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## **Gambling, Exchange Systems, and Moralities**

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History and ethnography show us that, across societies of the past and present, gambling varies considerably with respect to its organization, social meanings, and how it is regarded in moral terms. This paper presents a basic scheme for analyzing the relationship between gambling and society. A theoretical starting point is that reciprocity is fundamental to social and economic systems. An anthropological theory of exchange systems makes a broad distinction between a structural dimension (generalized versus balanced reciprocity) and a normative dimension (from voluntary to involuntary). A model of four basic forms of reciprocity, each having a characteristic exchange mode and morality, can thus be constructed. Gambling is here understood as an exchange system embedded in the reciprocal orders of society and having a necessary relationship to these; it can take on the characteristics of such an order or it can be regarded as conflicting with it. Much of the variation in the form and morality of gambling therefore emerges as systematic and explainable by a theory of forms of reciprocal exchange.

**KEYWORDS:** gambling; social anthropology; exchange systems; morality of gambling.

### **INTRODUCTION**

In society people exchange things – goods, services and information. Exchange constitutes the heart of society; it keeps social relations

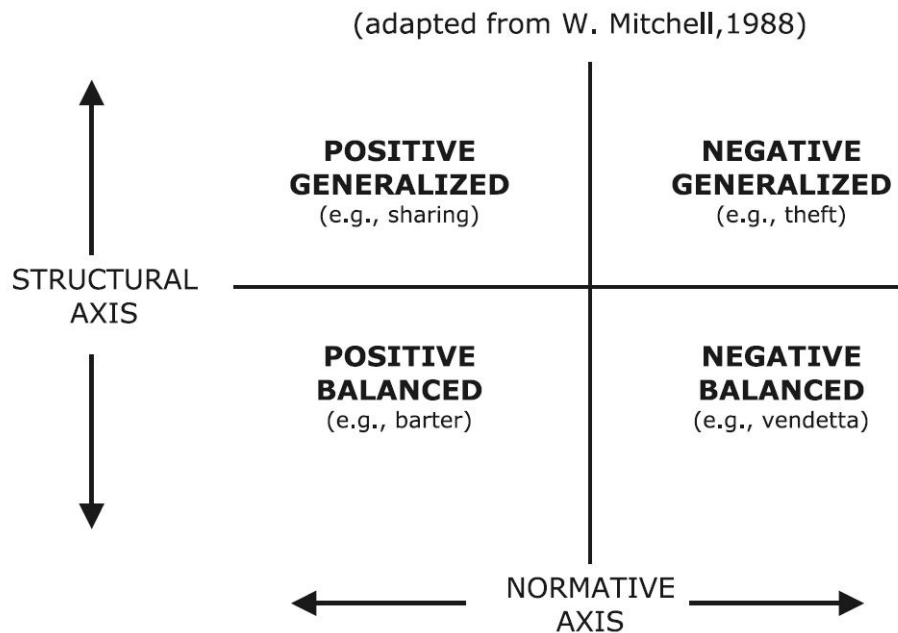
alive and distributes things of value within the social body. Consequently, social anthropologists have paid considerable attention to exchange systems and endeavored to reveal their constituting principles. Naturally enough, the economic systems of non-western societies have received much interest (LeClair & Schneider, 1968; Sahlins, 1972), as have ceremonial reciprocal systems in traditional societies (Malinowski, 1922; Mauss, 1990, orig. 1925). Other fields of research to which theories of exchange have been applied include kinship (Lévi-Strauss, 1969), the vendetta and other forms of blood revenge (e.g. Knudsen, 1985), and certain religious practices, such as cults of saints (Bois-sevain, 1966; Foster, 1963). By definition, gambling concerns money or other valuables. As in other exchange systems, in gambling items of value change hands according to conditional rules and thereby systemic patterns of flows of value emerge. Gambling can assume many diverse forms and be the subject of moral discourses ranging from the harshest denunciation to great appreciation. This paper argues that such variation in form and morality can be understood by taking into consideration the relationship between gambling and the forms of reciprocal exchange that are present in particular societies.

### **TYPES OF EXCHANGE**

Real-life exchanges take on many forms: the items exchanged are of various kinds, the terms and goals of exchange vary, and there are differences in terms of scale and frequency. To be of value for analysis and comparison, a typology of exchange needs to be abstract and systematic. One such typology has been proposed by William Mitchell (1988) (Figure 1). It elaborates the model of three types of reciprocities proposed by Marshal Sahlins (1968), which in turn was inspired by Polanyi's (1957b, 1959) thoughts on the principles of economic behavior.

The model presented in Figure 1 has two dimensions. There is a normative axis, ranging from positive to negative. "Positive" implies that something of value is voluntarily offered, that there is a measure of cooperation between the actors, whereas "negative" means that something of value is taken and that there is competition or antagonism. The structural axis ranges from generalized to balanced; that is, from little to

**Figure 1**  
**Four Modes of Reciprocal Exchange**



great concern that an item of value be exchanged for specific other item(s) of value, and also from exchange *within* a distinct social unit to exchange *between* two or a few individuals or groups. These two dimensions are combined into a model of four basic types of reciprocal exchange. The two axes should be seen as constituting a continuous field in which actual systems of exchange are positioned.

The *positive generalized* type of exchange is exemplified by the practice of sharing, common in egalitarian societies. In such societies there is an ethos that those who have plenty should share with those within the group who are less fortunate. To receive does not create a particular obligation to reciprocate to the donor; the morality is that everyone who at a certain time is above par with respect to food or desirable goods should be ready to share.

*Positive balanced* exchange is in this scheme a broad category, including barter. One farmer has, for instance, plenty of eggs but lacks potatoes. He finds someone with plenty of potatoes who would like

some eggs, and the two of them agree on the amounts to be exchanged. There might also be a time dimension: one farmer, for example, helps a neighbor to plough a field; in return he later gets help from him to plough his own field (delayed as opposed to immediate exchange). There is also a distinction between asymmetric and symmetric exchange. Feudal economies are an example of the former type: there is an exchange of goods and services between a center of power and a periphery of subjects (Polanyi, 1957b). In market economies, where exchange is predominantly symmetric, money functions as a generalized medium of exchange and the value of goods is determined, according to orthodox economic theory, through the balance between supply and demand. The moral framework of a market economy is that the parties who engage in transactions do so out of free will.

*Negative balanced* reciprocity entails an exchange of harmful actions between two, or a small number of, distinct parties. Valuable assets are taken against the will of another party or are destroyed so as to lower the other in relative standing, as in, for example, the vendetta and the blood feud. A particular person harms a member of another family; the harmful act might be theft, the destruction of property, or a physical assault, all having the effect of lowering the social prestige of the victim since he and his family is made to appear as weak and defenseless. In retaliation, members of the other family harm the antagonist or a member of his family, thereby demonstrating strength and determination to defend the family and its honor. This exchange of harms has a tendency to escalate: harm turns into manslaughter; manslaughter turns into a massacre that wipes out an entire family line. This process of escalation follows the principle of symmetric schismogenesis identified by Gregory Bateson (1973). Negative balanced reciprocity is a salient feature of societies characterized by weak or absent state power and competing factions or kin groups for which individuals feel their principal social belonging and obligation; honor is typically a moral value of paramount importance. Examples of such social settings in European history are Corsica (Wilson, 1988), Friuli (Muir, 1993), and Calabria (Brögger, 1971).

