Timothy Hampton: Welcome to Berkeley Book Chats. I'm Timothy Hampton, director of the Townsend Center for the Humanities.

Berkeley Book Chats showcase a Berkeley faculty member engaged in a public conversation about a recently completed work. This popular series highlights the richness of Berkeley's academic community.

Today's conversation features Alva Noë of the Philosophy Department discussing his book, *Infinite Baseball: Notes from a Philosopher at the Ballpark*.

He is joined by Anthony Cascardi, dean of the College of Letters & Science.

A. Cascardi: I want to begin with a confession, and the confession is that this is not the first time that Alva and I have been in conversation, but it is the first time that we've been in conversation about this book. And preceding our first event of this sort, I told Alva that the format would go something like this: I would pitch him softball questions, and he would hit them out of the park. So obviously we can't do that today because it's baseball. And in thinking about the conversation and the event, I just came to realize how much baseball is completely woven into our language. I found myself at one point facing what felt like a minefield of possible puns and figures of speech, and it was just… There were just too many, so I will be very, very restrained and try not to enter that somewhat dangerous terrain.

Alva Noë: No curveballs, please.

A. Cascardi: And from there it goes. I have it in my mind that this audience is comprised half of baseball nuts who can't get enough baseball even if there's no actual baseball involved, and half philosophy nuts who can't get enough philosophy no matter what it's about, including baseball. In some ways, the convergence of those two things is right here sitting across from me, Alva Noë, who's a baseball nut and a very, very distinguished philosopher.

A. Cascardi: I want to begin the conversation as is not customary by reading a passage from another book that I happen to be reading alongside yours, Alva, and just open this for your thoughts. It's recently translated from the Italian by Giacomo Sartori, called *I Am God*. If you'll bear with me:

A. Cascardi: "I am God, and I have no need to think. Up to now, I've never thought, and I've never felt the need, not in the slightest. The reason human beings are in such a bad way is because they think. Thought is by definition sketchy and imperfect and misleading. To any thought, one can oppose another, an obverse, and to that yet another, and so forth, and so on, and the inane cerebral yakety-yak is about as far from divine as you can get. Every thought is destined to expire from the moment it's hatched, just like the mind that hatched it. A God does not think. That's the last thing we need."

A. Cascardi: So I want to pose that as a general passage for comment by a philosopher who's found a way to think about many, many things including baseball. Alva, what do

you have to say about what I detect as a kind of irresistibility of thinking about things, including baseball?

Alva Noë: Well, there's different ways that I can answer that. As many of you know, philosophy is the business of precisely thinking about the things which we tend not to think about, the things we take for granted, putting our perceptual consciousness itself, our ways of being in the world, our values and attitudes, on the table for contemplation. So in some ways, what I'm trying to do here is bring that kind of attention to baseball.

Alva Noë: But what I found remarkable and kind of stimulating in the quote you read — which I'm not sure I entirely understood, I lost a little bit track of who was speaking — is this idea that it's kind of an affliction to need to think and that, wouldn't it be better if we could just get on with the game and play? And actually, that's the main idea in this book, that baseball is an activity which is endlessly anxious about its own performance, about the significance in its own doings so that there is no free play that can be separated from thinking about all the questions raised by the play itself.

Alva Noë: And I actually argue that that makes baseball, in a way, a kind of philosophical sport because it's a way of giving in. It just sounds very abstract. I hope we get a bit more concrete. But it's a way of giving in to the ways in which playing baseball raises questions.

A. Cascardi: Yeah, so you do make the argument in the book that baseball is a game, a sport, and I don't know as though we distinguish between game and sport in the book, but nonetheless it's a practice that incorporates in its very nature reflection on its nature as a practice, and I hope we'll get a chance to be a little more specific about that. But before we do, I want to just get a little closer to the question of philosophy's relationship to something like baseball.

