Proprieties and Vagaries
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Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

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Proprieties and Vagaries: A Philosophical Thesis from Science, Horse Racing, Sexual Customs, Religion, and Politics.

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Bridge

"Why, what do you like, if you hate both disputes and whisk?" said (and "with great surprise") David Hume to Horace Walpole in Paris, 1765. In America, 1932, he would leave out the "disputes," increase the surprise, and vastly broaden the circle to whom he might address the question.

All strong things have the defects of their merits,—or owe their strength to the merits of their defects. Of all things in the world the game of bridge is one of the great triumphs of the second of these classes. A gamble which is not a "good" gamble, a test of skill which is not a "good" test of skill, it is yet a skillful gamble which, escaping the repulsions of the sterner gamble and of the sterner test of skill, has held steady place in our civilization for two hundred years. Today, in its most up-to-date form with its essential defects most ingeniously contrived to merits, it makes its professors wealthy, its amateurs zealots, and itself an amazement to the few still unconcerned.
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I hasten to say that I play bridge, have played it from bridge-whist through auction to contract, have won a little money at it, have had much entertainment in it, have played it more hours than I care to think of. But I have also played chess, long and arduously and ardently; as I have poker—draw, stud, and crazy. I have played many of the hordes of minor card games: pitch, blackjack, faro, fan-tan, red dog, rum, hearts, stop, banker and broker; and solitaire from the most intricate and careful to the most idiotic. I have played dice and roulette—how long!—and I know the greater game of the races. I have not been a professional nor have I had great skill in any of these, but I love them. Now, at almost all of these others I have had far more intense enjoyment than ever I have had at bridge. And yet all these I find often giving way, gradually giving way, again after a new spurt giving way, to bridge. (I bar the races, for that entrancement is so much more than a game that it would be no fair competitor here.)

The stronger gives way to the feebler, so often; the feebler must also be the stronger. Shall we not say the stronger in respect of our weakness, the weakness of the flesh, of the spirit? I prefer to play bridge when I should prefer to prefer to play poker. Then, thanks to bridge which serves my weakness. But woe is it that it encourages and seduces my weakness, and woe is me. I do not mean I succumb to bridge with constant remorse and anguish of spirit—any more than I feel delinquent when I read stretches of newspaper, stretches in which
I have no particular interest, instead of soaring with Shelley or struggling with Einstein. But then we are not told that impertinent columns of the paper are more thrilling than *Adonais* and more cogitative than the theory of relativity, as today we are told that bridge is the one master game—and more than a game, at once a perfect relaxation, a moral exercise, and an intellectual school.

Let me admit early that much of my irritability with bridge is due on the one hand to personal "tastes" which, though arguable like all tastes, are beside the point here, and on the other hand to the "atmosphere" of the game which is more or less accidental to the game itself. The major games have their own traditions, as distinct as those of baseball and tennis. In the noble game of crap (not of the gambling house but of the "friendly" variety) I have sometimes objected to the noisiness and the blatant insistence on the naked money—a defect of a merit which most bridge players will also, and the more, object to. But at the race track the real bridge players are apt to be comfortable only in the clubhouse boxes, the one part of a race track I do not like; and they will be offended if not horrified at the atmosphere of a "poolroom" (where bets are, illegally, made and paid far from the track), most of which I like. The smoke is thick and hot, but I rejoice in the forthrightness and lack of social front it enfold. The "boardman" pronounces weirdly and has a musically shocking voice but his singsong calling the
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line is music to my ear: "Tuwenty, tuwenty, tuwelve, naiyun to faive, 'n scuratch the bottom."

And bridge has more than a tradition, it has a whole retinue of observances, case-hardened paraphernalia of doings which seem even more important and inviolable than the integral game. Even in its language bridge must tilt its nose. It is no longer enough to shuffle the cards at a bridge table, they must be "made."

And how they must be made! Shuffling is of as little importance in bridge as it can be in any card game: all the cards are dealt, one at a time, roundabout; and if the tricks are taken and the deck assembled with any sort of honest carelessness it is impossible to tell by scrutiny of the hands whether shuffling has been indulged in or not. Yet bridge will certainly assay a higher load of shuffling than any two other games. The very technique of shuffling in bridge is bridgy—that method introduced by bridge players and practised secretly and displayed with infernal repetitiousness by bridge players, wherein the cards are held aloft, faces exposed, separated, bent in the middle, and exploded together with a long-drawn crackling. For some years while already addicted to other card games I declined bridge but sat in the room through many games, and I well remember the monotonous impression: a period of solemn silence, another period dominated by that machine-gun shuffling over and over while four voices rose in chorus. And just one person, not the dealer, must do the shuffling of the proper one of the two, no more and no less, decks. And
you must always deal the "right" deck. The first occasion on which a man half sprang up as I had begun to deal, put his hand over the deck, and gasped "You deal the blue," I for a moment did not know what he was talking about, then promptly lost respect for one I had thought a pretty good sort of intelligent person. Since then I have learned just to say to myself "It's bridge."

