

# Roger Caillois, Games of Chance and the Superstar

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Superstars are not by accident a conspicuous phenomenon in our culture, but inherently belong to a meritocratic society with mass media, free enterprise, and competition. To make this contention plausible I will use Caillois's book, *Man, Play and Games*,<sup>1</sup> to compare the mechanisms underlying the superstar phenomenon with a special kind of game, as set out by Caillois. As far as I know, Caillois's book is not quoted in the literature dealing with income distribution theories, although the comparison with play and games is, for limited purposes, interesting. In play and games we find almost all elements which play a role in theories of just income distribution: equality of opportunity, chance, talent, competition and skill, reward, entitlement, winners and losers, etc. These are not chance similarities, for "... games are largely dependent upon the cultures in which they are practised. They affect their preferences, prolong their customs, and reflect their beliefs... One... can... posit a truly reciprocal relationship between a society and the games it likes to play".<sup>2</sup> Moreover, as we will see, superstars combine the four basic characteristics of play that make their activities a special kind of play.

## Play or work

Johan Huizinga,<sup>3</sup> cited by Caillois, considers play as an activity which is not serious (that is, standing outside ordinary life), with no material interest and where no profit can be gained. Caillois disputes Huizinga's belief that in games no material interests are involved. He sees this belief as a result of Huizinga's restriction of his analysis to competitive games, and the consequent omission of games of chance. Still, Caillois affirms that in play or games of chance in general "*Property is exchanged, but no goods are produced...*" A characteristic of play, in fact, is that it creates no wealth or goods, thus differing from work or art.<sup>4</sup> If we want to relate superstars in sport with Caillois's analysis of play and games, then we seem to have a problem: the commerce of sport and athletes' high annual incomes can be considered as earnings or rewards for services rendered by them in the form of games. However, if the game produces no goods (or wealth), then professionals or superstars sports do not play, as amateurs do, but work. Indeed, following this logic, Caillois asserts that: "As for the professionals... it is clear that they are not players but workers. When they play, it is at some other game."<sup>5</sup>

The question is whether an external element, like monetary rewards for the players, changes our characterization of an activity: it is no longer play but work. Should an activity performed by amateurs be reckoned as play, while the same activity performed by professionals be reckoned as work? As Caillois remarks elsewhere, the intrusion of

reality (i.e. money) in play brings along the possibility of the corruption of play (like bribery, drugs, etc.), but the game itself remains intact: "The nature of competition or the performance is hardly modified if the athletes or comedians are professionals who play for money rather than amateurs who play for pleasure. The difference concerns only the players".<sup>6</sup> If the difference concerns only the players, then it cannot concern the play. For the outside spectator, both amateur and professional sports will be seen as play (despite the fact that the professionals are at work): when watching sports, we, the audience, do not have the feeling that we see hard workers rather than fanatic players. This is why we have to go one step further than Caillois did in criticizing Huizinga: in play not only is property exchanged (as happens in games of chance), but goods or services are also produced. We can consider professional sports as play only if we drop Caillois's assertion that by definition in play no wealth or goods are produced.

### Classification and characterization of plays

Caillois distinguishes four categories of play:

I am proposing a division into four main rubrics, depending upon whether, in the games under consideration, the role of competition, chance, simulation, or vertigo is dominant. I call these *agôn*, *alea*, *mimicry*, and *ilinx*, respectively. . . One plays football, billiards, or chess (*agôn*); roulette or a lottery (*alea*); pirate, Nero, or Hamlet (*mimicry*); or one produces in oneself, by a rapid whirling or falling movement, a state of dizziness and disorder (*ilinx*).<sup>7</sup>

Each category can furthermore be situated between the two poles of *paidia* and *ludus*. *Paidia* is the indulging in and giving free rein to uncontrolled fantasies, free improvisation, and turbulence. *Ludus* is the inverse tendency which keeps *paidia* in check by setting up arbitrary rules. In Caillois's framework, *ludus* must be seen as the necessary complement to, and refinement of, *paidia*, where the energy present in *paidia* can be transformed by means of the rules of the game to a purified and excellent activity:

Such a primary power of improvisation and joy, which I call *paidia*, is allied to the taste for gratuitous difficulty that I propose to call *ludus*, in order to encompass the various games to which, without exaggeration, a civilizing quality can be attributed. In fact, they reflect the moral and intellectual values of a culture, as well as contribute to their refinement and development.<sup>8</sup>

So the distinction *paidia-ludus* deals with the degree of institutionalization of the game, whilst the classification into four categories reflect the kind of play and, not unimportantly, the psychological attitude of the players.<sup>9</sup>

According to Caillois, two pairs, *agôn-alea* and *mimicry-vertigo*, are exceedingly productive and fruitful in terms of shaping and expressing culture. His proposition is that in primitive societies social cohesion is based on practices linked with the *mimicry-vertigo* couple, whereas, for instance, Western civilization (at least since the miracle of ancient Greece) is dominated by practices referring to the *agôn-alea* couple:

... primitive societies, which I prefer to call "Dionysian", be they Australian, American, or African, are societies ruled equally by masks and possession, i.e. by *mimicry* and *ilinx*. Conversely, the Incas, Assyrians, Chinese, or Romans are orderly societies with offices, careers, codes, and ready-reckoners, with fixed and hierarchical privileges in which *agôn* and *alea*, i.e. merit and heredity, seem to be the chief complementary elements of the game of living. In contrast to the primitive societies, these are "rational". In the first type there are simulation and vertigo or pantomime and ecstasy which assure the intensity and, as a consequence, the cohesion of social life. In the second type, the social nexus consists of compromise, of an implied reckoning between heredity, which is a kind of chance, and capacity, which presupposes evaluation and competition.<sup>10</sup>

Confining ourselves to the pair, *agôn-alea*, the productiveness and fruitfulness of this combination lies in a double similarity and a double complementarity. The first similarity concerns the implicit notion of equality of opportunity. In competitive games no starting point is favoured over an other, and similarly in games of chance each lottery ticket has an equal chance to win. The second similarity is that both competitive games and games of chance are strongly bound and regulated by rules (that is, *paidia* is strongly bound and regulated by *ludus*).

Competitive games and games of chance exhibit mutually complementary characteristics with respect, first, to the way the winners of the games are selected and, secondly, to the way the players behave. In competitive games the winners are selected by means of demonstrated ability, while by games of chance the winners are assigned by lot. The second complementarity is strongly connected with this. Players in competitive games make great efforts and must have confidence in their own capabilities to win, while the players of games of chance are passive, renouncing their will and submitting to luck.

Now the equality of opportunity or equal starting points, the strong regulation by rules, the different ways the winners are selected, and the difference between endeavour and resignation are all elements of daily life. For instance, the importance of equality of opportunity in daily life is reflected in the striving for equality by means of equal access to schooling and subsequently to employment, effected if necessary through positive discrimination in favour of minorities ('affirmative action'). The element of chance refers to the high degree of contingency in our lives, despite all the social policies which are in force. Income can be obtained by hard work or by good fortune (inheritance, natural talent). It would be too long to list all the parallels, but it should be stressed that games of both the *agôn*- and the *alea*-type are the mirror-image of our daily life.

Anticipating the discussion below of the special place of superstars in our society, we can say that their activities exhibit characteristics of competitive games as well as of games of chance. The superstar is, so to speak, the epiphenomenon of the *agôn-alea* couple. Before elaborating on this, I want to dwell briefly on the relationship between *agôn-alea* and the just distribution of income or, rather, on what they share in common, according to Caillois.

### **Agon-alea in relation to a just distribution of income**

What is the relation of *agôn-alea* to a just distribution of income? In *A Theory of Justice* by Rawls, the moral arbitrariness of talent (the arbitrariness of the distribution of natural talents among individuals) plays an important role. If the distribution of income does not

take into account the effects of differences in natural talent (and social assets), it in effect sanctions these contingencies. Those with less favourable assets, whether natural or social, will end up with less favourable results, even if they try as hard to become successful as others who happen to have been born with great talents and in a favourable social environment. Given that natural talent and our environment during early childhood are things beyond our individual control, we can say that the influence of *alea* on the distribution of income compromises, if not outweighs, the influence of effort (*agôn*) in which we put our talents to productive use.

