

# Raising the stakes

*The addictive and immoral nature of internet gambling, and what we can do about it*

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## **List of abbreviations**

PGSI – Problem Gambling Severity Index

WHO – World Health Organization

RTP – Return-to-player

CRM – Cause-related marketing

CSR – Corporate Social Responsibility

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## **Abstract**

This thesis aims to explore whether online gambling should be considered exploitative, making it morally wrong, and what should be done about this. Initially, the effects of online gambling on individuals, those around him, and wider society is explored. It is concluded that there are several motivations to gamble (fulfilling a deep-rooted need, money, entertainment, etc.) which give different effects, and that these are connected to addiction. The effect on individuals negatively influences family and friends, but positively influences the state institution through economical and social efforts from the gambling industry. Further, it is concluded, using three different theories of exploitation, that the way which the online gambling industry currently operates is wrong. Lastly, solutions are proposed on three different levels. The most important solutions are that individuals should try to distance themselves from gambling, local community should be strengthened through communities not constantly focusing on markets, and the state should apply a combination of nationalizing gambling and banning the marketing of it.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

Gambling has been a major cause for division for decades now, and with the introduction of internet in society, the debate has increased in complexity. For example, 4% of all Englishmen are at-risk gamblers, and each of these influences on average four people in family relations. For these people, consequences can range from losing money to destroying families. All of this accumulated makes for an incredibly multifaceted problem which governments worldwide have failed to solve.

In this paper, the problem of gambling will be addressed through four sub-questions. First, answering ‘How does the online gambling industry influence society?’ will help place online gambling in a wider societal context and explore both negative and positive sides for the individual and for those around him/her. Further, answering the question ‘Is everything which is exploitative morally bad?’ will be important in giving weight to the answer to the question ‘Is the online gambling industry exploitative?’. These two questions, which will both be answered affirmatively in this paper, in combination will clarify the (possible) link between gambling as exploitation and moral wrongness. Thus, the approach which will be taken is from theories of exploitation, where anything which is exploitative is considered morally wrong. Lastly, the question ‘If the online gambling industry is morally bad, what can be done about the current situation?’ will be treated. Here, possible solutions to the problem of online gambling will be provided on a micropolitical, macropolitical, and mesopolitical level.

Thus, the central question of this paper is: *Should online gambling be considered morally wrong, and if so, what should be done about it?* The thesis which will be argued for is that ***online gambling should be considered exploitative, and thus morally wrong and that this problem should be solved through a combination of micropolitical, macropolitical, and mesopolitical solutions.***

## Chapter 2: Effects of online gambling

In this chapter, it will be clarified which kinds of gambling will be addressed, and the multifaceted consequences of these will be investigated. By doing this, it will be clearer which aspects of online gambling contribute to its moral wrongness. Having an overview of the current situation will also help in seeing the effects of different possible solutions. First, it will be outlined which type of gambling will be considered in this paper.

### Online gambling

Gambling, in the Cambridge dictionary, is defined as “the activity of betting money, for example in a game or on a horse race”.<sup>1</sup> Hence, online gambling should be considered as engaging in this behavior online, i.e. through the internet. However, this definition of gambling is too broad for the scope of this paper. In *The ethics of gambling*, Frank N. Freeman introduces three different types of gambling.<sup>2</sup>

The first type is one where both parties participating in a gambling activity treat it as a sport. This can include playing poker for money or having a wager over a football match. This type of gambling will not be the object of discussion in this paper, because it does not include any commercial gain.

Another type of gambling, which will be the focus of this paper, is that where one party gambles as a sport while the other gambles for business. This is commonly viewed as commercial gambling, including slot machines, betting on sports, lotteries, etc. This type of gambling will be focused on, as it is the most prevalent way to gamble, and the type where people play for the largest sums.<sup>3</sup> The industry is relatively clearly defined, making the scope clearer, and it is the type of gambling which usually gets the most negative attention from a moral perspective.

The last type of gambling, according to Freeman, is that of gambling in business. This includes concepts like speculation and insurance. This type will not be addressed here, because it differs too significantly in nature from the second form of gambling to justify treating it in the same paper. As an example, speculation has a positive expected (monetary) value for those who

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<sup>1</sup> “Gambling,” Cambridge English Dictionary, accessed March 16, 2021, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/gambling>.

<sup>2</sup> Frank N. Freeman, “The Ethics of Gambling,” *International Journal of Ethics* 18, no. 1 (1908), 83-86.

<sup>3</sup> Ståle Pallesen et al., *Omfang av penge- og dataspillproblemer I Norge 2019* (Bergen: Universitetet i Bergen, 2020), 51.

engage in it, while commercial gambling has a negative expected (monetary) value for the player.<sup>4</sup> This form of gambling can still be considered morally bad, but commercial gambling will be treated as it is more controversial and influences a larger number of people.

### **Description of effects**

An important aim of this paper is to give an accurate description of the role played by online gambling in the modern, western, globalized society. In the following parts of this chapter, the effects of gambling will be addressed. While some effects relate to the mental and physical state of the individual, others relate to the effects that go beyond the scope of the individual towards influences on family and friends, and sometimes even state institutions. When addressing effects on state institutions, the focus will be on the position of the gambling industry within society at large. Despite the interconnectedness of these effects, treating them separately is important to show the relations between larger societal effects and effects on individuals. Therefore, the upcoming part will focus on the various effects on individuals, before moving on to the effects on the people around the gambler and societal effects. This will be approached by addressing the mental mechanisms in play when engaging in online gambling, and how these materialize in the physical world. Of the effects on the individual, there is one which is considered more fundamental and which most of the other effects have their origin in, namely addiction.