Finally, *negative generalized* exchange can be illustrated by the following example. Someone has stolen my car. Instead of buying another one, I roam the streets until I find a suitable car to steal. That car may belong to the person who stole my car, but probably does not;

it is simply somebody else's car. This type of reciprocity seems primarily to be persistent in societies where there is a temporary breakdown of the social and moral order, caused by, for instance, severe famine or abrupt and imposed cultural change. An example of this is the Ik of East Africa during the severe famine in the 1960s (Turnbull, 1974). Negative generalized reciprocity can, however, in some societies be present as an attitude adopted in relationships with non-kin. The South Italian concept of *furberia* illustrates this. *Furberia* is a positive quality referring to a person's ability to cheat others and to manipulate relationships to one's own advantage. It pertains to a cluster of ideas that contrasts the ideal harmony, unselfishness, and honesty characteristic of relationships within the family, with an image of relationships with non-kin as permeated by selfishness, rivalry, and dishonesty (Binde, 1999: pp. 22–30). Essentially, the morality justifying *furberia* is summarized by the following line of argument: "Since everyone else cheats and steals, I would be a fool not to do likewise."

An important point, illustrated by this example, is that different types of reciprocities typically coexist in a single society. For instance, within the family there may be positive generalized reciprocity, within the village positive balanced reciprocity, while the relationships between members of different villages might be characterized by negative generalized reciprocity. The moralities pertaining to each type of reciprocity are often conflicting, giving rise to disputes as to what is proper conduct in various contexts as well as to the elaboration of ethical arguments. In periods of extensive economic and social change such disputes are intensified, since ethical and moral issues need to be reconsidered in the light of new circumstances.

This model of four modes of reciprocal exchange bears some resemblance to models used in game theory, since it concerns systemic patterns of interaction. However, while game theory focuses on how actions and strategies of individual decision makers interact with those of others in a "game" (i.e. in situations subject to certain rules), the model of reciprocities outlines properties of four different types of socioeconomic systems, defined by prevailing patterns of interaction. These patterns become prevalent because exchange systems are institutionalized and have moral, customary, or legal sanction. Such institutions should not be seen as resulting from the aggregation of a multitude of individual exchanges. Institutions are rather formed by basic features of the organization of production and of social life, and

as institutions they shape the actual exchanges between individuals and groups (c.f. Polanyi, 1957a, p. 251). Institutionalized forms of reciprocity thus structure the actual arenas within which people venture to make exchanges and pursue various strategies in their individual interest, and they provide accompanying moral statements. Gambling is one such arena.

### **NEGATIVE GENERALIZED RECIPROCITY**

Let us consider a party that has gathered around a table to play poker for money. The players are good citizens who in their daily life are reasonably honest with each other and would not seriously think about cheating or swindling their friends. Once the poker game starts, their behavior changes radically (Hayano, 1982; Zurcher, 1970). They try to bluff each other by disguising their intentions and giving false impressions. Betting, verbal comments, and non-verbal gestures are permeated with deceit and lies. This otherwise reprehensible conduct has one sole aim: to appropriate money from other players and to win the game. Cooperation between players is considered a serious breach of etiquette or a form of cheating that disqualifies players from further participation in the game. Each gambler seeks to gain as much money as possible without much regard to the frustration that this might cause the others. All this takes place according to the motto and morality: “Once you’ve started, you must take the consequences.”

The poker party has all the characteristics of negative generalized reciprocity: it takes place within a specific social unit (the players at the table), it involves competition and antagonism, and the bets of the players are collected in a pot that goes to the winner of each deal (appropriation of value). Once the players sit down at the poker table, they have agreed to enter an arena where negative generalized reciprocity prevails.

As a form of generalized negative reciprocity, the poker game has a certain similarity to theft. That gambling, more generally, is indeed a form of theft and should therefore be condemned and outlawed is an argument that has recurred in various societies and at various times. We find this argument in the Jewish tradition as early as the Talmudic period (Margoliouth, 1913) and later in the writings of the Jewish scholar Moses Maimonides (ca. 1135–1204), in his influential *Mishneh Torah*

(Chapter 6, laws 7 and 10). In Christian tradition we find an early instance of the “gambling-is-theft” argument in a treatise written in 1577 by the minister John Northbrooke (1843, p. 122f). In the early twentieth century the authoritative *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* characterized gambling as a kind of robbery:

Its motive is, however carefully disguised, covetousness. It is an attempt to get property without paying the price for it. It is a violation of the law of equivalents. It is a kind of robbery by mutual agreement; but it is still robbery, just as dueling, which is murder by mutual agreement, is still treated as murder. (Paton, 1913: p. 166)

Today this argument is still put forward by conservative Lutheran voices. The proponents of the view that gambling is theft have recurrently felt compelled to comment on an obvious counterargument. This counterargument, which is especially evident to gamblers themselves, is that gambling cannot be a sort of theft, since it is a voluntary activity while the victims of theft become so involuntarily. The “gambling-is-theft” position deems this distinction to be of marginal significance, focusing instead on the state of mind and intentions of the moral person. The gambler and the thief are both assumed to be greedy, selfish, and prone to appropriate items of value without concern for others.

Questioning the morality of the gambler along this line of reasoning does not necessarily derive from a religious point of view. In his study of American horse-race bettors – many of whom are “inveterates” who spend much of their leisure time at the betting office – John Rosecrance (1985b: 96) notes that, “Many inveterates view poker players as aggressive, hostile individuals, since the winning player actually takes money from the hands of other players.” These horse-race bettors thus make a sharp distinction between their own form of preferred gambling, in which they all place bets against the bookmaker, and where the win of one individual does not immediately necessitate the loss of another, and that of poker players, in which the winner with an eye-catching gesture rakes in the pot consisting of other players’ money. This conception highlights the circumstance that different forms of gambling to a varying degree are suggestive of negative generalized reciprocity. The economic reality, however, is that neither bookmakers nor lottery companies altruistically give away money to gamblers; in the long run all wins come from the losses of other gamblers.

Thus, in terms of the abstract properties of exchange systems, gambling has similarities to theft, and this has been a cornerstone of a long tradition of religious and moral opposition to gambling. Generalized negative reciprocity is condemned according to the moral axiom “*Thou shalt not steal,*” which expresses the basic premise of positive balanced reciprocity, namely, that exchanges should be voluntary. Gambling is an activity with the capacity to frame generalized negative reciprocity within the context of games, separating it from the modes of exchange prevailing in society at large.

In all large-scale societies, however, there is a sphere of activity, repressed by the prevailing social order, which is permeated by negative generalized reciprocity: the criminal world. History shows that gambling and criminality often tend to merge. In some societies and at certain times – such as the USA for most of the twentieth century – the averse attitude toward gambling has included a perception that gambling is an activity that borders on or pertains to the criminal world (Hayano, 1977).

The connection between gambling and criminality is not just that gambling at certain times has been outlawed and therefore forced to coexist with other illegal activities. There is something inherent in gambling that at all times and in many societies has made it a favorite activity for people in or on the margins of the criminal world. It might be argued that this inherent feature is its structure of negative reciprocity. In the gambling environment, where players have consented to engage in games where they risk their money for the prospect of appropriating that of others, endless opportunities arise for devising cunning schemes of deception and fraud that have the potential of being very profitable.

