

When a small child at our village fair with my weekly allowance (10¢) in my hot little hand, I was about to risk my all on a game whose barker, Genesis-snake-like, had diverted my attention from the family's no-gambling rule. Beholding my temptation, my father said "What would you do if you had a dollar?" I put the dime back into my pocket....Wm. Law: If you do one good deed, is it not rational to repeat that type of good deed as long as you live? (Ditto for an evil deed.)....Pauline Kael, my favorite movie-critic: "If there's anything to learn from the history of movies, it is that corruption leads to further corruption, not to innocence.""Propaedeutic" is preinstruction in the basic principles of a subject. My father's question was propaedeutic in how not to live. I've never put a dime, or even a penny, on anything. On this, I'm purer than the Puritans were. (Not that I thought you'd like to know; but to read this Thinksheet aright, you should know.)

1. Gambling and adultery, I'm told, are--like cocaine--fun if you don't get hooked. I wouldn't know, since my commitments have delivered me not only from those actions but even from the temptations thereto. I just have to take other people's word for it. But from the sobered reports of repeaters, I gather I've not been missing much. Besides, I've lots of less dangerous ways of getting my jollies. I have my temptations, but I thank God for joyful freedom from those three.

2. The KJV, of which in my teens I memorized great gobs, comes back to me: "If meat maketh my brother to offend, I will eat no meat while the world standeth, let I make my brother to offend" (1Cor.8¹³; this altruistic-ascetic principle is deeply Pauline: see the whole chapter, & chap.10 [esp. the central positive motivator, the glory of God, in v.3], and Ro.14-15⁷). But if you occasionally put a buck on a lottery, government or private, I wouldn't come down too hard on you on the ground that without you, compulsive gamblers wouldn't have that lottery to tempt them: I make no other use of alcohol, but I do have one drink at lunch. But then, should cocaine be available to the upperclass, since almost all of them have the self-discipline to keep it under control?

3. We are too long for the Kingdom of God (Ps.84²), not striking it rich: gambling corrupts, among other ways, by dollar-dreaming, & thus colludes with commercial advertising (the manipulation of product-&-services dreaming) to deepen the degrading of the citizen into the consumer, a bland stimulus-response creature in which the image of God is faded and blurred. "The mellowing power of commerce may keep the world sedated with material satiation. But can consumerism be a soporific without being a drug that degrades the soul?" (Geo. Will, 14 Aug 89 NW, p.66).

4. Gamblers of all degrees of commitment allege the innocence of the means: "There's nothing wrong with gambling in itself." It's the logic, too, of the NRA: "Guns don't kill people. People kill people."....And consumerism is killing the environment.

No more corruptive gambling

The proposed football lottery is one more scheme of government to corrupt us, the people of Massachusetts. Gambling corrupts. Government-sponsored gambling corrupts profoundly. Gov. Dukakis may not have to go to prison for it, but Gov. Kerner did.

When governor of Illinois Adlai Stevenson opposed the introduction of sports gambling (in that case, jai alai) into the state, I was acting president of the Illinois Council of Churches, and almost all of our 6,000 churches were actively resisting the incursion of this corruption. Church and government together kept the gamblers at bay.

But when Otto Kerner — he of the Kerner Report ("two nations, one white and one black") — became governor, he let the gamblers in, and went to prison for taking their money under the table. He had the honor of being the first Illinoisan to be corrupted by organized jai alai gambling.

America today is the world's outstanding obsessive-addictive society. Teaching two years at Harvard Busi-

ness School, Amitai Etzioni should not have been surprised to find a virtual absence of the moral sense, and "found no way to help" the students "see that there is more to life than money, power, fame and self-interest." Getting something for almost nothing in a lottery gives a high, cocaine gives a high — the drug cartel rips you off for the second, now the government threatens to increase its rip-off of you for the first.

We do right to cry out that our schools should teach "values." We should cry out also when government, at whatever level, threatens to reduce society's shrinking pool of residual values.

But is gambling corrupting? Ethicists ironically consider that question as at the same level of intelligence as the question "Is smoking harmful?" We the people are no longer letting the tobacco lobby dupe us. Let's stop letting the gamblers, including the pro-gambling lobby in Boston, dupe us.

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