

GAMES, TIMEPIECES,  
AND BUSINESSPEOPLE

“Business,” wrote a professor of marketing in 1929, “is the work of the world, humanity’s chiefest task.”<sup>1</sup> On the doorstep of the Depression, Prof. George R. Collins was selling business, by which he meant the business economy, an economic order based on the systematic management of money. I do not intend to enter the volatile controversy between Collins and those like Aldous Huxley who accused business people of being venal and crass. Rather, I intend to trace one likely path by which many in 1929 had come to regard business as a redemptive activity and the business person as a redeemer.

My thesis is that the Western attitude toward business is a function of the Western attitude toward games. Enduring and pervasive has been the image of business as gambling and the businessperson as a gamester, a player at chances, an austere yet beguiling manipulator, an intriguer. Roger Caillois, in his analysis of games, has suggested that collective modern life is based upon a tension between merit (*agon or competition*) and chance (*alea*).<sup>2</sup> Attendant upon games of chance has been the risk of hubris, of unseemly pride before the powers that control the web of events. Social regard for gambling has consequently been negative or ambivalent, for the imperfect human is always tempted to insult or to cheat on the inhumanly perfect. I would

<sup>1</sup> George R. Collins, *Outline of Business*, 2 vols., New York, 1929, I, 8.

<sup>2</sup> Roger Caillois, *Man, Play, and Games*, Glencoe, 1961 [1958].

suggest that as business people seemed to master chance, the risk of hubris diminished, and the game they played seemed then to be one of *agon*, of human competition.

At the center of this dynamic has been the technology and philosophy of timekeeping. Through the conquest of time, the businessperson conquered chance and regulated much more than the world of commerce. Business gaming became associated with the high pursuit of ordering human affairs, and the gamester-businessperson became respectable simply by virtue of engaging in successful business.

I begin my account not with the Roman contract, circus and clepsydra but with the invention of the weight-driven geared mechanical clock in the thirteenth century. The clocks were usually installed in monasteries and cathedrals, for the Church controlled time—the ringing of the hours, the division of the day and of the year. Although the accuracy of the first clocks left much to be desired and the clocks were as much cosmological symbols as they were timepieces, the Church's use of clocks was a sign of its desire for a uniformly regulated society. Profiting from a commercial revolution which brought with it new forms of business law and organization, the church administration had come to recognize the value of a time-conscious bureaucracy.

But the churchman's time-sense lay between two worlds, between the commercial traffic of this precarious world and the ultimate traffic of a most secure world. So priests spoke intolerantly of games which used time (God's time) unwisely, and they considered earthly business to be essentially a game of chance. Games of chance were the worst sort of game, for they insulted divine providence; loans and investments with interest were tactics to win on wagers about the future, and the businessperson was gaming with the divine disposition of events. The conflict between business and religion might be seen in the conflict over daily time: merchants erected their own town clocks which told the hours so as to stress industrial rather than clerical divisions of the day.

In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, however, one did not live exclusively by the business clock, and Renaissance merchants rarely praised themselves because they were good

businesspeople. There was something vaguely disconcerting about the favors of *Fortuna*, that goddess of something more than luck whose relationship to *virtú* was at best capricious. Commerce was necessary, but gaming had no religious sanction. There were consequent compromises. Churchmen waffled on the definition of usury and risk. Enterprising merchants who sought to ratify morally their chance-taking contracts wrote God in as the agent responsible for their share of the profits. In turn, the great Italian commercial establishments (the Bardi, the Peruzzi, the Medici) had the approval of the Church and subsidized papal undertakings.<sup>3</sup>

Within the Church, in the era just before clocks, powerful contrary voices had called for the entire divorce of business and religion. St. Francis and later the more strident Spiritual Franciscans claimed that commerce threatened faith. Christians were being encouraged to concern themselves too deeply with the manufactured wealth of this world. The church, though distrustful of *alea*, had so entered into the spirit of *agon*, competition, that it had repressed the apostolic Christian impulse to play. St. Francis' sense of time and games verged on the heretical, for he was a *paidic* saint, a saint of improvisation and spontaneous humility, a saint of familiar but casual relationships between the self and the earthly environ. The worshipper neither strove against nor bet with this world; instead the worshipper

<sup>3</sup> On early clocks, see esp. Lynn White, Jr., *Medieval Technology and Social Change*, London, 1962; Carlo Cipolla, *Clocks and Culture 1300-1700*, New York, 1967; Jacques Le Goff, "Au Moyen Age: Temps de l'Eglise et temps du marchand," *Annales é. s. c.* 15 (1960), pp. 417-33; *idem*, "Le temps du travail dans la 'crise' du XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle: Du temps médiéval au temps moderne," *Le moyen âge* 69 (1963), pp. 597-613. On usury see Benjamin Nelson, *The Idea of Usury*, 2nd ed.; Chicago and London, 1969; John T. Noonan, Jr., *The Scholastic Analysis of Usury*, Cambridge, Mass., 1957; R. H. Tawney, "Introduction" to Thomas Wilson, *A Discourse Upon Usury* [1572] ed. Tawney, reprint: London, 1965 [1925]; Raymond de Roover, *Business, Banking and Economic Thought in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. J. Kirshner, Chicago and London, 1974; *Idem*, *Money, Banking and Credit in Medieval Bruges*, Cambridge, Mass., 1948. On contracts, see Johannes Nider, *On the Contracts of Merchants* [1468] trans. C. H. Reeves, ed. R. B. Shuman, Norman, 1966; Robert S. Lopez and Irving W. Raymond, eds., *Medieval Trade in the Mediterranean World*, New York, 1955. On fortune, see Felix Gilbert, *Machiavelli and Guicciardini*, Princeton, 1965, Chapter 3; Ricardo J. Quinones, *The Renaissance Discovery of Time*, Cambridge, Mass., 1972, pp. 175-86.