Then comes the cut; another fundamental bit of cards which is of minimal importance in bridge. In a four-hand full-deck game the single cut used in bridge can do no more than switch the same hands about the table and one-fourth of the time does not even do that. In other games any player may ask for a cut; in bridge no player ever asks but one particular player always does cut.

All this frippery ritual can provide one of the sorts of delight possible at bridge: you may call for three decks, shuffle out of turn, deal the wrong cards or without shuffling, decline to cut or call for the right to cut. I recommend taking quickly (you must be quick) the deck just used and dealing without a shuffle—it makes the least real difference and causes the greatest consternation. But the pleasure is not a worthy one; and it cannot last long, for either your companions are primarily card players and will willingly put up with you or they are primarily bridge players and will heave you out.

I repeat that my irritability on these scores is prima facie my own irritability, and that these tight observances are themselves, by the very force of the charge, not integral to the game itself and are largely just the
counter-prejudices of most, not of all, of those who play it. But is it not symptomatic of something constitutional in the game that it should have attracted such a mass of special ritualism and should attract especially such players? I think it is so symptomatic; that the game is essentially pedestrian, formalistic, suited to be eminently respectable, exigent of niceties of procedure but not greatly exigent either of the craft and courage of the gambler or of the insight and consecution of the thinker.

Bridge is not a gambling game, we are told by Mr. Culbertson and the grand chorus. The reply simply is that bridge is, of course, a gambling game but a mild one. Anything is a gamble, upon the broad definition, which risks anything of value on a chance. Upon a narrower and more proper definition (such as will rule out for instance insurance, which in all simplicity is the making and taking of a bet), anything is a gamble which risks something of value which need not otherwise be risked or which is not regarded as an offset to something already risked. Chance cannot in any way be avoided; the gambler takes thought to increase his unavoidable chances, the anti-gambler takes thought to decrease them. Where the gambling chance is erected by arbitrary rules as to the performance of selected objects, the gamble is a gambling game. By modern usage gambling games are restricted to those in which the value risked is money or something directly convertible into money. With all strictness bridge is a gambling game and its player when he plays is gambling.

The arguments offered in support of the frequent as-
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assertion that bridge is not gambling are two. Bridge is not dependent upon high stakes. Bridge is only negligibly a game of chance or luck. The second of these statements is I think quite untrue; but the first is quite true. That bridge calls for some stakes, a survey of the almost universal habit and insistence of players is sufficient evidence; but that it does not call for high stakes—i.e. high relatively to the means of the players—the same survey will as sufficiently show.

And it lacks most noticeably that tendency of games generally to push up the stakes among players continuing to play together either for an evening or through a longer period. Crap, banker and broker, red dog will skyrocket in an hour; poker will make the same push felt, surely, in a few sittings. The stakes at bridge may even tend to decrease. These characteristics are shared by some other card games but by none certainly in the same measure with whist or bridge. Where the level of play does increase with an individual or a party, it will be found explained not in the impetus of the game so often, as in increased wealth of the players or in the professional persuasion of one player that he is better than those with whom he plans to play. To be sure, those who love to gamble may also like to play bridge, and playing bridge they may be willing to increase the stakes beyond the particular wishes of others—and yet be content to play for a winning or losing they would not bother to struggle for at poker.

But all this is to say what I started by saying; bridge is
a mild gamble, as a gamble "not much." It is a gambling game in which the gambling interest is essential but not dominant. But if it is not dominant, if it is even a junior partner, it is far from being unimportant in the combination. Without it bridge would be scarcely as good as solitaire and profoundly inferior to checkers, not to mention chess.

This is mostly because of the determinative part played in the game by luck. Many types of solitaire give their successful player more reason to congratulate his skill than does success at a bridge sitting. The nature, extent, and conclusiveness of the "science" and skill of bridge will be glanced at presently; but the frequent assertion that luck is negligible in bridge is silly. The power of the cards dealt, the "distribution," the fitting of the two hands, the placing of the opposing cards and of the opposing hands, the succession of hands and of deals, the toss-up choices of leads, these and how much else are the obvious province of chance?