The mainstream gambler, however, neither regards himself as a thief, nor does he feel like a victim of theft. He has voluntarily entered into an agreement with other gamblers or the organizer of the game that, depending on the game’s outcome, he is either to win or lose. Far from all Christians think of gambling as theft. The Roman Catholic Church, which for reasons that cannot be discussed here has a more permissive view on gambling than most Protestant churches, recognizes that gambling is a voluntary activity:

... it is not sinful to stake money on the issue of a game of chance any more than it is sinful to insure one’s property against risk, or deal in futures on the produce market. As I may make a free gift of my own property to another if I



choose, so I may agree with another to hand over to him a sum of money if the issue of a game of cards is other than I expect, while he agrees to do the same in my favour in the contrary event. (Slater, 1909)

Emphasizing the voluntariness of gambling, this representative of the Roman Catholic Church reaches the conclusion that gambling, far from being a kind of *theft*, is more like a *gift*. Gambling is hence viewed as an instance of positive, and not negative, reciprocity. We will now turn to a discussion of how gambling can be embedded in social institutions characterized by positive generalized reciprocity.

### POSITIVE GENERALIZED RECIPROCITY

In anthropology the term “egalitarian society” is used to designate a socio-political unit where social stratification among adult males is absent or comparatively unimportant, where political leadership is weak and informal, and where property is relatively equally distributed among households (Boehm, 1993). Hunter-gatherers are typically egalitarian, and so are many nomadic peoples. Egalitarianism is expressed by morals, norms, and customs that regulate the behavior of individuals; sharing is typically encouraged while egotism is condemned, and attempts at coercive domination are criticized or ridiculed.

One well-documented way in which an egalitarian ethos can be translated into social and economic action is by gambling (for an overview, see Wagner, 1998). A case in point is gambling among the Hadza of Tanzania, which has been described by the British anthropologist James Woodburn (1982). The Hadza are hunter-gatherers who inhabit a dry savannah territory, with thicker vegetation in the valleys, southeast of Lake Victoria. They live in groups that move camp once or twice a month. Women and children collect most of the roots, fruit, and berries, while the men are responsible for hunting. The practice of sharing food is essential to survival.

Hadza men are renowned for their intense gambling. When a camp is large enough to form a good gambling party, the men spend more time gambling than hunting or getting food. The game to which they devote themselves, *lukuchuko*, is played by tossing a few bark discs

and observing which sides of the disks turn up; it is essentially a game of chance. The men put at stake relatively valuable objects that are imported into the area, such as metal-headed hunting arrows, knives, axes, and beads. Essential hunting equipment necessary for survival (bows and ordinary arrows), as well as things that can be manufactured from local raw materials, are not staked.

Hundreds of games might be played in a camp in one day in the dry season. Each man prefers to bet objects that he can dispense with, while trying to keep objects that he has won and can use. In that way, each man has a good chance of getting valuable and useful objects that he needs. A similar adjustment, redistribution, and leveling of goods takes place between groups of Hadza at inter-camp visits. If, however, a player is lucky and wins a lot, he is under great pressure from the others to continue playing and stake what he has won, "... so that other competitors can win back their lost possessions" (p. 443). Woodburn (1982, p. 443f) concludes that gambling among the Hadza has a powerful leveling function that works towards egalitarianism; he notes that: "It is paradoxical that a game based on a desire to win and, in a sense, to accumulate should operate so directly against the possibility of systematic accumulation."

A similar leveling function of gambling has been reported among the Wape of Papua New Guinea (Mitchell, 1988). The Wape people live in the highlands of the Western Sepik province. They reside in small villages and subsist mainly on agriculture and pig-raising. Their sense of egalitarianism focuses on the autonomy of men: no man has the right to command another man. The Wape have a traditional ceremonial exchange system, with rigorous rules, in which pig meat is exchanged for money (formerly valuable shells). This system circulates wealth with the effect that it does not accumulate for long in the hands of any individual.

In traditional Wape society, prior to contact with the West, there were no games of chance. After World War II a card game – *laki* – was introduced, but this was superseded in the early 1960s by the dice game *satu*. Only men play *satu*, and the wagers on each throw of the dice are most often modest sums of money. However, gambling sessions can be quite long, and weekend-long games, starting on Friday afternoon and ending on Sunday, are common. When the men of a village want to stage a big game, they signal an invitation to gamblers from neighboring villages by beating on a huge wooden slit-drum.

As among the Hadza, a man who has been lucky and has won a lot is urged to continue playing, "... to give the losers a chance to recoup their losses" (Mitchell, 1988: p. 643). Although men state that they participate out of a desire to win money, the game functions as "... a leveling device that deals with the increase of wealth generated by participation in a capitalist market system and a felicitous innovation for maintaining the cultural *status quo*" (p. 650). The traditional exchange system also prevented one man from gaining advantage over another in terms of wealth, but its drawn-out exchange transactions have made it increasingly unsuitable for dealing with the rapidly fluctuating amount of cash which is an effect of contact with the modern market economy. *Satu* gambling, however, circulates wealth in instantaneous transactions, and it addresses a contradiction in present day Wape society:

... men, while united against the economic advance of others, at the same time aspire to individual wealth. This critical disjunction in the contemporary male ethos in which they aspire both to an egalitarian past and a hierarchical future is central to their dilemma as modern men. (Mitchell, 1988, p. 650)

A third ethnographic example is the Tiwi of North Australia, whose ways of gambling have been described by the anthropologist Jane Goodale (1987). In this aboriginal group the men are traditionally responsible for hunting while the women forage in the bush and along the shore. In the 1980s these activities were still pursued, but about a third of the adults were employed in wage labor and many also received income from social-security pensions. The Tiwi are described as "almost militantly egalitarian when it comes to individual expectations of equal opportunity for achieving personal distinction" (p. 16). Food should always be shared; a family that had an unlucky day hunting and foraging could ask for a share of the food from a family that had plenty.

The Tiwi spend considerable time playing two kinds of card games, and gambling is especially intense in the days following the payment of wages and pensions. Women are the most experienced and skilful players. A good deal of cheating goes on, and two players may team up against the others. If one player runs out of money, he or she may continue playing using "spirit money" – that is, betting on credit. Women share their winnings with their kin. Goodale concludes (p. 15)

that “the most obvious economic effect of participating in these two games was to redistribute the available cash throughout all age groups and genders.” Just as food is shared among households, cash is shared through the card games.

To conclude, according to several anthropologists with field experience in egalitarian societies, gambling has a leveling economic function. Considering the statistical principles of games one might ask, however, how gambling can fulfill this function. Suppose that a chance game is played intensely among a group of people and that the amount of wealth that each individual initially has at his or her disposal for stakes varies. In a given period of time, a comparatively well-to-do person might lose some or all of his fortune, but he might also increase it. In fact, a rich person has an advantage over a poor person, because the rich person can sustain a longer run of losses than a poor person before going bankrupt.

Also recurrent in anthropological accounts is the demand, on the part of losers, to have an opportunity to “win back” what has been lost (Maclean, 1984, p. 49; Mitchell, 1988, p. 643; Woodburn, 1982, p. 443; Zimmer, 1986, p. 249). None of the writers who report this practice discuss it much further, but seem to accept that such “win-back” gambling sessions actually contribute to the leveling of wealth among the players. It is not, however, self-evident that continued gambling would allow a loser to recoup his or her losses. Everyone who is familiar with games of chance knows that one does not simply walk back to the gambling table and win back what one has lost, as continued gambling could well mean continued losses. Therefore, if gambling has a leveling function in egalitarian settings, it ought to be subject to some specific condition, or combination of conditions.