played in that holy innocence which might lead to visions or healing.<sup>4</sup>

About 175 years after clocks, near the end of the industrial depression we call the Renaissance, came the radical critique of the Reformers. Luther and his heirs said quite clearly that salvation was not a game, not a commercial enterprise. You did not gamble for salvation, you could not buy chances labelled good deeds, you had no recourse to banking on credit with the Lord through indulgences, you did not do business with God. The Roman Church, Luther charged, was no more and no less than a gamester. What audacity, what arrogance is there in the person who would bargain or lay odds with God for salvation. No human can expect legal or market reciprocity with the divine. The fear of God should be the fear that *whatever* one does is inevitably play.

For Luther, to whom St. Francis was not entirely alien, play had two aspects. The first aspect was that of insignificant amusement, aimless activity. Never pretending to understand God, one would ever fear that all one did to live a Christian life was but misguided amusement in the eyes of the Lord. The only solution to a constant state of fear was imbedded in the second aspect of play: to be unassuming, to be as a little child, to have faith. The freedom of this playing was the Christian's freedom.<sup>5</sup>

Such playing, unlike that of St. Francis, was not very playful. It was sober. In response, Catholic Reformers, backed by the decisions of the Council of Trent in the mid-sixteenth century, began to stress the value of ecclesiological intervention in all facets of daily life. Occupation, family and city precinct were redefined in terms of the parish. The Jesuits on their side and the Protestant educators on the other fashioned the *schole* or leisure of the Greeks into the school or children's workplace of Western Europe. From childhood on, one struggled toward a solid faith. The printed book and the pedagogy derived from

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Lynn White, Jr., "The Historical Origins of Our Ecologic Crisis," in his *Machina Ex Deo*, Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1968, pp. 75-94.

<sup>5</sup> See Nelson, *Idea of Usury*, Chapter 2; Martin Luther, "Trade and Usury" [1524] in *Works*, ed. H. T. Lehmann, Philadelphia, 1955, Vol. XLV, pp. 231-310.

the logic of Peter Ramus stimulated beliefs that knowledge was concrete, incremental and cumulative. Whether in Calvin's Geneva or in most Catholic Paris, the quotidian round became divested of its religious ambiguity. What one did was either toward or away from salvation.<sup>6</sup>

The problem for both Catholic and Protestant was to interpret worldly, commercial achievement. Sometime between 1520 and 1650, people began to regard worldly success as a sign of piety if not also of grace and election. Max Weber explained this change in attitude toward business by noting Luther's emphasis upon a calling divinely assigned to each individual; subsequent theologians understood success in one's calling as a mark of God's favor.<sup>7</sup> Thus Hugh Latimer, in his Sermon on the Ploughers in 1548, would quote St. Paul to his English Protestant congregation, "Let every man do his own business, and follow his calling."

But Weber's thesis evades the problem of Catholic values and large numbers of Catholic entrepreneurs. And the same Latimer who talked about the calling had previously delivered two sermons in which he used the traditional cardplaying of the Christmas season as a model of Christianity: "And, whereas you are wont to celebrate Christmas by playing at cards, I intend, by God's grace to deal unto you Christ's cards, wherein you shall perceive Christ's rule. The game that we will play at shall be called The Triumph, which, if it be well played at, he that dealeth shall win; the players shall likewise win; and the standers and lookers on shall do the same; insomuch that no man that is willing to play at this Triumph with these cards, but they shall be all winners, and no losers." (Hearts were trump.)<sup>8</sup> A century later, in 1645, Bishop Joseph Hall would write, "The

<sup>6</sup> See especially John Bossy, "Counter-Reformation and the People of Catholic Europe," *Past and Present* 47 (May 1970), pp. 51-70; Walter J. Ong, "Ramist Method and the Commercial Mind," *Studies in the Renaissance*, 8 (1961), pp. 155-72.

<sup>7</sup> Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. T. Parsons, New York, 1958 [1904-05]. On the Weber controversy see Robert W. Green, ed., *Protestantism, Capitalism and Social Science*, 2nd ed.; Lexington, Mass., 1973; S. N. Eisenstadt, ed., *The Protestant Ethic and Modernization: A Comparative View*, New York and London, 1968.

<sup>8</sup> Hugh Latimer, "Sermons on the Card," in his *Sermons and Remains*, 2 vols., Cambridge, 1845, Vol. I, pp. 8, 3.

world is a cheating gamester, suffering us to win at the first.”<sup>9</sup> In terms of my argument, sometime between 1520 and 1650 people began to look differently at games of chance, and the victorious gamester could be regarded as a moral victor as well.