The upshot of most of the talk of those who decry the luck of bridge is to produce the "law of averages" and aver that "luck evens up." This is as true of roulette or cutting cards. But in those, it may be said, skill has no part, while in bridge if luck evens up the skill of the players remains decisive. Then all that is just as true of poker, of fan-tan, rum, pitch, and dozens of other games which never try to divorce themselves from chance. The half-knowledge of the theory of probabilities on the part of the many bridge players who complacently and com-
pliantly deny luck in bridge because “breaks are even in the long run” is more misleading than no knowledge. Yes, chances come even in the long run. But how long? And for any nameable run no matter how long, if it is probable that there will be many instances of even distribution, it is just as probable there will be some instances of uneven and of blank distribution.

If I toss up two pennies they will probably fall head and tail rather than both heads or both tails. If I toss a hundred pennies and they fall all heads I would be surprised, but not as surprised as I would be if I were to toss those hundred pennies a hundred times and they were to fall every time fifty heads, fifty tails. Point me out at random one man in a gathering of a thousand bridge players, and if I had to bet on his luck during his next ten rubbers at the game I would bet it would be even; point out the whole gathering and I will bet that among them is at least one whose luck will be consistently bad. And somewhere in this world of bridge players there may well be some devoted unfortunate who dies at an advanced age after a solid lifetime of bad bridge luck.

I have seen a roulette wheel come red fifty-three times in succession. And I have sat down at bridge practically every evening of one long summer from June into September, playing with a stable group, most of them not supposed to be my superiors at the game, pivoting partners haphazardly, and never once got up winner. But there is no need to labor the point. Luck
does even up for most bridge players over a short period—rarely indeed more than a few years. And their skill remains. But their skill remains of so little final importance that unless they are playing “out of their class” their success or failure will even up almost in the same degree as does their luck.

Let me not argue myself into denying the skill of bridge playing—its reality, its intricacy, its joy. Primarily, in the play of the cards, the skill called for is like that of chess, the recognition of the situation, foresight of possibilities, and arranging of combinations. It is paltry—small, restricted, and brief—compared to that of chess, and susceptible of much less precision and definiteness, but it is of the same sort: analytic grasp and imaginative planning. There is the inference from cards and plays seen to the probabilities of cards unseen. Then there is the element of a highly special kind of card memory, the knowledge of what cards have fallen and what cards are left and where.

This mnemonic is where I am weakest, and I get little pleasure out of it (except in unusual situations) even when I do it with more than usual dutifulness. I know more natural players who seem to have always done it by natural gift and without effort, and others who by training have come to do it without effort; and both probably with little specific pleasure in it. In the bidding, which whist in its modern forms has more and more made prominent, there is the exercise of judgment in valuing one’s hand and, with the progress of the bidding, in
more exactly valuing it with reference to the others around the table, and the exploration and "bluff" of competitive bidding—a natural fascination except in those sad sessions when one never has any cards to value. This is about all. Surely, it is much.

And yet in the view and usage of most bridge players these exercises of skill are not all. These integral grappling with the nature of cards and the laws of the game (except the card memory) may even drop almost out of sight and out of existence under the predominance of another factor which clutters up our bridge tables: the mass of "rules" and "conventions" which the poor conscientious bridge player, without the conscience of a card player, learns by heart and repeats by card. As an ideal herein the player approaches the state where he need never think but merely remember—and then prate of bridge as a triumph of skill. It is perhaps what is meant by the still more fond characterization of it as a science.

In this extremity the game is reduced to a laborious method of cutting cards for small stakes, plus the pleasure, if there be any, of repeating nonsense verses. And this extremity is not merely a distant limit, it is one often closely approached if not accomplished. I have known "book players" at chess, but they were feeble and besides constantly left beyond book help; for the complexity of chess can barely be scratched by all the indefatigable analysis which has been devoted to it—interesting, sound, and useful as that is. But it seems
possible to rig up for bridge a roughly adequate "book of conduct": hideous in its prolixity, more hideous in its arbitrariness and creakiness. It will not make its slave a very good player, but it will not often leave him altogether at a loss. It is at once the perfection and the _reductio ad absurdum_ of pedantry.