For Caillois it is clear that *agôn* has priority above *alea* to bring about justice. Consider the following passage:

Opinion is unanimous on indisputable evidence that work, merit, and competence, not the capricious roll of dice, are the foundations necessary both to justice and to the proper evolution of social life. As a result, work tends to be considered the only honorable source of income. Inheriting wealth, the result of *alea* basic to birth, is debated, sometimes abolished, more often submitted to important restrictions, in the interest of the general welfare. As for money won in games or in a lottery, it ought in principle to constitute only a supplement or a luxury, which augments the salary or wages regularly collected by the player in payment for his professional activity. To draw [all or most of] one's . . . subsistence through chance or gambling is regarded by nearly everybody as suspect and immoral, if not dishonorable, and in any case, asocial.<sup>11</sup>

If *agôn* is more in line with justice than *alea*, then what is the place of the latter in our society? Caillois attributes to *alea* an important *psychological* role, outside the domain of justice, but necessary to make a meritocratic society acceptable to those who lose out:

He has been defeated in legal combat. To explain his failure, he cannot invoke injustice. The conditions at the outset were the same for all. He can only blame his own inability. He can look forward to nothing to compensate for his humiliation except the very unlikely reward of the gratuitous favor of the fantastic powers of chance.<sup>12</sup>

The loser can, so to speak, nourish a last hope for something for which all men are equal, sheer fortune. In this sense, *alea* can be considered as the necessary complement to the tendency of competence to eliminate the role of chance. The importance of a just balance between *agôn* and *alea* is a topic elaborated in the fable of Michael Young.<sup>13</sup> In this fable he sketches the rise of meritocracy and its probable decline in 2033. If income is completely based on IQ, effort, and other criteria of merit, then the low income earners run the risk of being stigmatized as inferior, as not belonging to the class of the talented. In coalition with women from the upper classes longing for romance, they will then rebel against the meritocratic system. The fable seems to suggest that the role of *agôn* (or merit) in striving towards a just distribution of income must not be pushed too far.

Caillois's description of the relation between justice, competence, and chance (*agôn* and *alea*) reveals an embryonic theory of justice *à la* Rawls:

Inheritance continues to weigh upon everybody like a mortgage that cannot be paid off – the laws of chance that reflect the continuity of nature and the inertia of society. *The purpose of legislation is to counterbalance these effects.* Laws and constitutions therefore seek to establish a fair balance between capacities and performance so that the influence of class can be checked and ability can become truly dominant, as affirmed by qualified judges, just as in sports contests.

However, it is obvious that the competitors are not equally placed to make a good start.<sup>14</sup>  
[Author's italics]

In other words, if we want ability or competence to have an important or even predominant place in a just distribution of income, then the analogy with play suggests that we must understand equality of opportunity in the substantial instead of the formal sense, that is, everybody should have real equal opportunities to make a good start. However, since natural and social inequalities cannot be checked completely, the problem of justice broadens and shifts to understanding how the institutional framework deals with the effects of these inequalities.

Caillois's assessment of the justice of the institutional framework of society shares much in common with Rawls's principles of justice, especially his second principle that stipulates that social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged and that they are attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity.<sup>15</sup> These two constituent parts of Rawls's second principle of "justice as fairness" are the so-called *difference principle* and the *principle of equal opportunity*. Free competition for all positions and offices in society on the basis of qualifications and talent is not enough. Such a *formal* equality of opportunity only ensures that nobody is excluded from offices and jobs on grounds based on race, sex, ethnicity, or religion. Formal equality of opportunity falls short of *fair* equality of opportunity.<sup>16</sup> Fair equality of opportunity demands that society must give more attention to the untalented, and this is what the difference principle is about:

No one deserves his greater natural capacity nor merits a more favorable starting place in society. . . . Thus we are led to the difference principle if we wish to set up the social system so that no one gains or loses from his arbitrary place in the distribution of natural assets or his initial position in society without giving or receiving compensating advantages in return.<sup>17</sup>

The difference principle so neutralizes as far as possible the effects of the contingencies of birth and upbringing.<sup>18</sup>