I would attribute much of the change of attitude toward games and toward business to the development of precision timepieces and a concomitant change in ideas about the “lifetime.” In the sixteenth century clocks became more reliable and more widespread. City towers had clocks with more sophisticated movements whose margins of error—less than an hour each day—were small enough to justify a minute hand where before there had been no hands at all and the clocks had rung the hours. Spring-driven timepieces, devised in the 1400s, became more prevalent and more reliable in the 1500s, and women of the higher echelons sported small pendant watches encrusted with jewels.

During the same period, skillful anatomists, following Vesalius, impressed physicians and artists alike with the complex frailty of the human body. Now that one could count the minutes of one’s life with some consistency, one could also appreciate the aging process. By 1650, after the devastation of the Thirty Years War, after the run of plagues and famine, after the havoc of light mounted cannon moving rapidly through fields razed by unpredictable mercenary armies, peasant or lord might well reflect upon the instability of life. Literature on the art of dying included more instruction on the art of aging, and the dead were separated from the living as much by minutes as by heartbeats.<sup>10</sup>

While Galileo worked out the principle of the pendulum that would transform clockmaking, while Harvey worked out the principles of the circulation of the blood that would transform the image of the heart from the vital to the mechanical, the paradigm of gambling began to have increased appeal. The

<sup>9</sup> Joseph Hall, “The Remedy of Discontentment” [1645] in his *Works*, ed. J. Pratt, 10 vols., London, 1808, VIII, 12.

<sup>10</sup> See especially Philippe Ariès, *Western Attitudes toward Death From the Middle Ages to the Present*, trans. P. M. Ranum, Baltimore and London, 1974; David A. Roberts, “Mystery to Mathematics Flown: Time and Reality in the Renaissance,” *Centennial Review* 19 (Summer 1975), pp. 136-56; George Poulet, *Études sur le temps humain*, 3 vols., Paris, 1949-64, I, pp. xiv-xxii, 1-15.

winning gambler won within time, was able to deal on his or her own terms with the passage of time. The winning gambler somehow understood chance and so was privy to the nature of events, the flow or flux of time. What disturbed mathematicians was not the act of gambling but their own inability to explain the professional gambler's command of chance.<sup>11</sup>

Who would be the ideal gamester? Someone who played for real stakes, whose winning meant something to society. Who could that be but the businessperson, whose coins circulated through society as blood through the body, whose fortune swung like the pendulum but always seemed to even out a little to the positive. People had seen the great city-size mercenary armies switch allegiance according to the lures of profit rather than religion or nationality, had seen Catholic powers support Protestant princes in so-called religious wars. The force in society seemed to be economic, and whatever providence was, the gamester was its vane, not its opponent. European governments organized games of chance known as lotteries for their own incomes during the sixteenth century, and by the early seventeenth century Genoa had established a lottery for public benefit. Protestant England and Catholic France shared in the development of lotteries. In England Bishop Hall complained only that "The world is a *cheating* gamester" (my italics).

In the following years, between 1650 and 1830, games of chance shed much of their bad reputation as chance itself became subject to mathematical scrutiny. Probability theory contributed to higher mathematics, and the science of statistics was founded. Life insurance, suspect in earlier years, developed a sophisticated base in the analysis of bills of morbidity and mortality. The first demographers, looking for a relationship between the economic health of a nation and the growth of its populace, tried to predict average demographic patterns. In the forms of annuities, lotteries and speculation on the new stock exchanges, games of chance appealed to a wider social group than ever before. Newton, concerned as were his friends

<sup>11</sup> Cf. F. N. David, *Games, Gods and Gambling*, New York, 1962, pp. 55-68, 81-97.

with the problems of divine providence, allowed in his mechanics for the chance interference with natural physical laws which some would call "miracle." Miracle was built into the system of a universe which would otherwise grind to an eventual halt due to friction.<sup>12</sup>

By the eighteenth century, business as a game of chance under control had become respectable. Indeed, it was thought that commerce had a providential function in the relationship of nations, and Daniel Defoe supposed that "there is a kind of divinity in the origin of trade."<sup>13</sup> The English language reflected the changes in the social evaluation of business. Used as early as 950 A.D. to mean anxiety or care and the state of being busy, "business" soon came to mean a pursuit or occupation of any kind that was not a pastime. In the early seventeenth century it acquired euphemistic references to defecation and sexual intercourse. But by the 1670s, "business" meant what I have been meaning by it, commercial affairs. By 1791 the value shift in favor of business is most evident as Edmund Burke described people who were "steady, sensible" and had "business-like heads."<sup>14</sup>

Games of chance, including the game of business, assumed an important role in literature. Issues of chance, coincidence, or heavenly providence (often confused) became the twisting points of long novels, and the rise and fall of business fortunes in the midst of the plot became an index to the moral state of the characters. Poems and plays about gamblers, censorious of both the duped and the duper, ranged from Mrs. Centlivre's *The Gamester* (1705) to part of Pope's *Rape of the Lock*.

