believe. Although there are spoilsports in chess, there are fewer "ways" to be a spoilsport in chess than in House or videogames. This is because the latter have a much richer make-believe than chess does, and each part of that rich make-believe can be spoiled by calling it into question. There is more to spoil.

8 | NGUYEN ON DISPOSABLE ENDS

In this section, I address some other arguments from Nguyen. Nguyen gives several objections to a view that he calls "skepticism about disposable ends."[27] This skepticism is similar to my view, so Nguyen's objections are worth addressing.

Nguyen's own view is that taking on disposable ends—"ends, partially detached from our normal ends, which we take up temporarily"—is often a crucial part of playing games. The skeptic rejects Nguyen's view, and claims that people playing games do not have disposable ends. Instead, it is make-believe that players have these as ends.

This skeptical view is not my view. First, the skepticism that Nguyen imagines has a much wider target: Nguyen's skeptic apparently denies that players *ever* take on temporary, detached ends. My claims, by contrast, are restricted

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to cases like those of Ginger and Daniel, in which nothing is at stake and those involved are not irrational. Second, I do not even deny that checkmate is one of Ginger's ends. There is an ordinary use of "end" on which if someone is trying to do something, then doing it is among her ends. On this use, checkmating Milo is one of Ginger's ends: she is trying to checkmate him.[28] My claim, rather, is about caring: Ginger does not genuinely care about checkmating Milo.

Nguyen warns the skeptic not to conflate make-believe ends with real ends:

> "There are… two ends involved with playing Super Mario Brothers: my make-believe end of rescuing the princess and my real end of winning the game. Certainly, in many games, these two sorts of ends are bound together, so that the actions that support my own ends also will support my make-believe ends… But it is crucial to distinguish my make-believe ends from my own end of winning."

I certainly agree that we should draw this distinction. The end of rescuing Princess Peach can *only* be make-believe, because Peach is not a real princess that one might aim to rescue. By contrast, it is possible to have winning Super Mario Brothers as an end, since winning the game is something that you can really do. Similarly, Nguyen and I would agree that we must distinguish the issue of whether a player *cares* about winning from the issue of whether he cares about rescuing Peach. These are distinct, and it is quite possible for him to actually care about winning, if he sees that there is something at stake. But it is also possible for it to be merely make-believe not only that a player cares about rescuing Princess Peach, but also that he cares about winning.

Nguyen gives three examples to illustrate the fact that our real ends can come apart from our make-believe ends. One example shows that we can have disposable ends without any make-believe involved. He says:

> "Imagine… a game in which I have myself air-dropped into the Alaskan backcountry in order to have the struggle of getting out alive on my own resources. I have acquired a disposable end—survival without help—but this end, and the activity it inspires, are entirely non-fictional."

Nyugen is right about this. Surviving is surely a real end of his, and he really cares about surviving. But there is no puzzle about this; there is nothing mysterious or puzzling about caring about surviving. Thus the case contrasts with that of Ginger: it is puzzling that Ginger apparently cares about winning her chess game. There is of course a question here of whether the benefits of being air-dropped are outweighed by the resulting danger and suffering; the decision to initiate this dangerous "game" may puzzle us, but this is different than the non-puzzle of why he cares about surviving.

Another example is supposed to show that "some games… offer win-conditions that run contrary to the make-believe ends on offer":

> "The tabletop role-playing game Fiasco simulates a hysterical story of con jobs gone wrong. The rules incentivize the players to act against their character's make-believe interests, in order to generate a comic narrative of disaster."

Nguyen seems to think that this shows that it cannot be make-believe that our end is to succeed at the game, since that would contradict the make-believe of the game. And similarly, this might be taken to show that it cannot be make-believe that we care about succeeding. However, I see no contradiction. It is consistent that it is make-believe both that it is important for each con artist to succeed in his con job, and also that it is important for us players to sabotage the con jobs. It is not as though the make-believe must identify the characters' goals with the players'.

Nguyen's third example shows that "[e]ven for games where an imaginary fictional world is possible, many players don't imagine that fictional world or any fictional counterpart."

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> "Consider the difference between a novice chess player, playing a Lord of the Rings themed chess set and imagining themselves a fantasy general, versus a professional chess player, focused entirely on potential moves and counter-moves."