A. Cascardi: We conventionally think of philosophy as directing its attention toward various object domains or subject domains. So we have a philosophy of science, and we have a philosophy of mind, and we have a philosophy of language, and we have a philosophy of religion, and we have philosophies of other things that are maybe less customarily designated, but there are these recognized domains of philosophy. Are you presenting us with a philosophy of baseball that should take its place alongside the philosophy of science and religion, or a philosophy of sport that should take its side, of which baseball would be an example? Where does this fit in terms of the domain differentiation of philosophy?

Alva Noë: I'm glad you raised that because I was hoping we could talk about funding a new chair in the philosophy of baseball at University of California. No. Actually, that's really not my picture. My picture is that philosophy is a lot of different conversations that have been going on for a long time, and philosophical problems crop up everywhere. They crop up in the domains of sciences, and they crop up in the domain of politics, and they crop up in the domain of all aspects of our lives, and I'm just offering baseball as yet another place where we might find it, but actually not to suggest that there should be a distinct subject called philosophy of baseball.

Alva Noë: I don't think really there's a distinct subject which is the philosophy of science or the philosophy of mind. Philosophy, like I said at the outset, tries to bring into play and ask questions about the things that are taken for granted in our ordinary thought and talk and life. I'm very inspired by Plato throughout this

book, and one of the early Socratic dialogues is so important for me. It's called the *Euthyphro*.

Alva Noë: I'm not a Plato scholar. There are Plato scholars in the room, so I should be careful, but *Euthyphro* has this amazing beginning. Socrates and his friends are hanging out on a street corner as they liked to do, and Euthyphro comes along, and Socrates is like, "Hey, Euthyphro. What's up? Where you going?" And Euthyphro says, "Oh, I'm off to the courts." "Why are you going to the courts?" "Well, I'm taking out a lawsuit against my father." "Oh, dear me. That's interesting. Why are you taking out a lawsuit against your father?" "Well, I'd like to bring him up on the charge of impiety," And Socrates says, "This is my lucky day. I've always wanted to know what piety is. Tell me," and then they're off to the races.

Alva Noë: And of course what Socrates does very well is embarrass Euthyphro, show that when he's interrupted from his sort of bandying around a word like piety and has to actually think deeply and reflect on why he wants to say the things he wants to say about it, he's quickly at a loss, so the upshot of the whole dialogue is not an explanation of what piety is, but rather some kind of recognition that we don't know what piety is, and so I want to do what Socrates did for piety for baseball.

A. Cascardi: Well, this is very interesting.

Alva Noë: We think we know what it is, but we do not.

A. Cascardi: This is very interesting, and truly I'm learning something, because in reading the book, I thought the subtitle, had it not been "Notes from a philosopher at the ballpark," might have been something like, "Wittgenstein in the bleachers." It's a very Wittgensteinian book. Do you see it that way?

Alva Noë: Well, what would that mean to this audience, "It's a Wittgensteinian book"? Wittgenstein was a philosopher who rebelled against questions like "What is piety?" because he thought a word or a concept like piety might be used in different ways in what he called a group of ways that resembled each other the way people resemble each other in a family, but not because they have some common essence. And certainly this is a book which is built up out of bits and pieces, observations, and it does actually argue that baseball is, as you said, a practice, not merely an activity, and I make a distinction between practices and activities. It's a practice, and that is a little bit like Wittgenstein saying that our conceptual lives are linguistic practices or are grounded in linguistic practices. But actually, I think, interestingly Socrates anticipated Wittgenstein.

A. Cascardi: No doubt in many ways. I was thinking though that Wittgenstein's language game is very much like Alva Noë's baseball game, which is to say that there are conventions and constructs in baseball very, you might say, episodically constructed within which things make sense or don't make sense, and so you talk in one part of the book about effectively the Hermeneutics of baseball, what is expected and what is not, and we could talk about how the game works in that context, but I came away from this thinking that baseball game and language game were very, very analogous phenomena.