<sup>12</sup> See John Ashton, *A History of English Lotteries*, London, 1893, and his *The History of Gambling in England*, London, 1898; Ian Hacking, *The Emergence of Probability*, Cambridge, 1975; P. G. M. Dickson, *The Financial Revolution in England*, London and New York, 1967, pp. 90-156, 486-520; Francis Baily, *The Doctrine of Life-Annuities and Assurances*, 2 vols., London, 1813, vol. I, pp. x-xxvii, on the history of earlier work; John S. Ezell, *Fortune's Merry Wheel: The Lottery in America*, Cambridge, Mass., 1960, pp. 1-59; D. V. Glass, "Two Papers on Gregory King," in Glass and D. E. C. Eversley, eds., *Population in History*, Chicago, 1965, pp. 159-220; J. E. McGuire, "Force, Active Principles, and Newton's Invisible Realm," *Ambix* 15 (1958), pp. 154-208.

<sup>13</sup> Cited in Jacob Viner, *The Role of Providence in the Social Order*, Philadelphia, 1972, p. 46, also see all of Chapter 2.

<sup>14</sup> "Business," *Oxford English Dictionary*, I, pp. 1205-06.



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In Henry Fielding's play, *The Lottery* (1732), the concluding song has it

That the world is a lottery, what man can doubt?  
When born, we're put in, when dead, we're drawn out; . . .

Those who ran lotteries knew also that

All the World's a Lottery,  
And men and women mere adventurers: . . .

So Shakespeare too was redone, Hamlet's personal crisis transformed into an unsettling discussion of a game of chance:

To buy, or not to buy, that's the question,  
Whether 'tis nobler in the purse to suffer  
The mournful emptiness of Fortune's daughter,  
Or to buy Tickets at a Lott'ry Office  
And by a Prize to end them. A Prize! Hard Cash!  
And by possession of that Cash to end  
The heart-ache, and a thousand cruel shocks  
That Poverty is heir to. 'Tis a consummation  
Devoutly to be wish'd . . .<sup>15</sup>

This advertising puff implied that the lottery would reward the worthy, the poor, just as the hero or heroine of the Augustan novel always made a conquest of lord or lady luck.

Perhaps that conquest was not itself coincidental. So must have believed Jacob Marperger, Malachi Postlethwayt, Marquez Sebastao Pombal, and Johann Georg Busch, who proposed and in the last two cases established formal educational institutions for prospective businessmen. If business were a game, at least one might teach the players a little about mathematics, accounting, weights and measures, and correspondence.<sup>16</sup> Eighteenth-century society examined the game of business intently and found law enough in the game—just as mathematicians had

<sup>15</sup> Ashton, *History of English Lotteries*, pp. 88, 178, 200, 208.

<sup>16</sup> Fritz Redlich, "Academic Education for Business," in his *Steeped in Two Cultures*, New York and Evanston, 1971, pp. 199-212.

found laws of probability—to make rules and prepare courses for business success.<sup>17</sup>

If business was a game, then by the nineteenth century games had become a business. Between 1650 and 1830 people saw the creation of the first amusement parks (Vauxhall Gardens) in England and France, the rise of the professional pugilist, the organized racing of horses and cockfighting tours.

This period nonetheless witnessed only the barest beginnings of the commercialization of games. More crucial was the considered and systematic use of sports in education. The idea that athletic games might mold the character of children was not, of course, new; after all, the Spartans and Athenians had known what they were about with their gymnasiums, although the Platonists had disliked the exaggerated respect granted athletes. Roman gladiatorial professionalism, Christian monastic schooling and especially post-Gutenberg desklearning with printed books had interrupted earlier regimes of physical education. John Locke and Jean Jacques Rousseau proposed that games and exercise be part of the schooling of children. In 1774 Johann Bernhard Basedow established his Philanthropinum in Dessau to make physical games and gymnastics an equal part of the educational process. At the English public schools were trained England's public servants, and they battered at each other, a little informally, in football and, by 1823, in rugby.

Sir Walter Scott celebrated one football match in 1815, and the last line of his fifth stanza may reveal the stature of competitive games in Western Europe:

<sup>17</sup> John M. Roberts and Brian Sutton-Smith, "Cross Cultural Correlates of Games of Chance," *Behavior Science Notes* 3 (1966), pp. 131-44, would argue that the Western European popularity of games of chance would be indicative of uncertainty in early upbringing, environmental insecurity and anxiety about achievement and sex. I find rather that the increasing acceptance of games of chance is indicative of social and intellectual control of the uncertain. Legislation against lotteries (declared illegal in England in 1826, legal in the United States only in Louisiana by 1878) would seem to run counter to my suggestion that games of chance were increasing in stature. But lotteries were closed down not so much for the essential act of gambling as for the "inevitable" problem of swindling with which they were plagued. The reform campaigns against gambling more often than not emphasized the *absence* of chance (fair deal, fair odds) in professional gaming houses and crooked lotteries. Respect for chance, for open risk, remained. Cf. Ezell, *Fortune's Merry Wheel*, pp. 204-70.