One such condition could be that the games played should involve some skill. Then experienced players may challenge less skilled and wealthier players, who more or less voluntarily agree to play in order to fulfill cultural norms and expectations. These experienced players will, of course, have a very good chance of winning.

Another possible condition is that the players engage in a chance game that is not fair. We should keep in mind that the social expectations are that the wealthy should distribute their assets to less-fortunate people. The less wealthy “ought to” win from the wealthy when gambling, and this is also, according to the reports, a major purpose for staging gambling sessions. Less wealthy gamblers may form teams that

use more or less honest tactics for winning money from wealthy players (Goodale, 1987, p. 14; Zimmer, 1986, p. 248). Furthermore, the gambling equipment used is far from the perfectly balanced roulette wheels of Las Vegas, and there are no “pit bosses” who carefully supervise, ensuring that rules are strictly followed. Thus, one can assume that due to group pressure from other players and onlookers, the enforcement of the rules of the game, as well as the reading of the results of its turns, could become biased in favor of less-wealthy players (c.f. Sexton, 1987). In that case, given the typically long gambling sessions that comprise hundreds of turns of the game, the chances of these players winning money or valuables are dramatically increased, even if the odds are just slightly in their favor.

Finally, it may be that even if the game is fair, wealth flows from rich to poor for reasons not pertaining to the game *per se*. Intense gambling sets money and valuables in motion; wealth changes hands over and over again as it flows back and forth between the players. In this situation, social and moral norms may have a systematic impact on the direction of the flows of wealth. If, for instance, there is a tendency to remit the gambling debts of those who are poor, then wealth will flow from rich to poor. This would thus comply with the observation, concerning egalitarian societies, that “levelling mechanisms come into operation precisely at the point where the potential for the development of inequalities of wealth, power and prestige is greatest” (Woodburn, 1982, p. 440).

In the article referred to above about gambling among the Wape, William Mitchell (1988: 647) argues that gambling is “a dynamic form of negative generalized reciprocity in which money is cycled within a community of gamblers.” In a certain sense, this is true. If the intentions of gamblers are considered, the activity appears as negative generalized reciprocity because everyone wishes to win and the wealth won comes from other gamblers. The intention to lose money to others through gambling seems to be rare.

However, despite the intentions of gamblers to enrich themselves, gambling is regarded positively in all the ethnographic cases discussed above. Among the Tiwi, gambling is considered a form of “work,” a bona fide activity that brings money to the family (Goodale, 1987). There is nothing in the ethnographies to suggest that gambling is considered immoral or wrong. Instead gambling is embedded in an ethos of positive generalized reciprocity, honoring egalitarianism and

sharing. As an institution, gambling serves the same purpose as the sharing of food and other vital assets.

### **NEGATIVE BALANCED RECIPROCITY**

As mentioned earlier, notions of prestige are often salient in systems of balanced negative reciprocity, such as feuding. Prestige is a valuable social asset that not only gives personal satisfaction, but also, through its social force, favors the acquisition of desirable things in life, both material and immaterial. Prestige is a “social currency” that can be used to influence social relations and can be converted to material wealth. The notion of prestige presupposes social hierarchy, since prestige essentially is relative: for someone to be ascribed high status there must be those who have lower status.

Prestige is ascribed to a person by others and is based mainly on two conditions: the holding of a prestigious office, or the performance of acts that conform to an idealized image of how to conduct oneself in certain crucial situations. In the first case, it is the office that is prestigious and the behavior of the incumbent must comply only with certain minimal requirements. In the second case, status is predominantly a question of personal conduct as it is judged by others. This condition requires that prestige regularly be affirmed by action, such as the distribution of valuables, the performance of feats of bravery, or the demonstration of highly valued social skills.

When prestige has to be regularly affirmed by behavior, others are in a position to contest it by staging actions that require a public and appropriate response. Among the old European aristocracy, a slap on the face delivered in public signified a challenge that typically resulted in the loss of honor of the victim unless he agreed to a duel (Kiernan, 1988). High-stakes gambling is a suitable occasion for the public reaffirmation and contestation of prestige. It is a crucial test of character (Goffman, 1969), as the conduct of the gamblers is open to public inspection in the critical situation of experiencing great wins or losses.

Such was the character of much of the gambling reported among the Indians of the Pacific Northwest of North America (Aginsky & Aginsky, 1950; Culin, 1907; Desmond, 1952; Maranda, 1984), people who were intensely preoccupied with prestige. Gambling for high

stakes that involved issues of prestige was also present among many other North American Indian tribes from the time of early colonization up to the first decades of the nineteenth century (Blanchard, 1979; Culin, 1907; Flannery & Cooper, 1946; Macleod, 1925; Mooney, 1983; Reagan & Waugh, 1919; Trigger, 1990, p. 188f). Ethnographic accounts of North American Indians abound with descriptions of competitive gambling for enormous stakes in which one party – a man, a section of a tribe, or a tribe – challenged an opponent to a game. To refuse the challenge or to accept defeat while in the game was very costly in terms of prestige, and consequently the bets were raised and re-raised until huge amounts of wealth and property were wagered. Sometimes such games ended with one of the parties being completely stripped of wealth. As a last resort, children, wives, and even the gambler himself – offering himself as a slave for a certain period of time – could be put at stake (Macleod, 1925).

Thus, high-stakes gambling among the North American Indians often assumed the form of negative balanced reciprocity. The purpose of engaging in such gambling was not primarily a desire to enrich oneself economically, but rather to challenge the prestige of an opponent or outright enemy. It was a battle for the most valuable asset of all – prestige – in which valuables were used as weapons. The stakes were increased during the course of the game, just as acts of hostility tend to escalate in feuds and armed battles.

Therefore such gambling closely resembles a well-known practice of the Kwakiutl and other Indian tribes of the Pacific Northwest of North America, the competitive potlatch feast (Benedict, 1934; Boas, 1897; Codere, 1950). At these feasts, men who competed for prestige and positions of status showed-off their wealth in a determined effort to outdo their guests. The invited guests were showered with food and gifts, and property could be destroyed in the most ostentatious ways to suggest that the wealth of the hosts was immense. Thus, property could in these ceremonies be transformed into prestige. The potlatch often became, as the Indians themselves put it, a “fight with property” (Codere, 1950) that had replaced fighting with weapons – a kind of duel for prestige in which the weapon used was wealth.

As a form of negative balanced reciprocity, high-stakes gambling, like the *potlatch*, is thus equivalent to war and feuding (Mauss, 1990, orig. 1925). This equivalence was expressed in many ways. For instance, Lacrosse, a sport on which there often was heavy wagering,

was by some tribes referred to as the “little brother of war” (Vennum, 1994), in Zuñi culture there was a close connection between gambling and the gods of war (Coxe Stevenson, 1903), and the hand game was commonly likened to warfare (DeBoer, 2001, p. 234).