The worst of this bridge pedantry lies in the nature of the largest factor: the "conventions," which have no reason or purpose aside from their arbitrarily concocted "signal" value. Obviously it is good to know the faces of those cards the backs only of which can be seen. If I flash my cards to my partner in a mirror or pass him a note under the table, that is cheating. And if I prearrange to let him know them by means of my management of cigarette or of voice in bidding, that is cheating. But if I prearrange to let him know by _what_ I do in any of the regular doings of the game, that is not cheating but the highest-class bridge.

I quite agree such a recognized practice is not cheating; the line between it and what remains cheating is clear. It is not cheating the opponents; but it is cheating the game. Of course, a great part of the proper pleasure of the game is in inferring from a partner's or an opponent's bid or play his holding: knowing the game, observing his action, the situation from his point of view is more or less accurately to be guessed. But when a play carries a meaning, which could not possibly be inferred by any acuteness of insight into the game, then I call that prearranged signal illicit; not illegal but extra-legal, a
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threat to the integrity of the game and a weariness of the flesh.

There is that pet abomination “the echo,” the use of which I read in the paper last night is the “necessary sign that one is no longer a dub.” There are the discards chosen not from any plan of one’s hand but to tell one’s partner what to lead. Yet there are bridge players unwilling to see any difference between the most natural inference-allowing plays and the most arbitrary signals—probably because they have taken them all from rules learned by rote. It was once said to me when I complained of conventions: “But you use them—you led queen from queen-jack-ten—why not jack or ten?”

It is in bidding, however, that the convention evil has really taken root and flourished, until today it is an unwary player who easily supposes any bid means what it says. Here as in the play of the cards there is licit inference and room for trickery. In auction I have bid a blank suit over a no-trump bid to my right in hopes of sending play into a suit where I might do some damage. Honest trickery is good game but the far opposite of convention: the one hopes to be believed, the other expects to be understood in a crooked sense. So today at contract my partner bids four hearts and without a diamond in my hand I am supposed to bid five diamonds; not that I mean to bid anything at all but just to tell my partner that I have no diamonds! It is my contention that that game which cannot successfully be played by intelligence working on a knowledge of the laws
of the game and of the nature of the objects involved is to that extent a bad game. If bridge requires the paraphernalia of arbitrary convention which now encrusts it, then to that extent bridge is a bad game.

I do not believe bridge requires it (I am not so sure about contract), but there is a characteristic tendency toward it. Inference-allowing plays run vaguely into conventions. I can imagine situations in which what is called an informative double might be tried by one who had never heard of such a thing. To lead ace-deuce with no more of the suit in hand is often a natural lead and readable by one’s partner. The obvious lead of king from ace-king might easily be shifted to ace when one holds no more of the suit and means to lead the two tops quickly. So the more natural conventions arise and the arrant and unclean ones follow. But if this affords some excuse for the manufacturers of conventions, it shifts the complaint to the game, which essentially pushes itself on, unless constantly guarded, to illegitimacy and sterility. And when a game reaches the state in which some players now have bridge, it is ready for suicide—or ought to be were it not that all of us sometimes and some of us always actually like to wrap the living in the trappings of death.

Indeed, these latter complaints of mine are not a detriment but an advantage for two classes of devotee, two classes large and important today in the game’s swelling front. There are bridge instructors who are now finding in bridge a “good thing.” I have no acquaintance among
them, but I believe many of them are good card players who cannot be blamed much for what is in part simply making the most of a gorgeous professional opportunity and in part the succumbing to what all teachers have more or less to succumb to. At best to teach a science or an art is difficult and often useless. Not so with a catalogue. To teach bridge "as she is" is a procedure sufficiently long but not of necessity too long; cumulative but with stopovers anywhere, with practice provided and attractive, and with the subject teachable with or without card-sense—teachable as the Chinese alphabet. The rest of the same picture is the number of docile pupils for this lore: those who are not especially card players or (without any prejudice to them) keen for games anyway. Bridge is today "the thing"; they want to play it respectably, as little unprofitably as may be, and particularly they want social ease in the performance and the lingo. And surely for all this the conventionalized and rule-ridden game of bridge, especially contract bridge, is manna.

