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## Reflections

# The Rise of the “Gamers”

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If one is to profoundly understand a society and era, as the sociologist Max Weber superbly taught, one must grasp the character and spirit of their dominant class.<sup>1</sup> A great deal that is central to American society and history since 1965 has been shaped by its new upper class of *gamers*.<sup>2</sup> I mean by that term a gender-neutral synonym of *gamesmen*: consummate competitors drawn toward gaming, many of whom cut corners. The gamers’ character-based ways of perceiving, thinking, feeling, and acting have been stamped all over the society and history of our time.<sup>3</sup> The most successful executives and professionals dominating all institutions have been gamers during the past half-century. The proto-gamers of the 1960s and the full-fledged ones of the 1970s largely eclipsed the WASP upper class and the paradigm it bore, although that leading class and paradigm continued to moderate the gamers until the early 1990s. As Heraclitus says, “Character . . . is destiny” ([ca. 500 BCE] 1948, 32). The central

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1. Weber’s work presented exemplary analysis of the paradigmatic roles of the middle class of early capitalism, the Mandarins of ancient China, the Brahmins of ancient India, and the warrior chieftains of early Islam. See, for example, Weber [1905] 1958 and [1922] 1964.

2. The original inspiration and notion of the gamers come from psychiatrist Michael Maccoby’s outstanding book *The Gamesman* (1976), but I have long worked with the concept, further developed it, and changed the term. See my treatment in Claassen 2007, 32–34. Many others have used the term as well, but mostly in passing.

3. The most powerful way to define the social classes is on the basis of their members’ character or personality. It is more common to define them in terms of income, wealth, occupation, education, power, and prestige, but those are relatively superficial features and tend to follow the attributes of character up or down.

*The Independent Review*, v. 25, n. 1, Summer 2020, ISSN 1086–1653, Copyright © 2020, pp. 105–116.

role played by the gamers in the United States has been among the less-understood aspects of all that has occurred since 1965.

## The Character of the Gamers

Essential to the gamers is that they possess not only the basic rational self-consciousness and self-control of the middle class but a higher-level version of the same, with which they control the elementary versions. Instead of feeling bound by rules, they flexibly use, modify, or discard them to further their individual goals (Claassen 2007, 32). Unlike the merchants and shopkeepers of early modernity who held inner rules rigidly or the white-collar workers<sup>4</sup> of the national era (1885–1965) who held them while also attuned to others' expectations, the gamers are self-directed but accept no binding rules. By “higher” self-control, I mean self-determination that is one layer more reflexive or aware in certain respects, not that is more worthy or more advanced, all things considered. The gamers' stock-in-trade is provisional, pragmatic policies that further their interests. Utterly immersed in and adapted to markets of all kinds, they analyze everything and hold everything up for grabs. Committed to no particulars, they cannot easily be flustered, but nor are they grounded or anchored.

The gamers arose early in the global era as higher-level, rational self-understanding and self-management became dominant in the character of many of the most able, especially among those entering business and the professions. They began habitually employing their higher self-control to game their careers and fast-forward their ascents. Utterly directed toward excelling at the game, they are highly adept at all things connected with their personal advancement. Systematically pursuing their interests as they understand them, the gamers deftly adjust and fine-tune their performance at school and at work, discipline and position themselves to get into great colleges and universities, maneuver their way into valuable internships, and garner outstanding early jobs. Intensely competitive and savvy, gamers think and talk incessantly about job and investment opportunities throughout their careers. The dexterity of their educational and career moves is one of the keys to their success.

Another key is that they hone their job performances to virtuosity. Highly capable and building upon impressive education and early experience, they specialize, work extremely long hours, and develop formidable repertoires of knowledge and skill. In time they become supremely proficient at what they do. Gamer executives adroitly vary management theories, marketing strategies, and corporate cultures. Those in marketing, advertising, and communications agilely and cleverly use media and public relations to their advantage. Gamer tax attorneys and accountants ingeniously interpret subtleties of law and accounting to solve clients' problems and to build their practices. Drawing upon sophisticated understanding and remarkable entrepreneurialism, gamer

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4. “Organization men” as William H. Whyte, Jr. (1957) termed them, “company men” as Michael Maccoby (1976) did.

executives evince a creative adaptability far greater and more astonishing than any the middle class has known. There have always been unusual business opportunities in liberal societies, but never before have such skills been available with which to exploit them.