A similar juxtaposition of high-stakes gambling and physical violence within a social space of prestige was present in nineteenth century Russia (Helfant, 2001). Like the Kwakiutl, the Russian gentry were preoccupied with personal and family prestige. Individuals were hypersensitive to all challenges to their honor; trivial arguments and even simple misunderstandings could rapidly escalate into confrontations in which the honor of the contestants was at stake. The ultimate step in such an escalating conflict was the challenge to a duel, in which the parties showed that they were willing to risk their life to defend honor. A comparable process of rapid escalation in matters concerning prestige could take place at the gaming table. The game became a battle arena between hostile men that attracted much interest among onlookers and was stored in the collective memory by becoming the subject of conversations and anecdotes. One gambler ostentatiously challenged another, and raised the stakes to great or enormous amounts of wealth, sometimes including entire estates or inherited fortunes. The other player either had to quit the game and accept defeat and loss of prestige, or to stay in it, thereby risking large sums of money but accepting the challenge of prestige. The analogue between gambling and physical violence was expressed also by card games being a favorite pastime among military officers; the risks and confrontations experienced on the battlefield found their symbolic equivalent at the gaming table (Helfant, 2001, p. 9). The affinity between high-stakes gambling and dueling has also been noted among the gentry of other countries in pre-industrial Europe (Kavanagh, 1993, ch. 2; Kiernan, 1988, p. 154; Walker, 1999) as well as among the wealthy in the southern states before the American Civil War (Wyatt-Brown, 1982, ch. 13).

The high stakes of “gambling duels” thus signify the importance of the event, indicating that the confrontation between the two parties has reached its ultimate level. We have seen that *the one who backs out* of a game suffers a great loss in prestige, and that each of the contestants hopes that the other will not dare to bet even larger amounts. We have also learnt that the winner of the game will always maintain or raise his prestige, but what about the *loser* of a completed game? His fate with



respect to prestige depends on how closely wealth is linked to social position in a particular social environment.

If social position is largely determined by wealth, then it is significantly affected by a substantial gambling loss. This seems to have been the case, for instance, among the Gros Ventre Indians in Montana. While the winner gained greatly in status and prestige, the loser lost proportionately; the loser became a “defeated and disgraced nobody” (Flannery & Cooper, 1946, p. 398f). Getting ruined at gambling among the wealthy bourgeoisie of eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe, for whom wealth was the determinant of social position, led to a similar loss of prestige.

If, however, prestige is essentially disconnected from wealth, the fate of the loser in high-stakes competitive gambling is more favorable. In some societies the high prestige of certain social classes is construed as depending on qualities other than the possession of wealth, for instance, noble descent. In order to emphasize this conception of prestige, wealth might be ostentatiously dismissed as being of no essential importance. To suffer heavy losses while gambling then becomes a public denial of the social value of wealth for oneself and for the social class to which one pertains.

A case in point is the French gentry of the eighteenth century, a time when the privileged social position of this class was challenged by the increasingly powerful bourgeoisie. The concept of nobility was based on the idea that an ancestor once had risked his life and blood on the battlefield in a heroic struggle for the king and the emerging nation (Kavanagh, 1993, ch. 2). This noble quality was construed to be inherited from one generation to the next through shared blood. For the nobility high stakes gambling symbolically served a dual purpose: to reaffirm their inherited predisposition to be ready to face risk, and eventual losses proclaimed “the individual’s superiority to the ever more imperious rule of money” (Kavanagh, 1993, p. 44).

An ostentatious indifference to wealth among the gentry when gambling has been documented in an earlier historical period (ca. 1500–1700) in the Republic of Venice by the historian Jonathan Walker (1999). The aristocratic gambler who lost a fortune did not automatically lose in honor; rather, by showing indifference he could convert losses into prestige. Walker suggests that in the seventeenth century the increasing preoccupation with high-stakes gambling, as well as the

stereotype of the noble and indifferent loser, should be seen as a reaction to a shift in economics as well as legislation that implied that wealth was given more relative weight compared to virtue in defining the nobility:

Just as the duel was used in France to assert the nobility's independence from the legal control of the crown, so gambling was used in Venice to assert the independence of nobles from the economic control of the state – money was staked on the turn of a card as blood was staked on an infinitesimal “point” of honour. (p. 67)

Returning to the North American Indians, we also find among them examples of gambling where heavy losses did not result in a corresponding loss of prestige, but rather an increase. This seems to have been the case mostly among the tribes of the eastern part of the continent, where “liberality rather than possession carried prestige” (Kroeber, 1920, p. 275), such as the Huron (Herman, 1956), but also among some tribes of the west, for instance the Yakima in the state of Washington. Among the latter tribe, the person who refused to meet wagers offered by others lost status but the “heroic gambler, who risked all of his wagerable property but a horse or two” and lost it, was compensated for his material losses by a gain in prestige (Desmond, 1952: 50ff).

In the examples above the loser in duel-like gambling gains in prestige. However, to acquire status by means of squandering large sums of money and thereby gain a favorable reputation within a certain group is neither confined to gambling in a context of negative balanced reciprocity, nor need it be connected to an aristocratic notion that money means nothing to a nobleman. The gaining of prestige is potentially present whenever large sums are wagered. The French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss remarked (1969, p. 56), when discussing the principle of reciprocity, that: “doubtless gambling provides, in modern society, the most striking picture of these transfers of wealth with the sole purpose of gaining prestige”. Betting in this way seems most often to be intended to signify that the gambler has so much money that a loss, in spite of appearing huge to others, is insignificant to him. Such gambling can be understood as a form of “conspicuous consumption” (Veblen, 1970), which easily becomes the target of moralistic condemnation from a variety of standpoints that have in common that

it is an absurd and vain waste of money that could be used for much better purposes.

To sum up, in this section we have discussed gambling as an arena within which escalating confrontations to challenge social prestige take place. The confrontations are dyadic – there are two opposing parties, each of which strives to appropriate the wealth put at stake – but prestige is the essential value in the game. Gambling emerges as a form of negative balanced reciprocity and it is often complementary to, or metaphorically related to, physically violent forms of negative balanced reciprocity, such as dueling, feuding, and war. The morality of such gambling is derived from indigenous notions of prestige. The one who does not accept a challenge is regarded as a coward worthy only of disdain. So powerful is the notion of prestige in this form of gambling that behavior, which to an outside observer might appear as a totally senseless gamble with enormous amounts of wealth, by the participants themselves is viewed as the only possible way to act.

#### **POSITIVE BALANCED RECIPROCITY: TRADITIONAL EXCHANGE SYSTEMS**

Positive balanced reciprocity implies a voluntary transaction between two parties in which something of value is traded for something else of value. As pointed out in the introduction, this is a broad category of exchange, including both elaborate ceremonial systems of exchange in traditional societies and commerce in modern market economies. This section discusses gambling in the former case; the next section, in the latter case.

An example of how gambling functions in a society with a ceremonial exchange system is found among the Gende, a New Guinean people (Zimmer, 1986, 1987a, b). The Gende are shifting cultivators having sweet potatoes and taro as staple crops. Each individual engages in a multitude of transactions with others, some of which extend over decades. A person incurs debts to parents and kinsmen who care for him or her in childhood and youth, and who sponsor ceremonial events, such as initiation and puberty ceremonies. These debts have to be repaid in adulthood, when a person begins to sponsor and help others with the intent of creating obligations that must be repaid later. Debts and obligations are not cancelled at death, but should be paid and fulfilled

by relatives or others with whom the deceased had ongoing transactions. Nowadays cash is involved in exchanges, while traditional items of value were pigs, certain feathers, animal skins, and food. The exchange system regularly intensifies with the occurrence of large-scale distributions of food and pigs in which thousands of persons might participate. The Gende have a typical New Guinean “big man” system, in which certain individuals – both men and women – through the extensive redistribution of valuables and food succeed in attaching to themselves a large number of followers, thereby gaining reputation and social importance (Sahlins, 1963).