Nguyen is right here too: chess players rarely imagine a fantasy world of battling monarchs and their loyal knights. But this is compatible with my view. As I said in the previous section, playing chess often involves a less fleshed-out make-believe in which winning and following the rules are important, and the players care about winning, but which contains little else.

9 | BEYOND GAMES

Let us zoom out to the phenomenon that puzzles Joe the alien. The phenomenon seems to extend beyond games, as illustrated by a number of thought-provoking cases presented in recent work by Nils-Hennes Stear. Stear's cases include the emotions of people who (a) briefly mourn the victims of a distant tragedy, (b) watch in horror as a teacup falls and shatters, (c) solve a Sudoku puzzle, and (d) engage in passionate debate. Each case involves people who seem to care intensely but briefly. This presents a potential *opportunity*: my account of Ginger and Daniel may apply more broadly, beyond emotions in games. But as Stear emphasizes, it may instead be a *problem* for the idea that players and fans do not really care. Stear claims that in "most or all" of his cases, it seems clear that the characters genuinely care. This threatens what I have said about Ginger and Daniel. In particular, it appears to undermine the "fickleness" argument: caring cannot be too fickle, and Ginger's quasi-caring is very fickle, so it is not genuine caring. Stear's cases appear to involve fickle yet genuine caring, refuting the first premise of the fickleness argument.[29]

My view is that some of Stear's cases involve genuine caring, but are dissimilar to the cases of Ginger and Daniel, while his other cases do not involve genuine caring and should be understood as "gamelike." None of the cases threatens the stability requirement for caring that Frankfurt emphasizes. I will consider the cases in turn.

(i) I hear of a terrible famine in a distant country. At first, I am deeply saddened, but the next day I pay the victims little thought. My emotions here are fickle, yet I really care.

To show why this does not threaten the stability requirement, distinguish occurrent from dispositional caring. Consider my cousin, whom I rarely think about, and whose well-being I occurrently care about only occasionally. There is also a non-occurrent, dispositional sense of "care" in which I always care about my cousin's well-being, even while I am napping. During my naps, I am disposed to care occurrently about her well-being, if the topic of her well-being arises. The same is true of my feelings toward the famine. After my initial period of sadness, I rarely occurrently care about the famine, but I still dispositionally care. As Stear says, my attitudes "do not disappear so much as take a back seat."[30]

It is only the dispositional sort of caring that plausibly requires stability. Thus my feelings toward my cousin and toward distant tragedies should not be taken to be counterexamples to the stability requirement. Ginger, by contrast, does threaten to violate the stability requirement, if we take her quasi-caring to be genuine caring. Once she is done playing chess, Ginger does not even dispositionally quasi-care about the outcome of the game. If the game were to come up in conversation, Ginger would feel apathetic toward it, and would not occurrently quasi-care.

Beyond fickleness, there are normative differences between Ginger's feelings and my feelings about the famine victims. If someone brings up the outcome of the chess game, there is nothing wrong with Ginger's complete apathy toward the outcome. By contrast, apathy is the wrong response to the famine. It matters whether people starve to death, but not whether Ginger defeats Milo.[31]

Turn to the second case:

(ii) Just as a teacup falls and shatters, I yell out, hoping that someone will catch it. I promptly forget the whole affair.

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Is this a case of fickle caring? The example needs to be fleshed-out more. If the teapot was valuable, then perhaps I will continue to care dispositionally about it, to some extent. If the teacup was worthless—if it was already falling apart, or it contained a troubling amount of lead—then presumably I will not care. There is still my split-second of horror as the teacup falls. But this is mere reflex. The moment passes too quickly for me to consider whether it really matters whether the teacup breaks. If I were able to calmly consider the value of the teacup just before it breaks, doing so would relieve my concern, and my reflexively-induced caring would cease. This makes my emotions entirely unlike Ginger's and Daniel's, as theirs are not merely reflexive. They have plenty of time to reconsider the importance of winning, yet they still quasi-care.[32]

One further difference between games and cases (i) and (ii) will become clear in the next section. Whereas the caring involved in (i) and (ii) should be taken seriously by others, the quasi-caring exemplified by Ginger and Daniel lacks moral significance.