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Then strip, lads, and to it, though sharp be the weather,  
And if by mischance, you should happen to fall,  
There are worse things in life than a tumble on heather,  
And life is itself but a game of football.<sup>18</sup>

Byron described Napoleon as a man “Whose game was empires and whose stakes were thrones, / Whose table earth, whose dice were human bones.”<sup>19</sup> *Agon* and *alea*, competition and chance, seem at this point to have each an aura of nobility; for both poets, life itself has the structure of a game.

Games of chance and of contest had become more paradigmatic of life and businesspersons more archetypal of humanity between 1650 and 1830. Again I would argue that the changing perception of time made for the changing times. During these years, the pendulum clock and the spiralwound springdriven watch had been perfected by Huyghens; Hooke, Newton and Fatio had labored over elegant pendulum clocks and jewelled watches with reduced friction and increased accuracy.<sup>20</sup> John Harrison had engineered two masterpieces of clockmanship to gain the British Admiralty’s grudging prize for a marine chronometer that would at long last allow ships at sea to ascertain precisely their longitude. And businessmen with pocket watches that ticked the seconds began to manage factories.

E. P. Thompson has shown that the change from task-orientation to time-orientation was a fundamental part of the early industrial revolution.<sup>21</sup> As workers began to labor for hourly wages, they grew sensitive to clocktime, and they were forced to work each day not until they were done with a task but until their time was up. As the producers of timepieces exploited new processing techniques, workers as well as their

<sup>18</sup> “Song on the Lifting of the Banner of the House of Buccleuch, at a great foot-ball match on Carterhaugh,” *Poetical Works* (6 vols.) Paris, 1838, Vol. VI, pp. 335-36.

<sup>19</sup> “The Age of Bronze,” in *Works*, ed. T. Moore (17 vols.), London, 1833, vol. XIV, p. 267.

<sup>20</sup> L. Defossez, *Les savants du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle et la mesure du temps*, Lausanne, 1946.

<sup>21</sup> “Time, Work-Discipline and Industrial Capitalism,” *Past and Present* 38 (1967), pp. 56-97. See also Sebastian de Grazia, *Of Time, Work, and Leisure*, Garden City, 1962, pp. 181-95; J. C. Crowley, *This Sheba, Self: The Conceptualization of Economic Life in Eighteenth-Century America*, Baltimore and London, 1974.

foremen could afford the cheaper watches, and workers began to pay as much attention to clocktime as their employers—in order to defend their lunch break, their quitting time, the duration of their job. In the factories, the person as well as the clock had become a timekeeper; the word itself, “timekeeper,” in the seventeenth century referring only to clocks, referred also to a human occupation by the nineteenth century.

Businesspersons—manufacturers, merchants, wholesalers—seemed to control time and to have subdued chance. Like the economist Charles Babbage’s calculating machine, they saved money by saving time. Saint-Simon and then Engels and Marx would point out the changed relationship between labor and time. They observed that the Church had lost the power (and right) to define work. The bourgeoisie, the victors of the French Revolution, laid claim to a moral supremacy which derived from their ability to enforce their definition of work.

Engels and Marx spent comparatively few words on the analysis of leisure. Yet as the Church lost control of time and timekeeping, it also lost control of leisure and had restricted power to pass moral sentence upon games. By the late nineteenth century, the businessperson ruled the province of leisure. Business interests took over English football and American baseball. Voluntary associations of hobbyists and sportsmen arose first in the 1840s and spawned journals, conventions, standardized products for collections or competitions. In the United States before the Civil War, theater had been invaded by promoters, booking agents, scalpers. In the decades after the Civil War, leisure time activities were increasingly consumer activities: music-playing was affected quickly by the choices of music publishers, booking firms dominated theaters and exploited the star system, circuses were big businesses, Coney Island appeared as a commercial recreation area, and six-day bicycle races jacked up enthusiasm for the safety two-wheeler. By 1925 American football, basketball and hockey had also been professionalized, and motion pictures were as heavily controlled by business as vaudeville.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Arthur H. Cole, with Dorothy Lubin, “Perspectives on Leisure-Time Business,” *Explorations in Entrepreneurial History*, 2nd ser., 1, 3, supp. (1964), pp. 1-38; John R. Betts, “The Technological Revolution and the Rise of Sport,

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While businesses expanded and combined in fascinating and often extra-legal ways, language followed suit with a host of new combining terms for the word “business.” The business card was presented by 1840. Men wore business suits by 1870, failing entrepreneurs called upon business doctors by 1910. People who were serious were said “to mean business,” and everyone knew from childhood experience what the “business end” of a tack was. Similarly, “time” was influenced by the business world, for now it was more often quantified, measured, given substance. By 1812 one could “call time” in boxing, and this phrase had direct association with finishing work. The stopwatch, which in effect called time, was known first as a “timewatch,” as if one were accustomed to time as a series of interrupted events. Phrases which Americans now take for granted came into common parlance: working against time, being on time, being out of time, being a time-saver. Going to prison, significantly, was “to do time.” About 1877 appeared that most curious word—and influential device—the timeclock. The “time-card” appeared soon after, and with that men and women began their workdays by “clocking in.” Time had become the major boundary in life, and leisure was geared to the clock, to spare time, to time off. Etiquette prescribed exact minutes for arrival and departure on social occasions. Games often had time limits, and what was play was less careless of time.<sup>23</sup>

Business was an eminently playable game. As the businessperson began to tame chance through statistics, education, chronotechnics and advertising, the business profession gained in social and moral stature. When the game of business rid itself of dangerous chance while keeping to itself an element of skillful daring, people viewed business as more sport than gamble, as *agon* rather than *alea*.