Nevertheless, for at least two reasons *agôn* will never chase off *alea* from the scene. First, even if fair equality of opportunity could be established, a radical contingency remains: ". . . it is hard to imagine that an accident of birth or the position of one's father would be without effect upon the son's career or would not automatically facilitate it."<sup>19</sup> This is comparable to Rawls's view that equality of opportunity can only be carried out imperfectly

as long as some form of the family exists. . . . It is impossible in practice to secure equal chances of achievement and culture for those similarly endowed [the so-called "careers open to talent", I.G.], and therefore we may want to adopt a principle which recognizes this fact and also mitigates the arbitrary effects of the natural lottery itself.<sup>20</sup>

Secondly, as *agôn* gains ground, according to Caillois and in line with Michael Young, the need for the complementary role of *alea* will rise. Not only those who are discouraged by their lack of talent, but also those for whom all patience, effort, perseverance, and talents were in vain, will want *agôn* to have the last word and hope in one way or another to delight Fortuna in order to escape the chilly outcomes of *agôn*:

Under these conditions, *alea* again seems a necessary compensation for *agôn*, and its natural complement. Those it dooms are entirely without hope in the future . . . It is the function of *alea* to always hold out hope of such a miracle. That is why games of chance continue to prosper.<sup>21</sup>

Precisely here the paradoxical status of superstars comes in.

### The superstar as the epiphenomenon of the *agôn-alea* couple

The rise of the superstar is connected with the transition from primitive to rational societies: “. . . in the founding of the great games (Olympic, Pythian, and Nemenic) and often in the method of choosing city magistrates, *agôn* in association with *alea* takes the privileged place in public life that *mimicry-ilinx* occupies in Dionysian societies.”<sup>22</sup> Because of the “truly reciprocal relationship between a society and the games it likes to play” (for instance, the great civilizing function of play in submitting oneself to the decisions of an impartial referee), competition, competence, and impartial administration go hand in hand. During the transition, the role of *alea* is at first rather ambiguous. Caillois alleges that in the transition from primitive societies (that is, those in which social cohesion is based on the *mimicry-ilinx* couple) to rational societies, *alea* could have been an important intermediary.<sup>23</sup> Even ancient Greek culture, where competition played a very important role, bore the marks of fatalism, like *tyché* (luck), *moira* (fate), and *kairos* (opportunity), which were only gradually obscured in the modern Western societies by the growing influence of *agôn*. For the Greeks, the selection of politicians by lot was a perfectly fair and egalitarian procedure, all the more so because it was very effective in preventing favouritism and nepotism. The problem for the ancient Greeks was not so much to choose between either *agôn* or *alea*, but to decide in which situation which principle, *agôn* or *alea*, should have precedence:

It demonstrates that they are contrasting but complementary solutions to a unique problem – that all start out equal. This may be accomplished by lot . . . provided they renounce any use of their natural talents consent to a strictly passive attitude. Or, it may be achieved competitively if they are required to use their abilities to the utmost, thus providing indisputable proof of their excellence.<sup>24</sup>

Now what is the place of superstars in a predominantly meritocratic society? Although work and competition (activity and determination) and games of chance (passivity and luck), or *agôn* and *alea*, are two separated poles, in the superstar they come together:

It is the reward of an extraordinary and mysterious convergence in which are compounded one’s being magically gifted from infancy on, perseverance that no obstacle could discourage, and the ultimate test presented by the precarious but decisive opportunity met and seized without hesitation. The idol, for one, has visibly triumphed in an insidious, implacable, and confused competition, where success must come quickly – for these resources, which the most humble may have inherited and which may be the precarious lot of the poor, are timebound; beauty fades, the voice cracks, muscles become flabby, and joints stiffen.<sup>25</sup>

The superstar unites both elements, because the superstar has extraordinary natural talent augmented by an even more extraordinary perseverance and drive, who in competition



with almost equally endowed and motivated rivals seeking an uncertain goal, succeeds in reaching the number one position, superstar status. It is clear that the superstar benefits from a great dose of luck, chance, and coincidence. Those who attain superstar status are *primus inter pares*, because small and relative differences are of decisive importance for winning or losing by a hair's breadth. In sports which are rank-order tournaments, the differences between the champion and the runners-up are small. A change in the rules of the game, for instance one instead of two services in tennis (or a change in the height of the basket in basketball), will change the rank-order of the hundred top players. Players now high on the list because of their strong service will lose their relative advantage and others will take their place. Due to the arbitrary nature of the rules of the game (these are just conventions like all gratuitous difficulties rubricated as *ludus*), superstars cannot demand that the rules exactly favour their relative advantages (e.g. length and strength of service). So the rules of the game, as issued by the sport associations, have an important impact on the distribution of advantages among players.