I do not deny that there are interesting philosophical and psychological questions about what is going on in cases like (i) and (ii). Our ability to get over tragedies and turn our focus elsewhere is an interesting phenomenon. But it is not the phenomenon that puzzles Joe the alien. Ginger's loss to Milo is not a tragedy that she needs to get over. It is not even a tiny tragedy like the demise of an expensive teacup. There is nothing truly at stake for Ginger, as she is fully aware in her more sober moments. Furthermore, Ginger's emotions and attitudes do not "take a back seat" when she is done playing chess. They disappear: once the game ends, she does not quasi-care dispositionally. Ginger and Daniel, but not people who manage to put a tragedy out of mind, threaten to violate a stability requirement on dispositional caring.

The other two cases from Stear are quite different.

(iii) You struggle to solve a Sudoku puzzle, and you seem to care about completing the puzzle but soon shift your attention to other activities.

I say that Sudoku is just a game, and solving Sudoku puzzles very often involves the same sort of make-believe that Ginger and Daniel engage in (although the element of competition is absent in Sudoku).

(iv) Passions briefly rise as two people heatedly argue about whether some claim is true.

Debate is more complicated. Often, coming out the "winner" in a debate does matter, and debaters stably care (dispositionally) about its outcome. There are several reasons why debaters might care. Like a serious athlete, I might care about winning because I want to save face. I might care because I want to convince my interlocutors or observers of the truth of the proposition I am arguing for. And if I have built an identity out of defending a position over time, then I might care about succeeding in my subsequent attempts to defend it. Notice that these second and third elements are not present in most ordinary games. Sometimes, however, passionate debate is more like a game. Consider some inebriated philosophers heatedly arguing over whether hot dogs are sandwiches. It is just as plausible to deny that they care about winning the debate as it is to deny that Ginger cares about winning her chess game.

Silly debate is one example of a "gamelike" activity not normally classified as a game. Such activities should be understood as involving an element of make-believe. Let me illustrate with a noncompetitive example. I have many deadlines that fall on the same day, 6 months from now. In order to avoid having a horrible time 5 months from now, I set arbitrary deadlines for myself: I must submit one paper by March 1 (1 month from now), and another by April 1. Meeting these deadlines does not matter at all: nothing would be lost if I submitted my first paper on March 2 rather than March 1. Realizing this, I do not care about submitting by March 1. In order to goad myself into productivity, I create a (very minimal) make-believe according to which I must submit by March 1. This causes me to quasi-care about meeting the March 1 deadline. I may even embellish this make-believe with some further story about the disasters that will befall me if I fail to submit by March 1. Compare with a game a parent might play with a young child, in which they must hurry and clean the child's bedroom before the hour is up, or else a spook who haunts messy rooms will appear.

Another example is rehearsal: when a performer is rehearsing for an important performance, they may make-believe that the stakes are already high, in order to prepare for the pressure the real performance will bring. Perhaps this is even an essential part of rehearsing, distinguishing it from mere practicing.

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It is helpful to have the ability to engage in this sort of make-believe (especially for those of us who struggle with deadlines and stage-fright). And it is also helpful to be able to recognize it as make-believe. Having the concept of a gamelike activity can help us to see that the ends involved in certain activities are not ends that we really care about. As we will see in the next section, the fact that an activity is gamelike can have moral consequences.

10 | THE IMPORTANCE OF WHAT OTHERS CARE ABOUT

I have defended the claim that Ginger and Daniel merely quasi-care. However, you may still be suspicious of the distinction between caring and mere quasi-caring. Perhaps it is one that I believe in only because I'm desperate to assuage Joe's puzzlement. We face philosophical problems if Daniel and Ginger really care about winning, so I just say "they must only quasi-care," and declare that to be the solution. And even if I am drawing a real distinction, why is the distinction important to draw? Would anything significant be lost if we used "care" in a broader way, so as to include Ginger's and Daniel's emotions? I say yes: caring and quasi-caring differ in their moral significance.

A vague but attractive ethical thesis is that we generally have reason to respect what other people care about, at least if we respect or care about those people.[33] To illustrate: consider my friend, who has devoted years of her life to an epic poem she is writing. If she completes the poem, but loses the only copy, and somehow it ends up in my hands, then I have reason to preserve the poem. Even if I do not care much for the poem, I should not discard it.