Alva Noë: Yeah, I agree with that. I approached that kind of idea in lots of different ways throughout the book, but one of the things I try to use thinking about baseball to do is to think about language and writing in our lives, also communication. To

make it concrete, to begin to tie what we're talking about actually to the playing of baseball, it's interesting to think about the relationship between the pitcher and the batter as a kind of communication exchange where the batter's only hope of coping with what the pitcher throws at him is having some expectation of what it would be reasonable or likely for him to throw so that there's a sense in which the at-bat really is like a Wittgensteinian language game. And of course, there's a point. Each player has a point. The batter's point is to try to get on base or at least to avoid an out, and the pitcher's point is to try to get the batter out.

A. Cascardi: One of the surprises for me as I began reading the book was the way in which you approach baseball as, let's say, a non-data-driven sport. Many people think that baseball is what it is because it presents us with so many possible combinations, permutations of circumstances which we can track and analyze and compare, for which we have immense amounts of data and about which we can talk. But that's really not what baseball is about for you.

Alva Noë: No. No, and I hope the baseball nuts in the room won't be disappointed. This is not a sort of a contribution to baseball analytics. If anything, it's kind of a criticism of the too great obsession with thinking of baseball as a numbers game. I think of baseball, if anything, as a storytelling game. We're trying to make sense of the game as we play it and tell its story as we play it. That's why there's this extraordinarily important activity of keeping score, which is at the heart of baseball culture, trying to write the game down in real time as we play it, trying to sort of record history as it's happening, and it's not easy to for a variety of reasons. The nature of events in baseball require Hermeneutics, they require interpretation, and they throw up all sorts of conceptual puzzles, which I hope we'll have a chance to talk about.

Alva Noë: But the way I think about the numbers is statistics and numbers, probabilities and measurements, are simply one very useful tool for storytelling and for framing what's going on in the game, but we make a big mistake, I think, if we think sort of the interest that attaches to the game bottoms out in numbers.

A. Cascardi: I think one if the very, very insightful arguments that you make, and it's early on in the book, is that baseball is a game of responsibilities. It's a game in which who is credited for what and who is charged with what, matters fundamentally to the game, and that does relate to keeping scores. Keeping score is not just recording events, but it's actually a record that involves who is responsibility for what. Do you want to expand on that?

Alva Noë: Yeah. I'm glad you're pointing so directly to that point, because in some ways it's the most novel idea in the book, and I think it's one I care a lot about. I had this appreciation one day that when we care about events in baseball, we don't just care about sort of events as you might think of them materially, ball goes here, runner goes there. How we think about those events is always in relation to what matters, and what matters is always how we source, praise, and blame in relation to those events.

Alva Noë: So we care not just that the ball went there and the runner made it to the base. We ask, "Was it a hit?" or, "Did the runner make it to the base, the batter make it to the base as a result of a fielder's choice? Or perhaps it was a result of a fielder's error." And those differences, which don't actually affect the sort of mere material unfoldings on the ground, are the source of what interests us. That's what we're paying attention to, and if we're trying to write the game in real time by keeping score, that's the decisions we need to make about how to decide what happened.

Alva Noë: Or to give other examples, a runner on first makes it to second on a pitch. Is it a stolen base? Or did he advance because of defensive indifference? Or did he advance because of a wild pitch of a passed ball? Again, same action, but very different meanings. Or consider this. We care so much about runs. I mean, the most fundamental thing we keep score about is we keep score of who's got the most runs, but then we ask the question not just how many runs are there, but was this an earned run? An earned run is a run that we can blame the pitcher for having let happen, right? An unearned run is he's innocent.

Alva Noë: And these are the questions. These judgments about praise and blame actually make it the case that something happened. A different interpretation would make for a totally different outcome, and one of the areas where this gets kind of more controversial is I would even go so far as to say that something as basic and fundamental as the ball and strike needs to be understood in this way.