The varying degree to which sports superstars are subject to *agôn* and *alea* can also be illustrated by comparing the role of the referees in sports in North America and in Europe. In the more popular sports in the US, notably baseball, basketball, and American football, much more effort is spent in banning chance by means of intensive refereeing than in the popular sports on the European continent. In soccer, which is by far the most popular sport in Europe, there is just one referee (with two linesmen) in an enormous field with twenty-two players. The referee in soccer has to decide everything at a glance, leaving much room for contestable decisions (that is, chance). In American sport, by contrast, three or more referees are the rule rather than the exception. In general, one might be tempted to conclude that the games which are popular in North America exhibit a more important role of *agôn* at the expense of *alea* compared to the games popular in Europe, where both good and bad luck have a much greater impact on the final outcome of the game (witness the fact that many soccer matches end in a score of 1–0).

Perhaps the most important aspect of the role of the superstar in our society is the identification of the public with the star. *Agôn* and *alea* are both not only present for the superstar (for the outcome of the game is unsettled and open beforehand), but also for the public, by virtue of their identification with the star. Due to this identification, the public is exempt from participation. This is marvellously expressed by Caillois as follows:

Every soldier may carry a marshal's baton in his knapsack and be the most worthy to bear it, except that he may never become a marshal commanding battalions of mere soldiers. Chance, like merit, selects only a favored few. The majority remain frustrated. Everyone wants to be first and in law and justice has the right to be. However, each one knows or suspects that he will not be, for the simple reason that by definition only one may be first. He may therefore choose to win indirectly, through identification with someone else, which is the only way in which all can triumph simultaneously without effort or chance or failure.<sup>26</sup>

### Are superstar incomes just?

I use the following criterion to speak of superstars, namely all those cases where only one or a few among many others reaching for the same goal or position succeed in getting the lion's share of the added value in the market.<sup>27</sup> The best actors, directors, producers, pop

musicians, athletes, writers, software-producers, etc. can command annual incomes for which the sky is the limit. With the increasing role of mass media in daily life, every year new records are set. At least we can say that these incomes, however large, are obtained in a legitimate way within a system of free competition, copyright protection, etc. To answer the question of the appropriateness of superstar incomes I shall enumerate some factors mentioned by Caillois.<sup>28</sup> First, there is the role of the public: "The inordinate glory of the idol is a continuous witness to the possibility of a triumph which has already been of some benefit to, and which to some extent is due to, those who worship the hero".<sup>29</sup> In this respect, one may wonder whether the material reward of the superstar is a necessary ingredient (for the glory of the star) for the identification of the public with the star, or whether it is the excellence or the private life of the star which is of more importance. It is also unclear to what extent the star is motivated by intrinsic values (the attractiveness of the activity in which he employs his talents) or extrinsic values (the lure of money) of his activity. In any case, both questions concern psychological aspects, not justice.

To characterize superstars' rewards Caillois uses the term "disguised lotteries", as opposed to ordinary lotteries:

In fact, when the general expenses of administration are deducted, the seemingly disproportionate profit is exactly proportionate to the amount of risk played by each player. A more remarkable modern innovation consists of what I shall arbitrarily call disguised lotteries – i.e. those not requiring money to be risked and seeming to reward talent, learning, ingenuity, or any other type of merit, thus naturally escaping general notice or legal sanction. Some grand prizes of a literary character may truly bring fortune and glory to a writer, at least for several years. These contests stimulate thousands of others that are of little significance but which somehow trade upon the prestige of the more important competition.<sup>30</sup>

In opposition to Caillois, I believe that the thousands of others participating in the same common practice as the celebrated writer are very important for the common good realized (in literature, for example) in those practices. As indicated above, superstars can only emerge by making use of and participating in existing practices. The superstar is just the *primus inter pares* who has reached the level of excellence in the activity involved, in competition with many others. In other words, there is a "communitarian" aspect involved. It is not only that movie stars make great movies, but that they can only emerge when there is a tradition, culture, and technology of movie-making. Someone who has a talent for playing three-dimensional billiards in space will have to wait for some time.