Gamer drive pushes forward much more intensely and unremittingly than did middle-class discipline in its heyday, leading to far greater personal income and wealth. So single-mindedly rational and instrumentalist are the gamers that everything largely becomes a matter of economics to them. As they subject themselves to a higher inner despotism, even their manner of speech, with its long and short bursts of rapid, mechanical utterance, betrays the severity of their striving. Management is no longer the low-key, jovial, secure experience it often was at midcentury.

Max Weber ([1905] 1958) judged middle-class discipline as primed by the Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism to have been the engine of the West's unparalleled development during the centuries of early capitalism. In its economic aspects, the character of the gamers has been the advanced engine of development helping drive the much more rapid economic growth of the entire world since 1965, but in its noneconomic aspects that character poses major problems, even for growth.

Whether gamers be venture capitalists, politicians, scholars, or intelligence analysts, the inquiry toward which they lean is technical, reflecting their intense instrumentalism. The gamers may know a great deal, but they tend to know things narrowly and calculatedly rather than comprehensively and intuitively. Their penchant for losing themselves in technical detail is partly responsible for the great American intelligence fiascos of recent decades, such as failing to see the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, coming. A prime example of gamer one-sidedness is the character of Mark Zuckerberg as fictionally portrayed in the film *The Social Network* (David Fincher, 2010). Mitt Romney's brilliance and his uneven sensitivity are quintessentially gamer. However gifted, knowledgeable, and proficient the gamers, their one-sidedness renders them particularly vulnerable to being outflanked by the complexity and elusiveness of human nature.

Realist through and through, the gamers tend to be interested in comparatively little in and of itself—they want results. In their driving ambition, they cashiered the well-intentioned but often loopy idealism of the 1960s for striving. Avoiding and even disparaging the ideal, the gamers appreciate higher education overwhelmingly for the doors it opens and the fungible adaptability, credentials, and connections it bestows, not for its humanistic value. Like most human beings, the gamers project their own mentality onto the actions of others, as in the way they impute everywhere the cynical realism that pervades their own thinking.

More individualistic in many respects than the early bourgeois and vastly more so than the white-collar workers of the 1950s, the gamers take to competition with a relish. They work horrendous hours as latter-day, secular monks, yet the gods to which they are dedicated are no longer spiritual or even societal, but rather their own power, wealth, and prestige. An essential trait of the gamers is one-sided striving for self.

Where peasants wanted only enough for their modest, customary lives, the early middle class wanted a standard of living ample for economic security, and the other-directed organization men and women of the mid-twentieth century wanted indefinitely more for comfort and keeping up with the Joneses, the gamers “want all”—it must have been in the 1980s that I saw a Marin County Porsche with that exquisite California license plate. If the middle class of the 1950s was consumerist, the gamers are hyperconsumerist. Gamers in politics or culture may not be quite as materialistic as those in business or finance, but they undertake the same gaming toward goals of high office, prestigious professorships, or renown as artists, nor are they averse to making a great deal of money along the way.

Overloaded by the outsize demands they place upon themselves and invite employers to place upon them, the gamers multitask through large parts of their days, nervously checking their hand-held devices for instant messages, emails, and trade signals from investment apps or services, while talking on the phone or listening to what someone is telling them from the office doorway. Their eyes intermittently glaze over in conversation through the day as their attention skips around among their diverse undertakings. Burdened and cluttered, their minds are easily distracted in personal interaction. Their narrow focus on instrumental goals and their multichannel juggling of tasks displace attention to and understanding of the big picture, the larger meaning of what they are witnessing and doing.

The stress from the gamers’ virtuoso participation in extremely complex, rapidly changing, high-stakes competition is so great that they need heavy R and R when off the job. During time off, they tend at first to manifest harried weariness from their chronic overwork, evoking the exhaustion of the dog-tired peasants of traditional agrarian societies or of the exceedingly hard-working farmers of early liberal societies. Leisure for the well educated and prosperous once meant time for reflection, leadership, and creative activity. The gamers’ long hours of hyperrationality and discipline today are often followed by depleted, low-energy “vegging” in complete relaxation, such as blank consumption of popular culture.

When their energy revives—if they do not return at once to work—they tend to intensely pursue often obscure hobbies, amusements, or challenges, skillfully gaming such activities as wine connoisseurship, exotic travel, rock climbing, and the collecting of rarities, not infrequently to the point of distinction. For example, while unwinding from a furious publishing pace, the gamer professor of history might over many years put in place during off hours a perfect Renaissance Tuscan garden in a spacious yard. Or, as David Brooks says, gamers may “turn nature into an achievement course, a series of ordeals and obstacles they can conquer.” In their compulsive striving, “they want to be a ‘serious’ walker, tennis player, skier or whatever it is that they are pursuing in leisure” (2000, 209, 212).