Alva Noë: Nowadays if you watch a baseball game on TV, they have the kind of graphical rendering of where the strike zone is, and we can decide that the umpire was wrong or right because he correctly or incorrectly called where the ball was, but for me, it's much less interesting, and I think a kind of misunderstanding to think of the strike zone as a physical space. I think of the strike zone as a zone of responsibility. A strike is a pitch the batter ought to have been able to hit, and if the batter can't hit it, it's his fault to the pitcher's credit. A ball, on the other hand, is a thrown ball that you can't blame the batter for not being able to take a swing at. And finally-

A. Cascardi: But you can blame him for swinging at it and missing.

Alva Noë: And you can blame him for swinging at it and missing. That's true for a kind of profound lack of self-understanding. Thank you for that, that's good.

Alva Noë: So what's going on there? It's not about the location of the pitch or the pitch's velocity. It's about this very subtle normatively laden communicative thing which is going on in that situation. One of the kind of mistakes I think we make about umpiring is to think of the umpire as just this fascinating, fancy measuring device. But really, the umpire is a participant, rather, in that exchange, and what the umpire is deciding is not where the ball was, but whether the batter should have hit it or whether the pitcher really shouldn't have thrown it there. And you can look closely at the dramas of at-bats and see how that works out. Sometimes if an umpire miscalls a pitch on one ball, he'll kind of correct it on the next ball because he's trying to be fair and be true to the quality of the exchange that's going on.

Alva Noë: So all of these are examples where what matters is thinking of baseball as a sphere in which to play the game is actually to be interested in questions about agency, responsibility, achievement, praise, blame. I hate to use the negative word blame, but I think blame is a big part of it. And in that sense, it's a kind of an agency game, or what I call it in the book is it's a forensic sport. The idea there being forensics is, as we all know from cops and robbers shows, it's the science of whodunnit. It's the science of who's responsible for the crime based on the tell-tale evidence that the forensic scientists can explore. It has a more original meaning in law, which you find also used in the philosopher John Locke, where forensic means "pertaining to the law or to questions of agency and responsibility," so who's culpable, who's liable for a crime. That's a forensic question, and baseball is, I think, a forensic sport.

A. Cascardi: So if I'm following you, baseball is a game that involves interpretation at every turn. The interpretation redounds to these fundamental questions of responsibility that accord praise and blame, but I don't think you say that it's all interpretation. That is to say you don't deny that there are a set of facts of the matter about the game, that a ball was hit. You address the question of what you call internal realism, so that you're not a fact denier, I don't think.

Alva Noë: No.

A. Cascardi: Because there is the temptation to criticize positions that rely so heavily on interpretation and to characterize them as denying the very existence of facts.

Alva Noë: No.

A. Cascardi: And there's a draw toward the facts, like we want the umpire to get the facts exactly right where that's, I think, we're saying is a misapprehension of the role of the umpire.

Alva Noë: Yeah. That's such an interesting set of questions, which I think, again, makes baseball a little microcosm for thinking about lots of other ways in which facts and values collide in our lives. So if you think of the umpire as a measuring device, that sort of goes with the idea that there's the facts and he's simply a response to them.

Alva Noë: An extreme other view, which you sometimes hear umpires defend, is a kind of an anti-realism according to which whatever the umpire says, "I calls them as I sees them," or, "They are the way I see them." This is an idea. So you seem to have this standoff between a realism and an anti-realism. In philosophy, so often extreme views capture something that we want to say. And what the realist gets right is that sometimes we do seriously question and want to dispute whether umpires made the correct call. That happens all the time, and that's really important. But what the realist can't really account for are these forensic interpretive hermeneutic qualities that I was just talking about.

Alva Noë: And by the way, the book is not a defense of this-ism or that-ism. These are sort of short, fun, amusing essays in which I just happen to throw these isms around. But I use the term internal realism, which is an homage to my professor, Hilary Putnam, when I was a graduate student who used that term. Really, there are facts just as there are social facts about race and gender and all these kinds of things, but these facts only come into focus from within the shared practices that we have.

Alva Noë: So there's no baseball-external way of deciding what's a home run and what isn't. There's no baseball-external fact of the matter about foul balls. You have to be inside baseball to even care about foul balls. But the interesting thing is if you do care about foul balls, there's all the difference in the world between whether a ball is fair and foul. So the problem of realism arises inside the game, not external to the game, and so that's what I mean by internal realism.