Thirdly, most of the rules of the game are rather arbitrary (recall the "gratuitous difficulty" that *ludus* imposes on *paidia*, as we showed earlier). No player has an a-priori right that the rules of the game are such that he or she will turn out to be the winner.

Finally, as already noted above, there is a high degree of arbitrariness, luck, and chance involved in the genesis of a superstar: the role of *natural* talents, universal recognition of that particular individual rather than another; in short, the fact that it is he, rather than anybody else, is the star.<sup>31</sup> The question of justice concerns not only who rakes in the superstar income, but also why the rewards have to be concentrated at the top, and not top-down to all the participants or contributors to the activity involved. For example, at universities the distribution is such that top-down every participant is paid a salary and not only the (potential) Nobel prize-winners. The excellence of an activity (research) is



only possible in a wetting with more actors (researchers, students), that is, if there is a whole pyramid of competitions at all levels (pre-university education).

Caillois's observation of the strong connection between *agôn* and justice, applied to superstars, in so far as their incomes are the result of a special kind of game of chance ("a disguised lottery"), indicates they are unjust. However, we also saw that superstar incomes play an important *psychological* role. Through identification of the public with the star it functions as a psychologically compensating mechanism in a society run on predominantly meritocratic principles. The tension between these two types of contradiction is not resolved by Caillois.<sup>32</sup> For Rawls, "The premiums earned by scarce natural talents . . . are to cover the costs of training and to encourage the efforts of learning, as well as to direct ability to where it best furthers the common interest."<sup>33</sup> This would certainly not justify superstar incomes as high as those experienced today.

## Notes

1. Roger Caillois (1967). *Les jeux et les hommes: Le masque et le vertige*, revised and enlarged edition. Paris: Gallimard, First published in 1958. [English translation: (1962) *Man, Play and Games*. London: Thames and Hudson. Two articles by Gaillois on this subject appeared in *Diogenes* in 1955 and 1959. Revised versions of these articles were integrated as chapters in the book.
2. Caillois (1962) op. cit., 82.
3. Johan Huizinga (1938). *Homo ludens: proeve eener bepaling van het spel-element der cultuur*. Haarlem: H.D. Tjeenk Willink. [English translation: (1949) *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
4. Caillois (1962) op. cit., 5.
5. *Ibid.*, 6.
6. *Ibid.*, 45.
7. *Ibid.*, 12.
8. *Ibid.*, 27.
9. "... [T]he ambition to win by one's own merit alone in regulated competition (*agôn*), the submission of one's will to anxious and passive anticipation of the decree of fate (*alea*), the desire to assume a strange personality (mimicry), and, finally, the pursuit of vertigo (*ilinx*) . . . the desire temporarily to destroy one's bodily stability and equilibrium, escape the tyranny of one's ordinary perception and prompt the suspension of one's usual consciousness": author's translation of Caillois, *Les jeux et les hommes*, 102–3, adapted from *Man, Play and Games*, 44.
10. Caillois (1962), op. cit., 87.
11. *Ibid.*, 158.
12. *Ibid.*, 160.
13. Michael Young (1962). *The Rise of the Meritocracy, 1870–2033: An Essay on Education and Equality*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
14. Author's translation of Caillois, *Les jeux et les hommes*, 217–8, adapted from *Man, Play and Games*, 112.
15. John Rawls (1999). *A Theory of Justice*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, revised edition, 266. [First published in 1972; the revisions were first incorporated into the German translation of 1975 and included in subsequent translations: see revised edition, xi.
16. In the section 'Further Cases of Priority', Rawls states that "an inequality of opportunity must enhance the opportunities of those with the lesser opportunity". In Rawls (1999), op. cit., 266. That is to say, fair equality of opportunity is the difference principle operated on the sum of opportunities.
17. *Ibid.*, 87. Rawls observed, shortly before this passage, "Thus the [difference] principle holds that in order to treat all persons equally, to provide genuine equality of opportunity, society must give more attention to those with fewer native assets and to those born into the less favorable social positions". *Ibid.*, 86.