This principle is particularly important when it comes to impeding people from pursuing what they care about. This applies even in cases of competition. Consider two close friends competing for the same job.[34] Although both job candidates might very well be justified in trying hard to get the job, to the detriment of their friend, they have some reason not to focus their efforts on securing this job. (Perhaps they could work harder on applications for other jobs instead) They should feel some twinge of regret if they manage to get the job, and if their friend gets it instead, they should take some solace in this.

This is generally true when it comes to impeding others in their pursuit of what they care about. But not if they only quasi-care: quasi-caring does not bestow the same moral weight. This has consequences for the ethics of competitive games. If Milo defeats Ginger, he does not act impermissibly. Milo should not feel guilty at all about defeating Ginger, and she should not resent him for it. If he wanted, Milo could provide her a challenging game, but play a little suboptimally, and ultimately let her win. This is obviously not morally required, nor would it be supererogatory or commendable. I think that Ginger's investment in the game does not even give Milo any reason to lose to her; this is because Ginger merely quasi-cares—she does not really care. In many cases, people do have reason to play suboptimally. A chess teacher might go easy against a student so that the student can keep up, or so they produce a more interesting game; or a professional athlete might throw a game for money. But these are not cases where the player has reason to go easy because their opponent quasi-cares; rather, they have independent reasons to play suboptimally.

Admittedly, some of the moral features of Milo's and Ginger's game can be explained without appeal to the distinction between quasi-caring and caring. Perhaps, by voluntarily playing chess with Milo, Ginger implicitly grants him permission to try as hard as he likes to defeat her. This may be enough to make it permissible for Milo to defeat Ginger: Ginger permits it. But other moral features of the situation are harder to explain without distinguishing caring from mere quasi-caring: in particular, it is hard to explain why Milo does not have reason to lose to Ginger, or to go easy on her.[35] This contrasts with the case of friends competing for a job. Milo could take things easy on Ginger, but he has no reason to do so. If Milo wins, he should feel no twinge of regret, and if he loses, it would be bizarre for him to find solace in Ginger's victory. So if Ginger really cares about winning, then it is hard to explain why her caring carries no moral weight.

One question is *why* caring and mere quasi-caring differ in their moral significance. This might be explained by appeal to the fickleness or baselessness of quasi-caring, or to the fact that quasi-caring need not be accompanied by beliefs about the value or importance of the outcomes in question. But it is worth floating a more radical, forceful

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explanation. Quasi-caring is a mere phenomenological and physiological state—the state people tend to be in when they care about something. Quasi-caring does not have content, according to this explanation: Ginger quasi-cares, but she does not quasi-care about whether she wins, or about anything at all.[36] So whereas there is reason to respect what others care about, it does not even make sense to say that there is reason to respect what they quasi-care about. There is no such thing as quasi-caring about something.

Whether or not this is the right explanation, there is clearly a moral difference between caring and quasi-caring. And as I stressed in Sections 4 and 5, there are other differences too. Ginger's emotions are remarkably fickle: she stops quasi-caring as soon as she is done playing chess. Those who quasi-care need not be at all disposed toward action: recall Samuel the fleeting Cowboys fan. And players and fans need not see anything of importance or value in the outcomes of games, nor do their emotions necessarily bestow importance on those outcomes.

These are real, important differences between caring and quasi-caring. And if Joe the alien thinks about this hard enough, he can see the difference, and realize that there is nothing so bizarre about the people throwing the spheres through the hoops. Players and fans have less in common with people who want to have a prime number of blades of grass in their yard, and more in common with children playing hot potato.

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ENDNOTES

[1] Archer and Wojtowicz (2022), Borge (2019), Nguyen (2019a), Scheffler (2013, p. 58), Stear (2017), Velleman (2002), Walton (2015, pp. 75–79), and Wildman (2019).

[2] For discussion, see Baier (1982), Benbaji (2001), Frankfurt (1982), Korsgaard (2006), and Wolf (2002).

[3] At least insofar as their caring is not immoral or irrational. See Darwall (2001), Section 2 on reasons not to impede projects that others care deeply about.