Alva Noë: Now, an interesting question that this raises is, what do you make of when they change the rules of the game through MLB sort of legislates that we're going to make some fundamental rule change? Are they making it from within or from without? Are they changing the game from within? And there's a lot of interesting questions that I don't think there's a clear answer, which is more example of how much food for though baseball throws up for us.

A. Cascardi: As I was reading the book, there came a point in which it became clear to me that the question of whether baseball was a metaphor for something or not was deliciously ambiguous. Baseball becomes as much the object of your focus as a metaphorical way of thinking about many, many, many things in the world. So baseball, at one point in my read through the book, no longer became just the object of your attention. It became a lens or a vehicle by ... through which to see many other questions including these ones of responsibility, including issues about realism, including about interpretation.

A. Cascardi: Do you find other sports to provide this same kind of experience?

Alva Noë: So in a way, in the book, I give something and then I take it away, because what I give is a particular structure that I find in baseball, a structure that makes a domain of life baseball-like. And what it is to be baseball-like, I think, is, as you said earlier on, is precisely for reflection to be built into the activity. So you might think there's this first-order activity, hitting, throwing, running, stealing bases, and then we can think about it, and there's the doing and there's the thinking.

Alva Noë: But what I suggest is, no, baseball is an activity which contains as part of itself its own meta-reflective activity. So the second order is contained within the first order, and that's actually the sense in which I came to the title, Infinite Baseball. That's the sense in which I think you can't draw the limits to the game around the physical stuff going on on the field, because it becomes a whole thought practice and in some ways a whole community or world of activity.

Alva Noë: But of course, once I noticed this interesting fact about baseball, I began to realize it's not in any way unique to baseball. In fact, it might be distinctive of all significant domains of human culture. Language, in my sense, is baseball-like. When you use a language, you don't just use words. You also reflect on your use of words. You explain your use of words when somebody doesn't understand you, or you deal with the inevitable misunderstandings that arise between people when they're talking. So language is baseball-like. The law is baseball-like.

Alva Noë: So it turns out that I think actually baseball became, for me, a way of discovering a more general fact about twhat makes a phenomenon interestingly cultural, and then it's also true of other sports. However, where I want to make a special plea that baseball offers something unique is in the way it wears these concerns right on its surface and the way in which it kind of thematizes them within the activity itself, and this is shown nowhere else more clearly than in this problem of keeping score.

Alva Noë: So the fact that to be part of the baseball world is to be a scorekeeper, that is someone who while you're doing something is also concerned with writing it down, which requires understanding what it is and taking that seriously, is really a very explicit engagement with this actually very general fact about culture that there's this kind of looping embedding of self-reflection inside of that.

A. Cascardi: So I wanted to ask you a question about wording baseball and wording the world, but I'm not going to do that so that we have time for questions from the audience which I know are many.

Tim: Later.

A. Cascardi: Later. Yeah. Tim, do you want to moderate the questions?

Tim: No. You're doing a great job.

A. Cascardi: All right. Thanks for the encouragement.

Tim: Can I get started?

Alva Noë: We need a microphone. We need a microphone for Tim.

Tim: I was really struck by this idea of the story, of baseball as a story. It's then probably not by accident that we have this tradition of announcers who are great storytellers, the kind of Vin Scully figures who really narrate the unfolding of a baseball game in the kind of way that you don't have in any other sport. I mean, and I got most of my baseball through the radio, and the kind of different ways in which you can narrate a home run at a key moment in a game versus what you would do at a football game, which is kind of always say the same thing, is quite, again, quite unique to baseball.

Alva Noë: That's a lovely observation, and I completely agree with you. Just to kind of add a little bit to it, a lot of the observations that I make about baseball in this book come from watching children play baseball, and there's some of the baseball moms in the room with me here, and I'm really interested in what they do when they play the game, and it's a lot more than just running, hitting, pitching, catching. There's a lot of talking. There's a lot of commentary to each other, and some of that commentary is just a kind of jibber-jabber, but some of it is actually, not to be too sort of heavy about it, but it's like emotional regulation. The work that a young person has to do, boy or girl, at the plate or on the mound or in a high-pressure point in a game… You can see tears rolling down the cheeks of the 12-year-old pitcher, and there's a lot of languaging inside baseball that makes it possible for those players to survive that.