The new high bar set by the gamers has been responsible for much of the increased inequality in first-world countries over the past few decades. People have been competing with economic prodigies, some of whom have been on the fast track to success since they were three-year-olds in select, accelerated preschools. Just as the disciplined

Puritans and Jews of the seventeenth-century Netherlands, England, Scotland, Switzerland, and American colonies pulled ahead with their capitalist-honed middle-class characters, the gamers have now been doing so with their greatly more competitive, market-honed characters.

The gamer upper class comprises approximately the top 5 percent of the population in the most-developed countries, smaller percentages in less-developed ones. The scale of this upper class is determined by the number whose character is dominated by individualistic higher self-management. Its self-control is ascendant not only in the gamers but also present to a degree in the executive and professional upper middle class, comprising the next 5 percent of the population, and to a lesser degree in the broad upper middle class of better-prepared college graduates, comprising the second to top decile. Gamer virtuosity tapers off into mere competence in the upper middle class, which is a hybrid, partly gamer and partly middle class.

### Gaming Morality

At its most developed, the universalism or orientation toward the whole that was relatively widespread during the first two-thirds of the twentieth century in the United States was as self-aware as the perspective of the gamers, only it was collectively rather than individually directed. It may have had lacunae with respect to difference, but whether religious or secular that universalism was oriented toward balancing and harmonizing all sides of society and life. Then came a turning point around 1970, when those on business and professional tracks began reacting against both the low-key other-directedness and geniality of the 1950s and the naive idealism and slack aimlessness of the 1960s. In their hubris, they jettisoned concern with society and instead spurred themselves on for career advance. Moral collectivist service began ebbing, and amoral individualist maneuvering began flowing. In school and during their early careers, many of the most able, best educated, and most ambitious began coming to the notion that they would neither drop out of nor reform their country but would game it for their own purposes. In the language of the time, they would “beat the system.” When gamers, whether in business, law, politics, or civil service, notice something amiss in the social or regulatory policy of their country, for instance, they do not think, “How can I bring this condition to the attention of public officials to correct it for us all?” but rather “How can I profit from it?”<sup>5</sup>

Gamers pride themselves above all on the smarts invested in their complex, individualistic high-level reflexivity; but they are in denial regarding the high-level collective reflexivity, the thoughtfulness, ingenuity, and care with which large numbers of their national-era predecessors watched over and nurtured their society.<sup>6</sup> It does not fit

5. Michael Lewis (2011, 20) has also noticed this.

6. See, for example, Baltzell 1964.

with the gamers' cynical assumptions. Their attainment of rarified personal awareness has come at the expense of a radical withdrawal of attention from their society, civilization, and aspects of the human not of use to them in their marches to success. Their higher reflexivity has represented a massive diversion of attention and concern from society as a whole to their quest for individual power and wealth.

With well-rounded moral codes, the professionals and specialists of sixty years ago were "experts." In addition to denoting mastery of their field, that designation connoted reliability in making their knowledge or its fruits available to others. This expectation had ethical content and was wedded to a norm of service. Gamer professionals and specialists have instead been *virtuosi*. They have routinely mastered what they have done to an even higher level, but their reliability has been open to question: in general they cannot be counted upon to act in the interest of others, and for this reason they tend to be treated guardedly. There are now no experts in the old sense—everyone has to look out for themselves. This reality cuts both ways: patients or clients have to be suspicious that medical or investment advice they receive may merely be making its sources money or protecting them legally, while the professionals have to be suspicious that patients or clients may just be setting them up for a lawsuit or leading them on for free service.

Just as the gamers pay little attention to rules of other sorts, they pay little to moral rules. They do what advances their aims and what they want to do. As George Friedman says, our elites appear "brutally indifferent to any interests outside their own" (2016). Their families often excepted, the gamers tend to believe in nothing beyond themselves. Charles Murray refers to them as a "hollow elite" because they have "no code of values that they feel they are living up to and that they think are important" (2017).