Contract, the most recent and ingenious evolvement of the professionals, seems not to be merely reprehensible. Its scoring, if not perfect, is in some respects certainly more rational than that of auction, and it has undoubtedly added elements of freshness and probably of permanent vivacity to the game. Yet it has curiously added to the frightfulness of the language; and, what is fundamental, it has seized on that worst aspect of bridge, the regimented and conventionalized and hypo-
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critic, for emphasis and development—bringing whist to that peak of fashionableness but also of absurdity where it now finds itself. Not long ago I silently watched an eager instructor, volunteer-instructor, who had just had a brief course of instruction in contract, as he was revealing its mysteries to a half-dozen eager friends who played auction but had only heard of the new game. The master was a man of at least some academic standing, but it was hard to believe that a mind of any scientific habit could be seduced even by bridge to such a farrago. Fresh hands would be dealt face up and on them directed a stream of imperatives as to what each must successively bid and do. And the others, the learners—no one of them ever seemed to think to ask why any of these strange new “musts” should come from what newness there was in contract, or for that matter why any of the “musts” were anyway. They seemed to think the change of law which made auction into contract should be left unquestioned in the code and to accept the new game as simply something to be “learnt” only by accepting a multitude of prescriptions from someone who had himself had them from some other one presumably just come down from Mount Sinai.

I am confident I could take two good card players who knew auction but had never heard of contract, confine instruction to one sentence: “Contract is auction in which you score toward game only the tricks you have bid, further tricks scoring as honors”; and without any consultation between them set them down against any
of that group with all their instructions and signals; and with any break in cards my pair would in twenty rubbers clean up. Later on they might not—at the instructed ones perfected their instructions. I would be tempted still to bet on the signalless card players; but it may be that contract cannot be successfully played without some scaffolding of conventional "system." In that case it is just a bad game.

Of all games which combine luck and skill, draw poker is incontestably king. The luck is raw and strong and rapid in its repetitious decisiveness, with just enough interval between threat and catastrophe. The powerfulness of luck is nicely met by equal vigor in the factor of skill. The player considers a complexity—of card values, of probabilities of the draw, of position play, of ratios with the pot, of capital, of psychological habits and twists, of surface indications—which all the more restricted intricacy of bridge can match only in intricacy. And he must often do it in the lifting of an eye. He needs beyond the fenced-off analysis of the bridge player both the patience and the swiftness of a cat, and the intellectual vigilance of a trial lawyer.

One of the most wearying of games it is, beyond all rival, the hardest game to stop. I have played it forty hours at one session and been willing for more. I have seen it begun "for an hour at most" and go over to breakfast; trains missed, engagements ignored, wives lied to, the world well lost. It has intoxicated me often, bridge never. Beside it bridge seems a languid thing.
Yet I scarcely ever play poker; I often play bridge. And when I play poker it is apt to degenerate after a while to stud, to seven-card stud, to wild cards, to dealer's choice, to all manner of more pure and puerile gambles. Poker is just too good. I no longer care to work so hard as good poker requires—even if I could by working so hard recapture that greater joy than bridge ever knew, which such hard work once gave me. And I have learned that one (at least almost anyone) does not play good poker unless he plays for more than he can afford to lose. I am no longer so often glad to play cards for more than I can afford to lose; and unless you at least try to play good poker it, too, is only a laborious method of cutting cards.

Why is this marked difference as to stakes between poker and bridge? In part it lies in the harder work poker demands. Not only does one expend more energy in playing his best poker than in playing his best bridge, but also a partial relaxation of that energy is not so fatal to bridge as to poker. In part, the reason lies in the fact that in poker the skill is closely wedded to the gambling: poker is more directly a battle with the players for the stakes, bridge more directly a battle with the cards for tricks. And this suggests a more subtle third reason. The accomplishments of poker are fragmentary and mostly secret (and not particularly interesting) except to the player himself: without the stakes to show for it he grows weary of at best self-commendation. The accomplishments of bridge are more extended—brief
campaigns but still campaigns of some extent and some coherent unity—and they are displayed and public to the table each side of which has been involved.

In this merit (and as a merit I recognize it) bridge approaches chess, the incontestable king of games of pure skill. But how feeble, in the accomplishment as in the skill called for, is that approach! I played chess before either poker or bridge, and with more voluntary enthusiasm and determination; but I gave it up more completely. It was not a deliberate giving up, but I have known prudent men with whom it was. I play it now, but too seldom for full commitment to its embrace. And it may be said in its favor that half-chess can be played, as half-poker cannot be played, with considerable pleasure, without loss of the quality of its charm.