[4] Frankfurt (1982, p. 261); for a reply see Korsgaard (2006).

[5] Walton (2015, p. 77) makes this point about fans.

[6] This desire-satisfaction thesis says that getting what we want is one way for our lives to go better. "Desire-satisfaction theory" is usually used to mean a theory that says that getting what we want is the sole factor in determining our well-being. I am not using it in this stronger way.

[7] Bradford (2013, 2015), Hurka (2006), and Keller (2004).

[8] Hurka (2006, p. 7), Bradford (2015, chap. 1). Although there is considerable disagreement in the literature about the role that luck can play in achievement, it is relatively uncontroversial that winning a lottery or a Bingo game is not an achievement. On lucky achievements, see Dunkle (2019), Guerrero (2017), Hirji (2019), and von Kriegstein (2017, 2019).

[9] Sometimes it is not belief, but a close cousin of belief, that explains our emotions. One prominent example is "alief," which is supposed to be more automatic and arational than belief (Gendler, 2008). (Examples of alief include the belief-like states that accompany implicit bias and fear of heights.) But Ginger and Daniel do not seem to alieve that winning matters. Their attitudes are under their control; Ginger can stop caring about winning once she is done playing. Ginger's and Daniel's attitude toward the importance of winning is less like alief and more like make-believe (see Section 6).

[10] Compare with Kavka's (1983) toxin puzzle, Gibbard's (1990, p. 37) remarks about the irrelevance of the consequences of feelings of anger to whether they are rational, and Hieronymi (2006) on belief and intention.

[11] Frankfurt (1982, p. 269).

[12] Frankfurt (1982, p. 261).

[13] When I say that Ginger's emotions are fickle, I mean only that they are not disposed to persist. I do not mean that Ginger lacks control over them. On the contrary, Ginger has far greater control over her emotions than people normally have over their attitude of caring, and this is yet another difference between Ginger's emotions and ordinary caring.

[14] Daniel might refrain from helping if doing so would threaten the game's integrity. But that would be because his disposition to help is overridden by other factors, not because he lacks the disposition.

[15] Samuel also fails to satisfy the necessary condition for desire suggested by Millgram (1997): committing oneself to performing practical inferences regarding the means to getting what one wants.

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[16] See Walton (1978). Walton applies this same machinery to problems in aesthetics and the philosophy of fiction; see Walton (1990). There have been many objections to his views about art and fiction, and to his general machinery. Some of the more general objections to him would apply equally well to what I say. For several objections, and responses from Walton, see the book symposium in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* (1991). For a defense of the idea that an attitude (x) can fail to accompany its typical phenomenology and physiology (quasi-x), see Walton (1997). For a defense of the idea that people can imagine something without any awareness that what they are doing is *imagining* it, see Currie and Jureidini (2001) and Gendler (2007).

[17] Walton (2015, chap. 5). Scheffler (2013, p. 58) similarly suggests that playing games involves "feigning significance." See Moore (2019) for a discussion of emotion in sport beyond caring and Wildman (2019) and Borge (2019) for defenses of Walton.

[18] Walton (1978) coined "quasi-fear"; it is now common terminology.

[19] Walton (1997, p. 39).

[20] This is understated and oversimplified: there are many reasons to engage in this sort of make-believe. On the benefits of make-believe, see Root-Bernstein (2012) and Singer and Singer (1992).

[21] Regarding fans, Archer and Wojtowicz (2022) emphasize that "the success… of a team [may impact] the community that fans are a part of and around which they build a central part of their identity" (p. 94). Archer and Wotjowicz suggest that winning matters for such fans, but that it may not matter for other fans (including, perhaps, fans like Daniel).

[22] One might object that this should lead to imaginative resistance. Imaginative resistance usually occurs whenever someone tries to imagine, together with some scenario, that a preposterous normative judgment about the scenario is true. For instance, suppose that someone instructs you to imagine that an apple has ripened quickly, that the quick ripening is among the most important events in world history, and that there is no further reason why it is important. You would probably struggle to imagine this. Now here is the objection to my view. On my view, basketball players imagine something similar: that putting a ball through a hoop is important, but for no reason. Players should encounter imaginative resistance to this, but they do not, so my view must be wrong. However, this objection is mistaken. It involves a scope confusion. Players do not imagine that putting a ball through a hoop is important for no further reason. Rather, there is no consideration which they imagine to be a reason why it is important. And this is not something we would expect to lead to imaginative resistance. It is not terribly difficult to follow along imaginatively with a story in which a character is doing something important, even though the story has not yet provided an explanation of why it is important.