Most of the stewardship and trust gone, the gamers' morality, such as it is, has tended toward radical relativism. Hillary Clinton's repeated statements over the years to the effect that reality or the truth is what people socially construct it to be, breathtakingly reflect gamer skepticism and cynicism. So tacitly does Senator Mike Lee's whiplash-inducing U-turn on Google's exercise of monopoly power. For the most part, the gamers do not think in terms of personal right and wrong or virtue and vice. When self-conscious about morality, they tend to avoid moral judgment or absolutes altogether. In the spirit of the times, the gamers have achieved considerable tolerance in many areas, but their otherwise habitual skepticism and even tolerance rarely extend to politics, where they easily slip into divisive, partisan opinion.

Except for a rare few, the gamers have not been *leaders*, which is to say moral and wise human beings whose high positions and formidable capabilities are directed toward the well-being of society and their fellow citizens.<sup>7</sup> Top institutions of higher education have liked to say during the past half-century that they were grooming leaders, but they have not been, not in the true sense; they have been batch-producing skilled but

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7. Regarding leadership and the gamers' incapacity to lead, see William Deresiewicz's (2010) outstanding lecture to the West Point plebes.

uncaring strivers. As the anonymous California congressman says in his recent tell-all book, “Rules don’t apply to us, just [to] the rubes we represent” (Congressman X 2016, 42). What gamers give to and receive from friends and acquaintances in the nation’s capital, as Mark Leibovich says, is the infamous “D.C. scalp stare,” in which they constantly look over each other’s heads at parties and public events, hoping to spot more powerful and prestigious connections toward whom to quickly move (2013, 237). The ascendance of gaming has brought a dearth of leadership.

At first overwhelmingly American, the gamer phenomenon has spread through much of the world. Although the gamers have been somewhat less prominent in continental Europe than in the United States, they have been as prominent in Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan, and South Korea as in this country. Gamers have also dominated the most-developed authoritarian societies for the past two to four decades, including China, Russia, and to a lesser extent Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the Persian Gulf states. Gamers assumed control of China when Deng Xiaoping took over the Communist Party and established his regime in 1978. The party’s brazen cynicism in simultaneously selling Maoism and Maseratis by the early twenty-first century is vintage gamer. So was Xi Jinping’s announcement of major troop cuts immediately before the onset of a large military parade in 2015.

### Why the Gamers?

A key source of the rise of the gamers, as of much else since 1965, has been the fast-moving rough and tumble of wide-open global capitalism. The world economic markets have been so horrendously competitive that under their pressure corporate business has demanded and elicited ever-higher levels of performance from top executives. The most sought-after employers of the previous era did not single-mindedly demand such adeptness; they were looking as much for prospective employees’ integrity or character in the traditional sense. Gaming arose as growing numbers of the most talented, under strong new pressures and inducements, became so good at what they were doing and began so intensely striving to do still better that they attained higher individualistic self-control. As gamer executives responded with supreme effort and subtle insight, they rose in time to virtuosity in their work.

In a similar way, when top law graduates became associates in large firms having the highest expectations and potential rewards, frequently with the same corporations as clients, their firms also demanded and drew forth sustained diligence and, in time, higher self-control and virtuosity. Being professionally engaged with the leading consulting and accounting firms where the stakes were no less high also promoted the gamers’ higher self-control and virtuoso performance. The stakes in politics, though different, were every bit as high. As I put it in my earlier book, *An Inquiry into the Philosophical Foundations of the Human Sciences*, “In addition to outstanding ability, preparation, and effort, only with higher reflexivity and nimbleness do [young people]

flourish in investment banks, consulting firms, or the halls of Congress” (Claassen 2007, 32–33). The gamers have been the latest in the series of fundamental character types that for the most part have emerged historically from business, including simple ego-dominant hagglers, rule-bound bourgeois, and other-directed, early- and mid-twentieth-century white-collar employees.

Gaming was given additional impetus in the United States by sharp competition for promising employment during the 1970s as the baby boomers moved into tight job markets while global capitalism was undermining the national protections that had sustained the comparatively forgiving U.S. business environment of the postwar years. It was becoming more difficult to retain a sense of unhurried ease or societal stewardship amid the increasing competition.