In the mid 1980s, according to the anthropologist Laura Zimmer (1986), card games for money were played almost every day, some games lasting up to several weeks. Two games were popular: the chancy *tri-lip* was favored when the stakes were high, while *seven*, a more complex game with a significant element of skill, was usually played when the bets were more modest. Players gambled individually or formed teams of two in order to get an edge over a wealthier player.

The amount of cash possessed by individual villagers varied considerably. People regularly left the villages on the northern slopes of the Bismarck Mountains for wage labor elsewhere and brought cash back home or sent cash remittances to relatives in the home village. Therefore, at one time certain people had plenty of cash while others had little; at another time the fortunes were reversed.

The Gende were critical of those who gambled for money that, according to the conventions of the traditional exchange system, ought to have been used for someone else; therefore much of the money wagered was the excess money of wealthy players. To lose at cards was not equated with losing money, and one informant stated: “You don’t have to worry. Your money isn’t gone, it isn’t stolen. You know who has it” (p. 249). The loser was conceived of as a “good person,” just as if he had distributed some of his wealth. If the loser was not satisfied with this social reward and for the moment preferred cash rather than enhanced reputation, he could demand that the game should continue so that he had a chance to win back his lost money (p. 249). Winners were expected to “invest” their winnings by, for instance, acquiring baby pigs, buying trade goods that could be sold for a profit, or simply buying food or tobacco to give away as gifts to fellow villagers. People who used winnings to buy food for themselves were said to make the money “die,” and were unlikely to be invited to further gambling.

Hence, card playing among the Gende distributed the excess cash of those who at the moment were wealthier. The cash was dispersed over a greater number of people, who all were expected to find good “investments” for it – investments that benefited the village economy and the reciprocal system at large. The loser in a game may lose cash, but he thereby became a “good person” and won in terms of prestige; he could later convert this “goodness” into material assets. Thus, gambling complements the traditional exchange system because it is more dynamic; gambling sets money in motion rapidly and radically shortens the duration of transactions, which decreases the risk of not getting a return due to unforeseen events (p. 259). Zimmer (1986, p. 260) concludes:

Gende card playing is an innovative attempt to solve both the problems of inequality and uncertainty. It supports the exchange system by redistributing cash for investment, and complements it by providing an alternative arena – the game network – for interpersonal exchange and involvement. It does this by converting loose money which may “die,” if invested unwisely, into “live” money.

Gambling among the Gende is thus quite similar to gambling among the Wape, referred to earlier. In both cases gambling complements a ceremonial exchange system in which money as well as traditional forms of wealth circulate, and wealth becomes more evenly distributed. Still another New Guinean example of gambling serving these two purposes is that found among the Maring, where gambling “blurs the distinctions between the different political and moral domains constituted by ... separate spheres of exchange” (Maclean, 1984, p. 57).

The capacity of gambling to redistribute and circulate wealth and scarce assets in non-Western societies is not unique to New Guinea. For instance, gambling among Canadian Inuits redistributes rifle ammunition of various calibers, essential for hunting, and more generally converts wealth between separate economic spheres (Riches, 1975). It has also been suggested that in traditional Inuit society, gambling worked in the interests of greater security and survival in a precarious natural environment through circulating and distributing useful tools and equipment (Glassford, 1970). Furthermore, an overview of gambling in Asia claims that gambling serves as an alternative way to distribute wealth, complementing ordinary channels: “Chinese kinship

distributions were centripetal or toward a centre while gambling was centrifugal or outward” (Price, 1972, p. 162).

When gambling complements other exchange systems it typically seems to be surrounded by a measure of moral ambiguity. Among the Gende, those who used money that ought to have been invested in the traditional exchange system were criticized (Zimmer, 1986, p. 260), while among the Maring some people are reported to dislike gambling since losses incurred had brought to an end local commercial enterprises, which are part of a growing modern market economy (Maclean, 1984). In the New Guinean examples referred to, it seems as if intense gambling constitutes a transitional phase between a nonmonetary traditional economy and a modern market economy; gambling circulates the increasing influx of cash that cannot properly be handled by traditional reciprocal systems. But as the modern market economy becomes more dominant, gambling is increasingly questioned. It may provide to the lucky gambler the economic means needed to “get going” in the commercial economic sphere, but it can also mean disaster to the local enterprise of an unlucky gambler.

### **POSITIVE BALANCED RECIPROCITY: MODERN MARKET ECONOMIES**

In modern Western societies and in much of the rest of the world, the most widespread form of gambling is commercial, run by private or state-controlled enterprises. The total world-wide turnaround of gambling in 2001 is estimated to have amounted to approximately USD 900 billion (report from the British company Global and Betting Consultants, Morais, 2002). Gambling has become a commodity that is sold and bought. Viewed as a positive balanced reciprocal system, gamblers exchange money (their bets) for the pleasure and excitement of participating in games and for the chance to win.

The consumption value of commercial gambling is multifaceted. At the general level, gambling can be viewed as simply one leisure activity among many, such as going on holiday or playing golf (e.g. Cotte, 1997). More specifically, commercial gambling in modern societies has a wide range of appeal that can be regarded as having five major dimensions: (1) Some people engage only in forms of gambling that have a social dimension. It might be that gambling provides an

opportunity to socialize with others, such as when visiting a casino or a bingo parlor (Dixey, 1982; Hope & Havir, 2002), or to compete with others (Goffman, 1969). (2) Another appeal, salient in horse and sports betting where an ambitious gambler must process huge amounts of information on past performance, is gambling as an intellectual challenge (Ceci & Liker, 1986; Rosecrance, 1985b). (3) Some forms of gambling, such as slot machines, have a power to absorb gamblers in a highly focused and exciting activity. The world outside the gambling activity is effectively shut-off, creating a state of dissociation that by some gamblers is perceived as pleasant (Dow Schull, 2002; Griffiths, 1994; Jacobs, 1988). (4) There simply is the pleasure of winning, even if the sums won are small and no skill has been exercised. This appeal of gambling has curiously enough been little addressed in the literature. To win at gambling has a symbolic value. Just as a birthday gift of insignificant value can mean a lot to the person who receives it, because it symbolizes the friendly intentions of the giver and speaks of the social relation between giver and receiver, a gambling win has a special meaning. To win can be perceived as a sign that one's luck is about to turn, a confirmation that good things do happen in life, or that one might receive things "for free" in a world where one is expected to give in order to receive. "Luck" in this sense is a secular counterpart to the religious concept of grace (Binde, 1999, p. 110f; Binde, 2003; Pitt-Rivers, 1992; Walker, 1999, p. 53). Finally (5) there is the dream of the "Big Win," the main appeal of lotteries. Lottery companies have thus been regarded as "selling hope" (Clotfelter & Cook, 1989; Griffiths, 1997), and those who buy lottery tickets have been called "dream buyers" (Campbell, 1976; Forrest, Simmons, & Chesters, 2002). In the imagery of the "Big Win" there is such an enormous discrepancy between the sum wagered and the sum won, that the notion of reciprocity becomes irrelevant and is replaced by either a conceptual void ("Why me – this is incomprehensible") or quasi-religious conceptions relating to the just-mentioned hybrid notion of luck/grace. The "Big Win" inspires imagery of wealth and happiness freely bestowed upon the chosen by so high a power that it is above and outside all systems of reciprocity. It is not unusual for winners of huge lottery prizes to imagine that they have been blessed by divine powers (Kaplan, 1988), and winners are subject to public discourse as to whether or not they "deserve" the win (Davies, 1997; Falk & Mäenpää, 1999).