18. Salient in this respect is that Rawls thinks that the combined impact of the principle of equal opportunity and the difference principle can prevent the occurrence of superstar incomes: "While nothing guarantees that inequalities will not be significant, there is a persistent tendency for them to be leveled down by the increasing availability of educated talent and ever widening opportunities. The conditions established by the other principles insure that the disparities likely to result will be much less than the differences that men have often tolerated in the past" *Ibid.* I do not think that superstar incomes can be eliminated or reduced by providing greater equality of opportunity or by increasing the fairness of competition for number one positions. The extraordinary high earnings are the result of the absolute scarcity of number one positions, and the greater the number of competitors, the more desirable it is to become the winner: for more detailed argumentation, Borghans L. and L. Groot (1998). Superstardom and Monopolistic Power: Why Media Stars Earn More Than Their Marginal Contribution to Welfare. *Journal of Institutional and Theoretical Economics*, 154 (3), 546–71.
19. Caillois (1962), *op. cit.*, 112.
20. Rawls (1999), *op. cit.*, 64.
21. Caillois (1962), *op. cit.*, 115.
22. Author's translation of Caillois, *Les jeux et les hommes*, 209–10, adapted from *Man, Play and Games*, 108.
23. "Submission to what is decided by lot is agreeable to these indolent and impatient beings whose basic values are no longer operable." Caillois (1962), *op. cit.*, 146.
24. *Ibid.*, 110.
25. Author's translation of Caillois, *Les jeux et les hommes*, 235–6, adapted from *Man, Play and Games*, 121.
26. Caillois (1962), *op. cit.*, 120. "They feel, despite everything, that they are represented by the manicurist elected Beauty Queen, by the sales girl entrusted with the heroine's role in a super production, by the shopkeeper's daughter winning the *Tour de France*, by the gas station attendant who basks in the limelight as a champion toreador." Caillois (1962), *op. cit.*, 121.
27. See S. Rosen (1981). The Economics of Superstars. *American Economic Review*, 71, 845–58, for a definition of superstars: The phenomenon of Superstars, wherein relatively small numbers of people earn enormous amounts of money and dominate the activities in which they engage, seems to be increasingly important in the modern world . . . In certain kinds of economic activity there is concentration of output among a few individuals, marked skewness in the associated distributions of income and very large rewards at the top."
28. In Borghans and Groet (1998), *op. cit.*, it is argued that superstars earn more than their marginal contribution to welfare justifies.
29. Caillois (1962), *op. cit.*, 122.
30. *Ibid.*, 118.
31. To give a telling example, Adler has shown that the superstar phenomenon can emerge even without differences in talent or performance. The crucial assumption is that consumption (e.g. of music or literature) is at the same time a learning process. This means that the degree of satisfaction increases with greater acquaintance with the artist or genre, and that the choice of an artist or genre depends on their fame and publicity. Because of this formation of consumption capital, it is rational to restrict oneself to a few artistic genres and a few artists. If everyone chooses a different genre or artist, mutual discussion and information transfer is impossible, whereas if many people make the same choice, search and learning costs can be reduced. And these costs are minimized by choosing the most popular artist: "To re-emphasize, to star need not possess greater talent. Stardom is a market device to economize on learning costs in activities where 'the more you know the more you enjoy'. Thus stardom may be independent of the existence of a hierarchy of talent" (Adler, 1985: 208). Carrying this argument to the extreme, it is entirely a matter of chance, not of talent or effort, to become the superstar: "First, bills of all colors could serve as money and likewise all [i.e., any of the] artists could be stars. Second, efficiency calls for only one money and likewise efficiency calls for very few artists with public recognition . . . If there were a slight majority of consumers that picked X as their choice, X would snowball into the star because after each period this majority would increase" [*ibid.*: 211]. This adequately illustrates the importance of *alea* in becoming a superstar.
32. For a meritocrat, the superstar may get the first prize, but it does not follow that there should be only a first prize or only a few big prizes. Even if the rewards are distributed top-down, then *alea* (the radicality of natural and social contingencies) has still enough scope to play its complementary role in relation *agôn*.
33. Rawls (1999), *op. cit.*, 274.