"I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."

(The Bible, Matthew, 18:3-4)

In order to prepare an omelet you have to break the eggs; in order to build a house you have to break the stones; and in order to succeed in the business world you have to break your principles. Those ideas prevail in parts of the business world of today, which is very competitive, and where you can win it all or lose it all. The rates of unemployment, especially of executives, are very high, and on the other hand the remuneration of brilliant executives is very high. Therefore, the temptation to conduct oneself in an immoral way is very strong. You have much to lose if you have too many scruples; if you come from a rich family you have to prove to yourself that you can surpass the achievements of your father, and if you come from a poor family you have to do your utmost to succeed in life and not be like your father. Business is a profession where you start out as an idealist and end up as a cynic. The managers and the consultants ask themselves frequently what is the market price for their conscience. They perceive themselves as mercenaries who are paid by the highest bidder. Society is ruled by wealth and power. Truth and ethics have nothing to do with it. We have to accept the world as it is.

But things are not as simple as they appear; we cannot remain cynical without feeling guilty about it and without perturbing our emotional and even sentimental life. This can result in excessive drinking, acute anxiety, nervous breakdowns, excessive rage, disgust, and tension with wife and children. Do we have to decide to leave the business world in order to cultivate our garden, or can we try to change the norms by evolution or revolution?

One of the most striking psychological aspects is the fact that most of the executives and owners of companies do not feel that they are to be blamed for transgressing the rights of stakeholders and minority shareholders. We have learned recently that one of the richest men in the world, whose company was sued for monopolistic behavior, is a fervent admirer of one of the most important books of the 20th century ‘The Great Gatsby’. His admiration is so acute that his wedding was designed in the roaring 20s-style described in the
novel and his very expensive home is decorated with citations of the novel. It would be interesting to learn if the following citation, which is practically the conclusion of the novel and its main moral, appears also on his walls.

Tom Buchanan, the capitalist tycoon who comes from a very rich American family, perceives Gatsby as a nouveau riche, a newcomer, who on top of this was the lover of his wife Daisy. He causes the death of Gatsby and after that washes his hands and his conscience, without any scruples, as those inferior creatures who do not belong to our clan do not matter. The author concludes: “I couldn’t forgive him or like him, but I saw that what he had done was, to him, entirely justified. It was all very careless and confused. They were careless people, Tom and Daisy – they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated into their money or their vast carelessness, or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made… I shook hands with him; it seemed silly not to for I felt suddenly as though I were talking to a child. Then he went into the jewelry store to buy a pearl necklace – or perhaps only a pair of cuff buttons – rid of my provincial squeamishness forever… Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgiastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that’s no matter – to-morrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther… And one fine morning - So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past.” (Scott Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby, p.107)

As long as the world will continue to treat the Buchanans as spoiled children who are not responsible for their actions, it will be impossible to change fundamentally the situation. But we should blame those who forgive them - usually because of cowardice. We hesitate to condemn the mighty. And we continue to shout at the donkey, as we are too afraid to confront the lion, the wolf or the fox. We cannot hope that the Buchanans of this world will all of a sudden be overcome by remorse. They will always continue to retreat in their wealth and appease their conscience by buying a pearl necklace. Therefore, it is necessary to fight and not condescend their immoral conduct, exactly as we condemn crimes performed by highway robbers. There is no difference between a bank robbery and a stakeholder or minority shareholder wrongdoing. And we have to define as theft every unethical act, even if the law cannot punish it. We could always sanction ethical crimes publicly, as this book advocates.

Charles Derber describes in his book ‘The Wilding of America’ the modern heroes, whom he calls sociopaths and savages, and compares them to the Iks of Uganda, known for their inhuman conduct. Boesky was proud of his greed, declaring in the 80s before a students’ assembly at Berkeley that ‘Greed is healthy. You can be greedy and still feel good about yourself.’ Milken, the God of Wall Street in the 80s, is described by some authors as the ultimate savage, in fact the greatest financial criminal of history. “One of Milken’s