It should be noted that this wide range of appeal is not commonly present in traditional or small-scale societies, where the number of gambling games is usually comparatively small and the social contexts of gambling are more uniform. Commercial gambling in a market society has an intrinsic tendency to diversify into various forms through the efforts of gambling operators to increase their profit. In the past 20 years this tendency has in most Western societies been accentuated, as the gambling market has been allowed more leeway from state intervention.

The moral discourse on gambling in modern Western societies has varied significantly over time (Rose, 2003). A major change in this discourse occurred in most countries sometime in the 1950s or 1960s, coinciding with a shift from a perception of citizens as *producers* to citizens as *consumers* (Abt, Smith, & Christiansen, 1985, ch. 6; Cosgrave & Classen, 2001).

A host of arguments against gambling, current in the industrializing era, relied upon a view of citizens as primarily *producers* who should embrace a puritan work ethic of thrift and frugality (Dixon, 1991; Reith, 1999; Thorner, 1956). Gambling was understood to disrupt the proper correspondence between work and reward because it promises great wealth for little effort, thereby eroding the moral value of thrift. It was considered an unproductive activity that occupied the time and attention of citizens who instead should devote their time and energy to fruitful work and businesses (Dixon, 1991; McKibbin, 1979). In terms of exchange, the citizen should sell his time and energy on the labor market and not squander it on useless games. Such views, which often amalgamated with religious arguments against gambling, such as the “gambling-as-theft” argument discussed above, had a decisively paternalistic character. The working classes were considered to be uneducated and subject to all sorts of misconceptions regarding the chances of winning at gambling.

While this essentially was a middle class critique of gambling, the denunciation of gambling from a socialist viewpoint during this period of time was not much different. It too relied on a paternalistic conception of the working class gambler as ignorant of the true exploitative nature of gambling and squandering his time and money on futile games in the hope of getting rich. The gambler was urged to give up his bourgeoisie hope of easy money and instead fight for social justice. The entire market system, in which labor is exchanged for money according



to positive balanced reciprocity, was condemned; it should be replaced by a socialist society relying on positive generalized reciprocity, where individual aspirations of wealth obtained by gambling or otherwise would be absent.

Since the 1950s and the 1960s the attitude towards gambling has become more accepting and this relate to the rise of the “affluent society” and its emphasis on consumption and leisure rather than production and work. This shift in attitude is part of a more general change in moral values (Clotfelter & Cook, 1989). Swearing, homosexuality, divorce, abortion, living together without marriage, women smoking and drinking in public, and the showing of nudity in public media – these are all phenomena that, along with gambling, are no longer considered as morally deplorable as before, if deplorable at all (Burnham, 1993). It is possible to regard these changes in attitudes as related to an increasingly commercialized society where individuals are not only regarded as having the freedom to choose among products on the market, but also among a variety of life-styles. It has thus been argued that: “Gaming perfectly meets the standards of postmodern consumption. It is a trade in illusions. Money is almost instantly turned into fun, identity, status, hope (and profit to operators)” (Kingma, 1996, p. 219).

Most importantly, gambling has been redefined: from being regarded as something more or less morally dubious, it is now regarded as a leisure activity. In Sweden, for instance, spending a day at the race track is now-a-days perfectly normal, for some assuming the form of an enjoyable family picnic, at which camping chairs and tables are set up beside the finish. Almost gone is the former stereotype of the racecourse habitué as a middle-aged man obsessed by horses and futile dreams of winning a fortune. Similarly, 50 years ago many people felt ashamed to buy a lottery ticket at one of the few authorized agents; today lottery tickets are bought along with newspapers and groceries at newsstands and grocery stores, and few think that there is anything wrong with that.

Furthermore, if citizens are primarily viewed as consumers, none of the arguments against gambling that relate to the work ethic have much relevance. Everyone is free to choose how to spend his or her leisure time and money. Whether or not to gamble is a personal choice; some people have a preference for gambling, just as others choose to spend

time and money on, for instance, breeding dogs, going to the movies, or owning a sailboat. Essentially, the morality is that everyone is responsible for his or her own choices with regard to consumption and spending money (Panasitti & Schull, 1994).

This notion of gambling as a consumer activity thus frees the gambler from moral stigma. The moral discourse has instead shifted to gambling as an enterprise and its regulation. In all Western societies, the state regards gambling as a special kind of enterprise subject to specific regulations. There seem to be three main reasons for this.

First, the gambling business is viewed as especially likely to become fraudulent and criminal. This standpoint relates to the historical connection, discussed earlier, between gambling and criminality. If gambling is to become a consumer product, then care must be taken to keep it well within the boundaries of the law. Therefore gambling companies in most Western countries are state-owned or strictly supervised firms that have been licensed to run a gambling business for a specific period. A frequent argument for legalizing various forms of gambling is to cut the link between gambling and criminality. Since it has proved practically impossible to suppress illegal gambling businesses, run by the underworld, it is concluded that it is better to offer gambling in a legal and controlled form. Thus, illicit forms of negative reciprocity are by means of state regulations replaced by controlled forms of balanced reciprocity.

Second, there is the concern that gambling revenues should go into public funds or be used for good causes. This reason for regulating gambling seems to stem from the notion that there is something morally questionable about gambling as a large-scale business that needs to be neutralized by introducing something morally noble. Judging from public debate on the issue, there seems to be the perception that gamblers spend their money on games without full knowledge of the poor odds of winning, driven by the futile hope of big and easy money and often encouraged by questionable advertising and marketing of gambling products. Gambling revenues are therefore tainted: they derive from a kind of “swindle” that is unavoidable in commercial gambling, since all players cannot possibly be fully knowledgeable of the statistics of games.

To allow private companies and individuals to profit from such a business appears in many countries as morally questionable. This would be to accept negative reciprocity in an economic sphere where ideally

there should be positive balanced reciprocity. However, the taint of gambling revenues can be removed if gambling is made to appear as positive generalized reciprocity, that is, as a kind of gift to the deserving. Thus the revenues from video lottery terminals (VLTs) may, as in Sweden, finance sport and leisure activities for youth. Often, however, the state decides to let gambling revenues go directly into state coffers without earmarking them. This also has to do, in part, with the perception of gambling revenues as “tainted.” Many would find it reprehensible if essential good causes, such as care for cancer patients or the elderly, were financed by gambling profits. Such services belong to the primary responsibilities of the state and should not rely on something as questionable as income from gambling business. Therefore the good causes financed by gambling revenues tend to be those that in a welfare state are not considered necessary but are nevertheless commendable.

The third major reason for state regulation of gambling is the view that some people are unable to make free choices when gambling because they are addicted. Viewed over a couple of centuries, heavy indulgence in gambling has been redefined from first being considered a result of sinfulness, then as caused by either irrationality or a propensity to vice, until today it is viewed as a pathological state (Reith, 1999; Rose, 1988).