Though there were naysayers in the 1800s who decried bus-

1850-1900,” *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 40 (1953), pp. 231-56; Redlich, “Leisure-Time Activities,” *Steeped in Two Cultures*, pp. 279-304; Henry Chafetz, *Play the Devil: A History of Gambling in the United States from 1492 to 1955*, New York, 1960, pp. 179-387.

<sup>23</sup> *A Dictionary of American English on Historical Principles*, eds. Craigie and Hulbert (4 vols.), Chicago, 1944, vol. I, 367-68 and vol. IV, pp. 2323-25; *O.E.D.*, XI, pp. 37-43.

iness, particularly big business and trusts; though there were muckrakers and suffragettes who spoke against the interests of business; though there were anarchists and communists who stormed the bourgeois barricades; though there were union organizers who found business and business leaders inhuman; though there were, in short, men and women who did not and would never share the beliefs of Prof. George R. Collins, there also the millions who knew the 135 novellettes of Horatio Alger.

In 1924 the same millions (or at least hundred thousands) were introduced to *The Man Nobody Knows*, which was the American non-fiction bestseller two years later. Bruce Barton, an advertising man, had made the "Discovery of the Real Jesus." Using an epigraph from Luke 2.49, ("Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?") Barton revealed that Jesus was an outdoor man, a sociable man, a superior advertising man, an inimitable executive, and "The Founder of Modern Business," who "picked up twelve men from the bottom ranks of business and forged them into an organization that conquered the world." Jesus "thought of his life as *business*," for he stressed service, "the spirit of modern business." Devotion to work was religious devotion: "Great progress will be made when we rid ourselves of the idea that there is a difference between *work* and *religious work*," for "all business is his Father's business. All work is worship; all useful service prayer."<sup>24</sup>

Here I am back with Prof. Collins and business as "humanity's chiefest task." If it is difficult to accept fully the popularity of Barton's book, perhaps a glance at an even more popular author will put both Collins and Barton in perspective. Collins himself quotes Elbert Hubbard, whose *A Message to Garcia* (1899) is among the top fifty all-time American best-sellers.

Between 1900 and 1930 Elbert Hubbard had designed a

<sup>24</sup> *The Man Nobody Knows*, Indianapolis, 1924, preface, pp. 162-63, 179-80. Cf. James W. Prothro, *The Dollar Decade: Business Ideas in the 1920's*, Baton Rouge, 1959; Frederick L. Allen, *Only Yesterday: An Informal History of the 1920's*, New York, 1959, pp. 147-50; Thomas S. Hines, "Echoes from 'Zenith': Reactions of American Businessmen to *Babbitt*," *Business History Review* 41 (1967), pp. 123-40.

complete equivalence between science, business, and moral systems. The businessperson was truly the redeemer of society. Wrote Hubbard, "The Science of Economics, of Business, is the chief concern of humanity." "Business," he wrote, "is the science of human service," and "That is sacred which serves." The conclusion? "The world can be redeemed only through business."<sup>25</sup>

Business is the most serious of matters. How then could Hubbard also write, "Business is a game, and we are all in it." He meant, I suspect, three things. He meant, in the nineteenth century idiom, that life is a game. He meant, as C. E. M. Joad wrote in 1928, "Business to the American is life's great adventure; it is sport, work, pleasure, beauty and patriotism rolled into one."<sup>26</sup> He meant finally that business controlled our time.

People in the 1920s and 1930s were worried about that. Some, grounded in Thorstein Veblen, wondered about the social apparatus which confined leisure in unhappy ways. Others intimated that Americans had no healthy sense of leisure. As early as 1926 a book was written about *The Threat of Leisure*, and during the Thirties studies were made of enforced leisure, of the social and psychological impact of the eight-hour working day, of the five-day workweek. "Time off" was a major dilemma in a society whose business advertisements concentrated on new time-saving products—smoothly operating washing machines and vacuums, Gerber's baby food, zippers. Leisure was dangerous when time was measured in terms of work.

In this civilization of time and *agon*, games and play had become a serious matter to educators, child psychologists, athletes. Arthus Sherwood, writer on etiquette, was pleased to find that "women not only play this ancient game [golf] with due seriousness, but actually with a grim and terrible earnestness."<sup>27</sup> Jesse F. Williams and William L. Hughes wrote in their book, *Athletics in Education* (1930) that "The emotions set free during contests are . . . the very source of devotion to high causes and

<sup>25</sup> Elbert Hubbard, II, ed., *The Philosophy of Elbert Hubbard*, New York, 1930, pp. 29, 30, 36, and, below, 34.

<sup>26</sup> *Diogenes; or the Future of Leisure*, London, 1928, p. 65, cited in Foster Rhea Dulles, *America Learns to Play*, New York and London, 1940, p. 365.