Alva Noë: Now, is that part of baseball? Yes. That's not sort of this external thing —it's part of the game. Similarly, the parents are not just on the sidelines watching. They're not merely witnessing. They're wrapped up in a very complex emotional give and take through what they shout and what they say, or what they don't shout or what they don't say, or the eye contact that they make, or the energy bar that they pass through the fence, or whatever it might be. They're involved also. So the circle widens, and I would actually want to say it widens so far as to include Vin Scully and this kind of larger process of thinking about the game. In fact, there's a sense in which I want my book to be part of that baseball activity, so yeah.

Audience 1: Thank you for the great talk. So you say that score keeping and other sort of reflective activities that go within baseball involve agency and interpretation. They're not just objective recording sciences. I'm wondering how you think about the maybe possible analogous reflective activities and empirical sciences, the hardest sciences we can imagine, maybe like physics and then maybe in visual arts, reflective activities within the visual arts on the other hand. How would you situate the reflective activities that go on in baseball and compare those with these two seemingly opposite extremes on some dimension?

Alva Noë: Yeah. Would it be possible to ask a bigger question? I mean, maybe next semester I'll teach a seminar on that question. No, because that's so profound, and I think you're right to register that there are differences in what reflection

means inside an artistic practice, or a philosophical practice, and what it means inside a laboratory practice, and what it means inside a baseball practice. I just want to say you're right to ask the question. I can't really quite answer it.

Alva Noë: I will say something, that when you talked about how there's going to be a panel or a series you're having soon on composition, one of the puns that I like to play with throughout the book is the idea that you're composing a score when you compose a baseball score. It's not a score that you will play after. You don't play baseball after a score, although that would be a fun game, wouldn't it? You take the game and replay it, reconstruct the game kind of like a Civil War battle except recording by the score, and then that raises all these interesting questions about how much is left out of a score that is required in order to play it, just as Beethoven needed to hand-write in exactly how loud you needed to bang those keys.

Alva Noë: Similarly, do you want the runners to slide in head first or leg first? Or do you want them to scratch themselves when they're standing there?

A. Cascardi: And this becomes performance art now.

Alva Noë: And this becomes performance art. Or maybe it's interesting to ask why it isn't performance art. So I think that there are so many differences in the way in which baseball reflection happens and what we call critical reflection in science. Just maybe to say one thing is that in science, and I'm obviously would have to speak in big, generalizing terms, but science is really results oriented. It's really results oriented. What is the finding? And you want to record the methods used, and are the findings replicable? And what's the abstract? What's the bottom line?

Alva Noë: Baseball has no bottom line. Actually, you're just reflecting on the meaning of events as they unfold, and with tremendous freedom. There's no one right way to do it. That's another really interesting thing. Even in the baseball community, you can keep score for different purposes. If I'm the pitcher's mom, I'll notate things that I wouldn't if I were a scout from a school, so this ... There's a lot of open texture to these processes.

A. Cascardi: Thank you.

Audience 2: I haven't read your book. I'm an art historian, and one of the most satisfying things about baseball, and I do find it an incredibly satisfying sport, is the beauty of the field and the simplicity of that and what it is to look upon something that seems to order the game in such a profound way, and that makes me think of not just how an architect or someone who theorizes space might want to speak to this issue, but I also think it's also incredibly slow as a sport. So that slowing down and having the visual in such a simplified orderly way seems to me that it would be something that might appeal to you. It appeals to me and is quite different than other sports, and I want to know if you want to speak to that, those two aspects, the visual spatial and the temporal.