[23] Nguyen (2019b). He provides a definition: "One engages in striving play when one takes on unnecessary goals for the sake of the activity they make possible, and when one does so for the intrinsic value of being engaged in that activity or one's experience of being so engaged" (Nguyen, 2017). Nguyen's concept of striving play is based on Bernard Suits' (2005) account of playing a game.

[24] See Tavinor (2009) for an extensive discussion of the elements of make-believe in videogames.

[25] Nguyen (2019b, p. 64). Nguyen also develops these ideas in Nguyen (2020, chap. 2–3).

[26] Nguyen (2019b, p. 64).

[27] All quotes in this section are from Nguyen (2019a, p. 450).

[28] This is important because the authenticity of sport requires that players really try to win, as Stear (2017, p. 282) emphasizes. If a player does not try to win, then she cheats her fans: in particular, "match fixing damages the integrity of sport." Stear takes this to be a problem for the view that players do not genuinely care. But we can avoid this problem if we grant that players can genuinely try to win while only quasi-caring. (Additionally, on my view serious and professional athletes often really care.)

[29] Stear (2017). Stear also provides other arguments for the claim that players like Ginger care, which I touched on in the preceding section. See Wildman (2019) for detailed responses to each of Stear's arguments and objections to Stear's positive view.

[30] Stear (2017, p. 285). Whether someone would occurrently care about x if x were to become salient is a reasonably good heuristic for whether she dispositionally cares about x, though I do not offer it as an analysis of dispositional caring.

[31] Stear (2017, p. 279) warns us not to compare drastically dissimilar cases: the distant famine should be compared to the most extreme sports "tragedies," not to "minor defeats" like Ginger's. Of course, no sports tragedy is at all comparable to a famine, but we can consider a more tragic case. Imagine that an underdog team miraculously makes it all the way through a league, nearly wins, and in the final minutes of the game, flubs everything and loses. If I hear of this on TV, I might react emotionally. But I very well might not. I might be apathetic, and there would be nothing morally objectionable about my apathy. Unlike real tragedies, sports "tragedies" do not demand emotional responses. And there are dispositional dissimilarities: I might (quasi-)care as I follow along on TV, yet not care dispositionally about the outcome the next day.

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[32] Stear gives a number of cases similar to (ii). These include desperately chasing a departing bus and worrying that a puppy is about to pee on the carpet. Similar responses apply to these.

[33] The thesis, as I have stated it, needs to be weakened. We might add to the antecedent that the caring is not wildly irrational or immoral, and perhaps also that it is not based on a false belief. Darwall (2001, p. 135) says that we have reason not to impede others in their pursuit of "projects to which they are passionately committed… so long as these do not pose threats to others." However exactly we qualify the thesis will not matter for this section, since Ginger and Daniel are not relevantly irrational, immoral, mistaken, or threatening.

[34] The situation is not that Milo temporarily has reason to *ignore* his reasons to lose to Ginger, to find solace in her victory, and so forth (see Nagel, 1970, pp. 131–132 on competition). Milo simply does not have these reasons.

[35] Those of us watching Ginger and Milo play do have reason not to prevent Ginger from winning (by turning the chess board over or making loud distracting noises). But that is because we would thereby disrupt Ginger's attempts to play chess, and playing chess is something she genuinely cares about doing. More generally, the reasons we have not to sabotage gameplay often concern the interest players have in playing, rather than any interest they have in winning; and these reasons typically also give us reason not to interfere in ways that would *help* the player to win.

[36] Note that the claim that Ginger's quasi-caring is contentless does not follow from my main claim that someone can have the phenomenology of caring without caring. It is a much stronger claim. Someone might deny it, despite accepting the distinction between caring and quasi-caring. Representationalists about the mind will deny it: they say that there can be no phenomenology without content.

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