Another major contribution to the advent of the gamers was that students of modest origin were given new opportunity by the opening of the best schools and colleges during the 1950s and 1960s to those young people objectively performing at high levels. An idea of what it meant for merit to be defined objectively may be gained by noting the ninety-five-point increase in Harvard’s verbal SAT scores between 1950 and 1960 (Murray 2012, 55). Other top universities and colleges also witnessed sharp gains in test scores. Part of what enabled the ascent of the gamers was that the social democratization of top schools delivered unprecedented numbers of extremely bright, exceptionally well-educated young people, “injecting a massive jolt of human capital into the American economy,” as Murray puts it (2012, 118). The qualitative leaps in performance brought by the gamers would never have been possible without this democratic talent pool. As ambitious, capable students were increasingly allowed entrance into elite colleges and universities irrespective of class, culture, and group origins, the clubby WASP establishment with its genteel manners and traditions of moderation and service was largely displaced. This opening helped change the American upper class from one of inherited and taken-for-granted privilege and responsibility to one of talent and credentials willing to give all for personal success.

The growing sophistication of the most selective schools and universities went hand-in-hand with and greatly facilitated the rise of the gamers. Advanced education of budding gamers in mathematics, logic, law, economics, engineering, and other rigorous disciplines strongly channeled their lives into the molds of rationality and instrumentalism. At the best business schools, sophisticated, self-conscious knowledge of management, finance, and corporate culture was conveyed as students were groomed in the subtle teamwork skills that form much of the real payoff of MBA programs. So much of such subtlety had been learned about management, marketing, and finance by the 1970s that rising to the level of performance newly demanded by the corporate world increasingly required both higher reflexivity and professional education of those who would approach its upper ranks. In their internships and early positions, gamers in training subsequently acquired invaluable experience as they applied themselves for long hours to high-level tasks involving real business problems.

Noting the changing circumstances, ambitious parents began gaming their children’s experience and development for admission to and success in elite educational institutions and careers. As fast-track high school and university students gamed their coursework and extracurricular activities with growing proficiency, they learned deft, modulated ways that would increasingly mark their careers and lives.

The gamers became what they are through exposure not only to economic markets and educational opportunities but also through exposure to sociocultural markets. The most sophisticated elements of the uprising in the United States in the 1960s raised themselves to higher self-consciousness and self-control, as had some of the great modernist philosophers and social thinkers upon whom they drew, including Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, and Marcuse. When influential figures of that decade did the same, they negated in all directions from their new redoubt of higher criticism. Carrying on the bohemian alienation of many cultural luminaries of the earlier era, the rebels of the 1960s were still idealist and collectivist, disdainful and taking for granted the economic. The die was cast as many of the rebels’ younger peers attained the same perspective during the early 1970s while at the same time emphatically rejecting the collectivism, idealism, and anticapitalism of the previous decade. But the gamers retained the earlier decade’s radical relativism and more than a little of its proclivity to conflict. At work and in life, they, too, began taking most of their own and others’ assumptions as limited in place and time, no better or worse than any others. Their bohemian legacy contributed to their gaming in sociocultural as in economic arenas, as it also did to their alienation.

The crucial source of the gamers’ withdrawal from leadership and responsibility, however, was their adoption already during the 1960s of the multiculturalism that shaped what they brought into the sociocultural markets. For that doctrine’s attacks upon and smearing of the United States and nearly everything American, Christian, and Western stripped the new upper class of concern for its country, fellow citizens, traditions, and civilization. Multiculturalist alienation left the gamers bereft of a sense of responsibility with which to lead the country or to restrain their private interests and desires on its behalf. As multiculturalists attacked and besmirched the country, its citizens, and Western Civilization, the young of talent increasingly turned their backs upon this society and smugly devoted their abilities and energy to furthering their own interests without regard to others. A wise, respectful, and constructive ideology would have nourished leadership and responsibility in a new upper class. Character is strongly conditioned by whether young people are brought up to respect their country, tradition, and fellow citizens. When they are not, many of them are going to withhold what is due to society and to others.

The separation of the gamers and to a degree the upper middle class from the rest that Murray beautifully sketches in his book *Coming Apart: The State of White America* (2012) was also crucial to the rise of the gamers, for geographical concentration provided the hothouse setting within which they could rapidly develop a distinct sociocultural matrix that fostered gaming. We may happily note that segregation by race has considerably diminished since 1965, but we must also note that segregation by

education and income has sharply increased. The gamers' attainment of critical mass around the centers of the economy, government, media, and higher education has provided them the sociocultural support with which to homogenize and boldly go their own way. Their geographical and sociocultural "coming apart" has been intertwined with their increase in the assortative mating of recent decades that economists have noted. Their stark new differences of character, class, culture, and geography have helped dissolve the gamers' sense of larger community and purpose, as have their hubris, multiculturalism, and obliviousness to the whole.