Alva Noë: Thank you for those two beautiful points. I go to a lot of baseball games, and I never fail to sort of inhale with astonishment at how beautiful the field is. Night games, it's one kind of beauty. Day games, it's another kind. When you come out of the stands and boom, there's that expanse. It is an astonishing thing to see. Every field is different from every other field in their actual layout and ground rules. I was just at a Giants game thinking about that crazy outfield wall that they have.

Audience 2: And the football gridding at Oracle. Really disturbing.

Alva Noë: There were a few years in the '70s when the Mets, the Yankees, and the Jets all played in the same Shea Stadium. I don't discuss this question that you just raised, but the other question you mentioned I do discuss a lot in the book, and it's this issue about how boring it is and how grateful I am for the opportunity for that kind of boredom, and how Major League Baseball is really barking up the wrong tree with their obsession about pace of play and the desire to find ways to speed up the game, because they're really misunderstanding where the action is.

Alva Noë: So again, when our kids are playing in high-school ball or Little League ball, we have to teach them after they've swung and missed to step out of the batter's box and take a few swings to collect themselves. They have to learn to waste time that way because it's a crucial part of collecting themselves for the challenge of stepping back in and controlling the clock, controlling the timing of the whole situation. Almost every slow event taking place on the field is in that way a time when tactical decisions are being evaluated and things are happening.

Alva Noë: The things that are happening are quiet and thoughtful. They're not boring, or they're boring to the spectator, but in the way that something complex to follow and think about can be boring, like a crossword puzzle can be boring or a math problem can be boring. But of course, it can be fascinating if you turn on to it in the right way, which is another whole theme in the book about the way in which loving baseball, and this is not unique to baseball, and it's also shared with the arts, is an opportunity to hone one's abilities to pay attention to things, to care about things, to see a double play, to discern it, for it to be manifest to you. Yeah, so these are really, really important topics.

A. Cascardi: Please, in the front row here. Yes.

Audience 3: Oh, thank you. I think, related to that, a point you made that I really enjoyed for some reason is we never know how long the game is going to last, and that seems of some importance in what you were just talking about.

Alva Noë: That's right. For some reason, my son and I always like to imagine all the different ways in which a game could go on infinitely long. I know there are some innocent Europeans in the room who may not even know this, but a baseball game has no natural end. It only ends if at a certain point there's one team ahead, otherwise you don't call it a tie. They just play forever.

A. Cascardi: I think this gentleman here had a question.

Audience 4: There's Little League Baseball. There's Cal Baseball. There's the baseball of those of us that got to listen to it on the radio a long time ago. Today, I guess I could refer to it as the infinite commercialization of baseball, and I just wondered if you've given that any thought, the difference between seeing kids play, seeing college students play, and then what's happened in the last several decades to the increasing commercialization of the sport.

Alva Noë: We have so little time left. I want to be brief because there are other voices, but I want to say that's a fascinating set of issues. I think baseball's always been very propagandistic about itself in ways that suggest advertising, this idea that baseball is the national pass-time. That's got to be the best marketing slogan that anybody ever came up with for an activity, but it's true. The money and the

advertising… And now, actually, through cable television and all of that, the limited access to games on television, free broadcast TV, doesn't cover most games anymore. It's quite nauseating what's happened to the game.

Alva Noë: I don't really try to register that or track that or tell that story in the book, but a story I imaged it in the book is how it's possible still to love the game despite that, and I tell the story which I was with my ... I'm a New Yorker and I'm a Mets fan, and we were in Oakland when there was interleague play. The New York Mets were in town playing the A's, and at the end of the game, David Wright, who was a great Mets superstar until very recently — as he was running off the field, we'd run down to the front and were standing near the dugout.

Alva Noë: When running off the field, he took up his batting gloves and his sweat bands and tossed them to us, and I, however 40-something-year-old I was at the time, I nearly fell down on my knees in a sense of gratitude and—no, gratitude isn't strong enough a word. *Love* for what he had done. They're all branded with Nike, and for all I know, his part of his branding, marketing, self-marketing scheme is he has to share out these advertising things. Mind you, I gave it all to my kids after I snatched it.

Alva Noë: So anyway, this is a big and complicated question. I'm glad you named it.