Although psychoanalysis early viewed heavy gambling as a psychopathology (Bergler, 1958; Freud, 1961, orig. 1928; Simmel, 1920), the modern notion of the pathological gambler emerged as recently as the 1980s (Collins, 1996). This notion is part of a more general trend toward viewing behaviors that were earlier considered as morally corrupt or criminal as instead resulting from illness (Castellani, 2000; Conrad, 1992; Rosecrance, 1985a; Rossol, 2001). There is no general agreement among researchers as to the precise nature of pathological gambling (Blaszczynski & Nower, 2002). However, the concept of addiction is currently most often favored, both by scientists and in the public debate, with respect to the behavior of the excessive gambler who ruins not only his finances but also his life. The concept of addiction puts the notion of gambling as a consumer product in a different light; gambling is not just another leisure product – gambling is a drug like alcohol, tobacco, or narcotics. Most people do not get addicted, but some do and this is an issue of public health. In terms of exchange systems, the notion of the gambler as addicted is incompat-

ible with the notion of commercial gambling as positive balanced reciprocity, since the gambler does not voluntarily engage in gambling but is forced to do so by his illness.

In many Western societies, therefore, the moral discourse on gambling is today dominated by a critical attitude towards gambling entrepreneurs and state authorities that allow gambling in its current scale and form, understood to incite pathological gambling. Gambling addicts are viewed as having little or no responsibility for their condition or behavior, because they are ill. Stricter regulation of gambling and gambling advertising is often called for. Questions are raised concerning the ethical soundness of private and state-owned companies making money on gambling, a substantial part of which comes from problem and pathological gamblers (estimate of 15% for all forms of gambling combined in the US, National Opinion Research Center, 1999: p. 33f).

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

Four basic forms of reciprocities, each with a principal adherent ethos, have been outlined:

<i>Type of reciprocity</i>	<i>Instance</i>	<i>Ethos</i>
Negative generalized	Theft	“Take what you can”
Positive generalized	Sharing	Altruism
Negative balanced	Feud	Honor
Positive balanced	Barter	Mutual agreement

Gambling can be “incorporated in an exchange system of any of these kinds because of its normative and structural duality. Players wish to win the money or valuables of other players (normatively negative), at the same time they consent to offer their own wealth to others according to the conditional rules of the game or activity (normatively positive). There are games in which one player or group of players confronts another or a gambling entrepreneur (structurally balanced), as well as games where all play against all (structurally generalized). Each

of the four types of reciprocities has a typical ethos that becomes the principal morality of associated gambling games.

Negative balanced reciprocity, in which all try to appropriate money or goods from others, is a salient feature of many gambling activities. The ethos of such games can be expressed thus: “Once you’ve started, you must take the consequences,” and “Take what you can.” Positive reciprocity, both the generalized and balanced form, relies on moralities that condemn appropriation and theft. Therefore gambling has, mainly from a religious perspective that praises altruism and denounces avarice, been condemned as a kind of theft. This critique of gambling is doctrinal – it is of little consequence that people voluntarily chose to participate in gambling. Because of its antisocial nature, negative generalized reciprocity is not found in human societies as a regular form for the organization of social and economic life. However, it is characteristic of the criminal world and there is a history of close association in many societies between that world and gambling.

In societies where positive generalized reciprocity is the dominant mode of exchange, gambling can function as an instrument for the egalitarian redistribution of scarce assets. A desire to win motivates individual participation in gambling, but as a social practice gambling is turned into sharing by the prevailing egalitarian ethos. Gambling is typically viewed favorably, and people who do not participate in gambling might be criticized.

Negative balanced reciprocity is a salient feature of societies, or certain social strata within societies, characterized by strict hierarchy, notions of prestige, and feuding. In such social environments gambling easily takes on the form of a symbolic battle, in which wealth is used as a weapon in a duel for honor and status. Refusal to accept a challenge to gamble brings disgrace to a person.

Positive balanced reciprocity is characteristic of a wide range of social and economic systems, only two of which have been discussed here. In indigenous societies with traditional exchange systems where the circulation of valuables serves to define social relations, gambling can complement these systems. Through gambling, the circulation of valuables can be facilitated and adjusted to the particular circumstances of the moment. This is advantageous, especially when a traditional economy is giving way to a modern commercial market economy. Gambling is then typically surrounded by a moral ambiguity created by its position as an interface between different systems of exchange

having conflicting moralities. As Marshall McLuhan put it (2001, orig. 1964: p. 254), when discussing gambling in different cultures: “the tribal virtue is the capitalist vice”.

In a market economy gambling has become a commodity, and in Western societies there has been a great demand for this product. For long, however, commercial gambling was outlawed or subject to strict regulation. The Protestant work ethic, emphasizing laboriousness and thrift, denounced gambling sharply. Religious notions of gambling as immoral negative reciprocity merged with arguments about its irrationality and unproductiveness. In the 1950s and 1960s, when there was a shift from perceiving citizens as producers to seeing them primarily as consumers, gambling started to become the huge industry it is today. Being a product on the market bought and sold according to mutual agreement, the moral stigma of the gambler largely vanished. Gambling is not, however, treated as just another product on a free commercial market, but is subject to state regulations. In the public debate the critique of gambling as immoral negative reciprocity is still current. Now-a-days, when excessive gambling is understood as an illness that impairs one’s freedom of choice when consuming gambling products, the critique targets entrepreneurs rather than gamblers.

The poker aficionado and author David Spanier wrote (2001, p. 50):

Money is the fuel of gambling; it drives it, as petrol powers a car, but the pleasure of driving a car is not about petroleum. It’s about speed, style, movement. Fuel is merely what makes the car run. In that sense, the real motives behind gambling are to be sought elsewhere.

Elaborating upon this metaphor of gambling, it can be concluded that this paper has said little about either “petroleum” or the “pleasure of driving.” Rather, it has been about roads, about the infrastructure that allows people to drive cars and determines where and how one can drive. That is, this paper is neither concerned with the immediate economic aspects of gambling, such as players’ money management or the business calculations of gambling entrepreneurs, nor with the individual motives for gambling or not gambling, but rather with the social logic of exchange systems of which gambling forms a part.

Viewed across cultures, gambling is an activity that is immediately and intuitively recognized despite its remarkable flexibility in form and scale. It is present in most types of societies, from hunter–gatherer

cultures to modern industrialized nations (Binde, 2005). Two extreme and antithetical positions in the study of gambling would therefore be that (1) “all gambling is essentially the same” and (2) “gambling in every society and at every time is unique.” All other positions imply some sort of typology or scheme in which specific forms of gambling are grouped together.

There seem to be two main kinds of such typologies of gambling. The first kind positions forms of gambling within schemes of different types of games, such as games of chance, games of skill, etc. (Caillois, 1961; Culin, 1903; Roberts, Arth, & Bush, 1959). An obvious shortcoming of this approach is that it completely ignores the social and cultural context of games and gambling. The second kind categorizes gamblers as different sociological or psychological types with characteristic preferences for certain games and/or with distinct gambling styles (e.g. Bergler, 1958; Blaszczyński, 2000; Fisher, 1993; Hayano, 1984; Moran, 1970; Neal, 1998; Newman, 1972). For the study of gambling within a specific society such typologies can be of great value. For comparative purposes, however, they return less of insight since social organization can vary significantly between societies and the appeal of games can be culturally construed very differently.

What has been presented here is a third alternative: a scheme for analyzing and comparing gambling and attitudes to gambling in different cultures that relies neither on the forms of games themselves, nor on the psychological or sociological properties of the individuals who play them, but upon a few elementary traits of the societal exchange systems of which they are part. It has often been observed that gambling reflects the character of the society and culture in which it is practiced (e.g., Breen, 1977; Geertz, 1972; Olmsted, 1967; Walker, 1999). This is also the conclusion of this article, our new insight being that we need to consider only certain, quite easily recognizable features of socioeconomic organization in order to demonstrate a systematic relationship between them and gambling as a social practice.

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