<sup>27</sup> *Manners and Social Usages*, New York and London, 1918, p. 300.

worthwhile ends. These are the moments for the fixing of values; the metal is ready to be poured, the iron is hot." Contemporary child psychologists like Arnold Gesell pushed the nursery school movement toward a use of play that would shape character positively. Games made sense to people because games—and in particular, contests, *agon*—made people.<sup>28</sup>

Like games, the business economy, according to Prof. George R. Collins, shaped people. "In a business economy," he wrote, "society is sane enough and acute enough as to organize the self-regarding tendencies of man as to produce results that probably could not be bettered very much at any given moment if men suddenly became what biologically they are not likely to become, completely unselfish and entirely altruistic."<sup>29</sup>

This radically positive appreciation of business and of game had its roots in the emerging chronotechnics. Between 1830 and 1930 time had been broken into smaller measurable units: the electric clock assisted astronomers tracking minute changes in the heavens, and the split-second stopwatch was developed for train conductors and then transferred to sporting events. The stopwatch, the art of photography, Marey's photographic gun, and the motion picture camera could freeze actions in consistently small, even intervals. Adapted by Frederick W. Taylor and by Frank and Lillian Gilbreth for their time-and-motion studies, the new equipment made the worker extremely aware of time in bits and pieces. Under the principles of Scientific Management, the worker's job was dissected component by component in terms of distinct movements, then reconstructed for ease and efficiency. Work was less a function of human labor than it was a function of time. In the schools, the economy of

<sup>28</sup> See Dom Cavallo, "Social Reform and the Movement to Organize Children's Play During the Progressive Era," *History of Childhood Quarterly* 3 (1976), pp. 509-22; Bernard Mergen, "The Discovery of Children's Play," *American Quarterly* 27 (1975), pp. 399-420.

<sup>29</sup> *Outline of Business*, vol. I, p. 22.

<sup>30</sup> See especially Siegfried Giedion, *Mechanization Takes Command*, New York, 1948; Daniel Nelson, "Scientific Management, Systematic Management, and Labor, 1880-1915," *Business History Review* 48 (1974), pp. 479-500; Samuel Haber, *Efficiency and Uplift: Scientific Management in the Progressive Era, 1890-1920*, Chicago, 1964; Edna Yost, *Frank and Lillian Gilbreth*, New Brunswick, N.J., 1949; Joseph Gore, "The Economy of Time Movement in Elementary Education," *Paedagogica Historica* 7 (1967), pp. 455-77.



time movement advocated curriculum revision upon the basis of ideas of efficiency borrowed from industry. In the factory, the improved assembly line sent the product through time; the worker had to keep up with the product. The mass production of inexpensive shelf clocks, alarm clocks, and cheap watches after 1840 brought the workers to the factory on standard time, and the workers' pay depended upon their timecards.

Segmented time invaded the leisure world. Movie serials had the same quality for the spectator as the life of the worker in the workplace; life in the movie theater was a timebound, serial progression. Athletes in the renovated Olympic Games (1896) competed against the clock as horses had first done in the 1840s. The time element became crucial in basketball and football. So much had sport and gymnastics been used to regiment life that in the 1920s physical educators demanded a place for free, spontaneous, unclocked play.

The business world had reduced games of chance to contests of measurement. Instead of gambling with production, the manager timed each part of the factory process; instead of gambling with sales the company commissioned marketing researchers and poll-takers. Bruce Barton was cocky enough to write an article in 1927 entitled, "Do You Believe in Luck? I Do."<sup>32</sup> Of course, there were laws to luck, and "breaks tend to happen to those who are prepared to receive them." So the gamester-businessperson reached an apotheosis: there is one game, life, and the gamester who works at the game wins all, that is, salvation. The same year that Prof. Collins wrote his outline of business history, James Truslow Adams wrote his study, *Our*

<sup>31</sup> C. W. Hackensmith, *History of Physical Education*, New York, 1966, pp. 379-463; Paul Klapper, *Contemporary Education*, New York and London, 1929, pp. 83-97; G. T. W. Patrick, "The Psychology of Play," *Pedagogical Seminary* 21 (1914), pp. 469-84. Historians have noted the ties between regimented sport (gymnastic) drill between 1880 and 1930 and emphasis upon conformity in social as well as physical rhythms; educators in the 1920's argued that drill exercise was incompatible with the American democratic spirit. Cf. Eugen Weber, "Gymnastics and Sports in Fin-de-Siècle France: Opium of the Classes?" *American Historical Review* 76 (1971), pp. 70-98; George L. Mosse, *Germans and Jews*, New York, 1970, pp. 102-15.

<sup>32</sup> *American Magazine* 105 (April 1928), cited in Prothro, *Dollar Decade*, p. 234.

*Business Civilization*, claiming that “the business men’s standard of values has become that of our civilization at large.”<sup>33</sup>

Since the Depression, despite a renewed appreciation for the paradigm of gaming, social confidence in the businessperson has weakened. We have game theory in literary criticism, mathematics, economics, communications, psychology and politics, but respect for the gamester-businessperson has not increased. Indeed, our chief gamesters have been accusing each other of shuffling around in grey flannel suits, of having lost their daring. What has happened?