A. Cascardi: Probably have time for maybe one or two more. Yes. Way in the back.

Audience 5: Go A's tonight.

Alva Noë: Yeah. Go A's tonight, absolutely.

Audience 6: One of the things you brought up was the idea of how we talk about the sport and what kind of language we use, and one of the things that occurred to me was this great George Carlin bit where he compares baseball to football. I'm wondering if you address that in the book or have any further description or discussion about that. For example, football comes across as very militaristic, we're going to throw the bomb and go deep into enemy territory, while in baseball, we all want to go home. There's a very different approach to how-

Alva Noë: We want to be safe.

Audience 6: Safe at home, yeah. Do you have any thoughts on how that affects cultures?

Alva Noë: Yeah. You know, I don't really discuss that exact point, but let me just say very briefly something which I do discuss, which is I think in the vicinity. Baseball is a product of the late 19th century, or the mid 19th century, which is also the time when science as we know it today really took form. We used to have the possibility of one very clever person, at least aspirationally, understanding everything, but one of the things that happened in the late 19th century is knowledge really became purchased through specialization. You have all these new sciences, and every science is sort of deep in the tunnels of its own expert mastery with no ability for crosstalk, and you have the emergence of a certain kind of notion of expertise and specialization.

Alva Noë: And then how do you fit human values into that story? And I think one thing you can say about American society is that it's a place where there's this battle going on between how to think of the relationship between science and value,

and one of the forms it takes is positivism, namely the idea that actually if you just had the right theory, you can crunch the numbers and get the answers you need. Should you take that pitcher out now? Crunch the numbers. Get the answers you need. Should you stop breastfeeding now? Crunch the numbers. Get the answers you need.

Alva Noë: And then on the other view, you realize that there are limits to what science can tell us and that there are challenges, hard choices everybody needs to make. That manager finally needs to follow his gut about whether to leave that pitcher in or not. The mother needs to decide whether she can really tolerate breastfeeding anymore, or whatever the considerations might be. It's not Carlin's point about safety versus militarism, but it's a very interesting way in which there really is a sense in which Americans are working out a certain way of reflecting on certain problems is worked out in the setting of baseball.

A. Cascardi: I think we have time for a last question. Wait for the microphone.

Audience 7: I shouldn't really open my mouth because what I know is cricket, the ancestor of baseball of course, and a lot of what you said pertains to cricket almost all the more. I mean, if baseball is slow, cricket is slower. The general point I wanted to make, building up a bit on what has been said about the aesthetics of the game, and I don't know if it comes into the book, is the idea of style and ritual. And it seems to me there's a sense in which perhaps all sports, but particularly cricket and baseball, they're a kind of ideal space. There's a game, but it's not a creative game in one sense. It's an expected game, and it's the kind of comfort of the players. They're wearing the right uniform. They're placed in the right areas of the game. And there's spaces in which nothing is happening, but you know, people can talk.

Audience 7: It's an image of life in a very special way. It's sort of controlled, and at the same time predictable, and yet there's always something new happening. I wonder about this kind of aspect of ritual. There's a comfort to being there if you know the game. What about that?

Alva Noë: All I can simply say is I couldn't have said it better myself. That expresses itself in so many ways. People eat their comfort foods when they watch, or they drink their comfort drinks. Something I am a bit critical of in the book, but which is a really important strand in baseball writing at least, and I wouldn't be surprised if it were also true of cricket, is nostalgia about the golden age and also the special experiences one had as a young person with Dad having these experiences.

Alva Noë: I grew up in Greenwich Village to kind of hippie, radical outsiders who hated baseball and everything conventional. So for me, baseball was like one brief opportunity to leave that madness and know something safe and ritualized. We didn't go to church, but I had baseball.

A. Cascardi: Well, I think that's a great note on which to conclude. Thank you, Alva.

Alva Noë: Thank you.

Timothy Hampton: We hope you enjoyed this Berkeley Book Chat, and we encourage you to join us in person or via podcast for future programs in the series.