Stakes are quite impertinent to chess; it is indeed better played with none; the game is all. And the game is rather too much, except for those born to it; too hard for mind and also for nerve. I have sounded ridiculous to many a college athlete, full of glory and cheering-sections, by saying chess is the most exciting of all games; but I am persuaded this is true. I have come out of chess matches limper than any dishrag and gone home to a sleep tormented by unceasing chess situations (which, I believe, I have often handled better, piece-meal fashion, in my sleep than awake). So, too, I have violated sleep with cards after hectic sessions at poker—or red dog or banker and broker. And once after years with no thought of chess I came from a poker battle to
find in sleep the old obsession of chess. But bridge has seldom or never thus against my will perpetuated itself upon that inward eye which may be the bane of solitude. Let us then be thankful for the mildness and pleasantness of bridge, for its merits but especially for the merits of its defects. Inferior to poker and to chess it does household tasks for which their strength unsuits them.

I am not tempted to argue the swelling claims made for it as moral and intellectual training ground. Let such claims bemuse the zealots and justify the careful ones who seek justification for their pastimes. No doubt any practice in the habit of concentration on the matter in hand is some help toward the advantages, and disadvantages, of that habit; but the transfer of special abilities, even when they are abilities of general faculties, is slippery ground. I once saw a man finger through a deck of cards as rapidly as they could be read, then deal seven poker hands face down one card at a time, and call off the combinations in each hand. I would avoid playing poker with that man, but I would not be confident of his showing unusual ability in other lines even similar. I have played blindfold chess; I never found that performance any gift-bringer to my memory in other fields. Every game, being a competition, has some disciplinary force; being a technique, has some intellectual incitement; any game specifically has precious little.

But of the worthiness of bridge as recreation I have the highest opinion. It "cheers but not inebriates." It is a
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gamble, poor just as a gamble, at which we can enjoy a
mild excitement which will not exhaust, and find a not
too severe relief from the greater and more unavoidable
gambles which crowd most of our days. It is a test of
intellectual skill, poor just as intellection, in which we
can exercise our judgment and ingenuity with a mild
concentration which will not exhaust, and find a not too
severe relief from the intellectual void into which most
of our days are crowded.

But in its mild hospitality is a sting. We need only
survey the tables drawn out after lunch or even break­
fast by mountain and shore and thronged until or
through the time for the dance, to realize how much it
may be an anodyne, or an engulfer of hours during at
least some of which the bridge table is only an escape
from more positive, and more exacting, opportunities.
And when its mildness comes toward its limit, when it is
deadened by all that can make bridge deadly, then, apart
at least from its social or its professional aspect, it sinks
through pastime into the merest way of passing time,
and then of killing time. There is no longer question of
good game or bad but, my masters, of sin. All of us kill
time at times, but we should not ever; for it is simply
suicide, partial suicide. Emotions which, like most
human emotions, waste upon illusions the hope, the joy,
the fear, the grief due to reality were held by the Stoics
to be the “conditions of sin”; but the boredom which
surpasses and caricatures the apathy of the Stoic and
concentrates upon the merry phantasms of cards the list-
less blankness it has already drawn over reality would outrage the pious and logical Stoic more than hilarity or vexation. I call on the Stoic because he is the supposed admirer of apathy. To kill time is to serve the devil; not Lucifer who was Son of the Morning, but that older more abysmal devil from whom even Chaos and Old Night were young brave rebels.

The coupling of "disputes" with "whisk" in David Hume's question may seem curious to us. The disputes in which bridge is tritely plentiful are evidently not Hume's meaning; and disputes in his sense are more apt today to be among the things against which bridge serves society as a guard—the more real perspectives of dispute or even conversation. But we must remember that in the quotation we are among the "scavants" of mid-eighteenth-century Paris, when "disputes" were as much the fashion as "whisk." And in some circles, for bridge has many many circles now, that particular division and congress of interests would still hold good.

And it may also seem curious that it should be Horace Walpole who was the malignant toward whist. For, though the characterization set for him by Macaulay is unfair, he is the sort of person we should expect to find at least an occasional addict. It was not that he was without interest in games (a defect to which all types of character are susceptible), for he went gladly to play at "loos" with my Lady Suffolk or the Princess Amelia. I think the sufficient reasons were his antagonism for the "scavants" and other whisk players (still a potent in-
fluence), and the fact that he was essentially a humorist. Bridge even in its ancestral forms has always been peculiarly "vulnerable" to humor.

I am not a humorist. And so from this trifling solemnness I will respite myself in the masterpiece of solemn trifling, bridge—will go forth hoping to be asked to "make a fourth," enjoy playing as good bridge as I can play, missing or ignoring my partner's signals and dealing with unshuffled decks, and come home mildly elated that my skill has won me a couple of dollars or mildly chagrined that my bad luck has lost me a couple.