In one respect, in all the *agon* we have lost play and wish now to reclaim it. Lynn White, Jr., suggests that we have neglected St. Francis, who found the world to be a partner in play, not an opponent in a game.<sup>34</sup> In another respect we have become suspicious of the fairness of the game. Hard-sell advertising and the devious use of psychological stratagems by businesses after the First World War have given the businessperson what seems to be an unfair advantage.<sup>35</sup> In a third respect, we have come to believe that competition and the conquest of chance is not a redemptive activity. Innovation—play as *paidia*, play untempered by time or external goal—seems too frequently to be missing when one substitutes *agon* for *alea*.

Beginning in the sixties, a few American corporations wondered whether their executives could find themselves by opting out of the game. They inaugurated executive sabbaticals, some intended explicitly for engagement with areas of social welfare or of the humanities. Call this what you will—a crisis of confidence, a gambler’s panic, a case of nerves, or humanism—a few in the business world began to question Collins’ dictum that business was “humanity’s chiefest task.”

I would once more relate the status of games and of businesspeople to changing perceptions of time. We are presently so adept at measuring time that on a profound level our scientists

<sup>33</sup> *Our Business Civilization*, New York, 1929, p. 15.

<sup>34</sup> White, “Historical Origins of Our Ecologic Crisis.” Cf. Robert E. Neale, *In Praise of Play: Toward a Psychology of Religion*, New York, 1969.

<sup>35</sup> Merle Curti, “The Changing Concept of ‘Human Nature’ in the Literature of American Advertising,” *Business History Review* 41 (1967), pp. 335-57; Stuart Ewen, *Captains of Consciousness*, New York, 1976.

do not know what to do with it—if there are elementary particles whose “lifetimes” are less than  $10^{-23}$  second, if on our delicate measuring devices we distort our evidence merely in the act of measurement. Time is no longer clear-cut.

In daily life, our electric watches and digital clocks are so accurate and reliable that time in terms of numbers is more authoritative than our sense of the passage of time. Our household technology—microwave ovens, nightlights, automatic water sprinklers—instructs us in a mechanical sense of time divorced from our bodies. In reaction, seeking a way back to *alea* and thence to free play, we in the West have begun to explore with greater interest and respect extrasensory perception, predictions, recall of earlier lives, transmigration, the slowing of time through meditation. We are willing to remove strict sequential dividers from our experience of time.

It may come as no surprise that businesspeople have recently been calling for the return of the renaissance man who recognized no boundaries, whose entire life was supposedly synthesis. But *Industry Week*, in its 1970 enthusiasm, had still the unrepentant spirit of Barton, Hubbard and Collins: “Like the Renaissance Man, the modern manager is the supreme doer. He’s got to be a maker, a creator, a builder . . . . Renaissance Man may be back . . . in the board room. One final question: Is it too late?”<sup>36</sup> Too late for what? For redemption?

Surely the solution is too simple, although the question may not be premature. What are we to do now that the game of business has become so overwhelmingly serious that some environmentalists foresee an early end to that human time which T. S. Eliot—a businessman—had Prufrock measure out in coffee spoons?

First we might refuse to accept the total identification of business and civilization. On the one hand, this will spare the businessworld a search for a role as redeemer. On the other hand, ecologists have claimed that it is precisely this refusal to identify

<sup>36</sup> “Renaissance man ... Back in a business suit,” *Industry Week* 166 (May 4, 1970), pp. 30-36; James B. Briscoe and Richard Gorton, “Wanted: Renaissance Manager,” *S. A. M. Advanced Management Journal* 38 (July 1973), pp. 49-56.

business concerns with sociocultural concerns that has led to the present environmental crises.

Second, we might discard our usual game models so that we are not handicapped by notions of chance or competition. Roger Caillois discusses a second pair of game forms—vertigo and mimicry—in which action is personal rather than social, or transformative rather than transcendent. It may be that our customary paradigms for behavior determine our insistence upon redemption as victory.

Third, we might remove the time clause from our definitions of work and leisure. The social compunction and technological advances which have forced us to define the nature of our activity in terms of time need no longer be the determinants of definition. The multiplying number of volumes on the sociology of sport, of play, and of leisure appears to be a hint that we are restless with the categories by which past society described human activity. Although happy businesspeople have, like others, insisted that for them work was play and relaxation, it seems that only those with some power to determine the scope of their work find that it is play. What of those whose sense of wasted time undermines all possibility of play?

In Samuel Beckett's play, *Endgame* (1957), it is either time for the painkiller or it is not. Near the end Clov tells Hamm that there is no more painkiller. No way to tell the time. After some bickering and reminiscence, Clov says,

Clov: Let's stop playing!  
Hamm: Never! (Pause) Put me in my coffin.  
Clov: There are no more coffins.  
Hamm: Then let it end!

But the play itself does not end, here or on its final page. Clov and Hamm both have good cases. For us as for them, it would be as dangerous to start the burial as it would be to stop the playing.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>37</sup> A fully annotated version of this essay will appear in *Dimensions* (Bureau of Economic and Business Research, University of Florida).