The gamers' radical one-sidedness and alienation have also been products of the newness of their higher self-control. Their way has been in keeping with Hegel's dictum that those newly aware on a given level tend first to negate difference, with others and within themselves, before turning toward reconciliation. Higher perspectives tend initially to be imperious and negativist because they are compelling and exhilarating (Hegel [1807] 1967, 246–51). It takes time for the rough edges to be worked from unfolding character types, allowing balanced versions of them to come to the fore. When middle-class discipline first emerged on a large scale in the Reformation, it too was severe and one-sided. It began moderating during the Enlightenment and by the early and mid-twentieth century had been worked into the mature form that was impressive in the American and British upper middle and middle classes of the time. Just as the basic self-control of most in the middle class was harsh in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the higher self-control of most gamers has been harsh for the past half century. Under the rapid economic growth and sociocultural turbulence of the time, few have been able to achieve the distance, tranquility, and senses of gratitude and responsibility from which leadership emanates.

The gamers' power in our society has come in large part from the fact that there are so many of them. A 5 percent upper class may sound like a small one, but where most upper classes historically have made up only about 1 percent of their societies, the gamers in the United States number more than 16 million, including dependents, which has contributed greatly to their power and influence. Their immense ability, single-mindedness, and remarkable sociocultural homogeneity following decades of self-segregation have also strengthened their position, drawing most of the upper middle class to their side, for example. The ultimate threat the gamers pose comes equally from their strength and from their acute alienation, their advanced inability to acknowledge the humanity of and recognize themselves in the more than 160 million of their fellow Americans who are middle class.

The gamers may be quite different in manner and style from the brash upper class of the Gilded Age, but the crucial differences are circumstantial, including the degree to which they have cemented themselves into positions of dominance across our institutions and the degree to which they have alienated themselves from the middle class and the society they associate with it. No larger percentage of them may be evil than the percentage of their late nineteenth-century predecessors, but the degree to which they are filled with themselves, the intensity with which their will-to-power asserts itself, the way in which they shrink from the middle class, and above all the lockstep way in which

they dismiss the universal in religion, philosophy, politics, and life pose distinctly greater threats to this society than did the likes of Jay Gould, Henry Frick, and Boss Tweed.

## Gaming as Opposed to Leading

The ascent of the gamers has been beneficial in the productivity flowing from their prodigious preparation and application, but grievous offsetting collateral damage to society has resulted from their indifference toward the effects of their actions upon others and upon society. The very best of the era have overcome gaming and embraced their fellow citizens and the larger society. They have been statesmen and wise counselors, carrying out missions rather than games. Among the most dedicated and exemplary of the era, leaders one and all, have been King Abdullah of Jordan, Tony Blair, Bill Bradley, Willy Brandt, William Bratton, Tom Coburn, the Dalai Lama, Bob Gates, Billy Graham, Gary Hart, John Paul II, Bob Kerrey, Henry Kissinger, Irving Kristol, Heather MacDonald, Nelson Mandela, George Mitchell, Charles Murray, David Petraeus, Colin Powell, Ronald Reagan, Helmut Schmidt, Eric Sevarid, George Shultz, Thomas Sowell, Margaret Thatcher, Paul Volcker, James Woolsey, and Lee Kwan Yew. These men and women may have agreed with each other on little more than that we ought to attempt to overcome oppositions and work together for the common good, but that is all we need. They have brilliantly directed their extraordinary talents in different ways toward the long-term well-being of the whole. Such leaders have been all too few since 1965. On a more modest level, although hardly less important cumulatively, gamers could remain what they are in other respects but balance their stellar careers with moral restraint, community involvement, and great families, and some have done so. Most of them by far, however, have instead been feverishly milling about for personal gain while leaving society adrift. Average citizens will follow leaders, but they will not follow amoral, cynical, and frequently conflictual elites; they will defer to a universalistic upper class but not to an indifferent, manipulative, and self-dealing one.

The metaphor of the game with regard to the pace-setting new upper class of the past half century is apt not only for its focus on their single-minded competitiveness but also for the light it casts upon their ultimate unseriousness. The pure gamers climb more ladders and take more exotic vacations to nowhere. The sixty-, eighty-, and even hundred-hour weeks of so many supremely talented young men and women represent the clear-cutting of old-growth forests. The gamers could contribute so much more if they only cared. All but a few have instead been making Faustian bargains, the devastating consequences of which we will be encountering for a long time.

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