### **Addiction**

When addressing addiction, one is speaking about a wide variety of phenomena. Thus, one could face significant semantic problems if the concept of ‘addiction’ is not defined properly. To solve this problem, different definitions of addiction will be explored to make it clear exactly what is meant by addiction when it is discussed in this paper. The general definition of addiction is “the state of being compulsively committed to a habit or practice or to something that is psychologically or physically habit-forming, as narcotics, to such an extent that its cessation causes severe trauma.”<sup>5</sup> Despite the possible sufficiency of this definition, what is included is

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<sup>4</sup> “Speculation vs. Gambling: What's the Difference?,” Investing essentials, Investing, Investopedia, last modified February 14, 2021, <https://www.investopedia.com/ask/answers/042715/what-difference-between-speculation-and-gambling.asp>.

<sup>5</sup> “Addiction,” Dictionary, accessed March 17, 2021, <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/addiction>.



still vague. In his book, ‘The Globalization of Addiction’, Bruce Alexander distinguishes four kinds of addictions, of which the one called addiction-3 will be used in this paper.<sup>6</sup> Addiction-3 refers to an overwhelming engagement in something, may it be an activity or a substance, which goes past some of the notions of addiction only referring to substance addiction (e.g., drugs or alcohol). Additionally, addiction-3 excludes the “positive” forms of addiction, which is a more uncommon expression in current society, but can for example refer to a Christian being addicted to Jesus or to reading the Bible. By excluding these types of addictions, addiction-3 ends up as an overwhelming engagement in something with negative consequences. This definition will be used as a basis for considering the addictiveness of online gambling in society.

Assessing the extent to which a given person is addicted to online gambling is difficult because one must base it on certain subjectively determined, but scientifically grounded criteria. A common measurement scale for addiction is the PGSI (Problem Gambling Severity Index), where respondents are asked nine questions relating to behavior indicating gambling addiction.<sup>7</sup> If they respond with something else than “never” to any of the questions, they will at least fall into the category of low-risk gambler. Despite the low threshold, this way of characterizing gambling will be the one referred to in this paper. This is both because it is a very common and acknowledged method, and because even tendencies towards any of these nine characteristics indicate that gambling does not have an unequivocally positive influence on you.<sup>8</sup>

To show the number of people who are addicted to online gambling according to the PGSI, England and Norway will be considered. Both are western European countries but have relatively different laws regarding gambling and online gambling. It is also interesting to note that Norway has a GDP per capita that is 1.79 times greater than that of England, which could influence “excess funds” that can be utilized for gambling without large consequences. The outcomes of the 2019 PGSI for the two countries are shown in the table below.

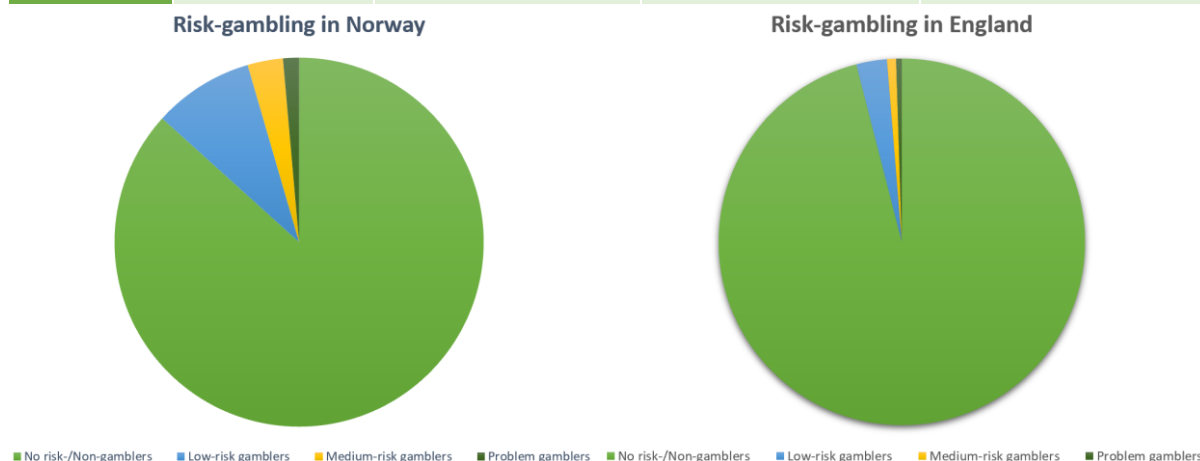
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<sup>6</sup> Bruce K. Alexander, *The Globalization of Addiction: A Study in Poverty of the Spirit* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 35-59.

<sup>7</sup> For details concerning the questions used in the PGSI screen, consult Appendix 1.

<sup>8</sup> “Problem gambling screens,” Gambling Commission, accessed March 17, 2021, <https://www.gamblingcommission.gov.uk/news-action-and-statistics/Statistics-and-research/Problem-gambling-screens.aspx>.

Country	Low-risk gamblers	Moderate-risk gamblers	Problem gamblers	Total at-risk gamblers
Norway <sup>9</sup>	8.8%	3.1%	1.4%	13.3%
	378,000	133,000	60,000	571,000
England <sup>10</sup>	2.7%	0.8%	0.5%	4.0%
	1,228,000	364,000	227,000	1,819,000



Here, one can see that there is a large difference in at-risk gamblers in the two countries. This might be down to factors that are not controlled for, like income, how likely people from each culture are to answer “never” rather than “sometimes” on a question, ease of gambling in each country, etc. It can also have to do with different methods of data collection, both in form and in time. These are (some of) the reasons outlined by *Lotteri- og stiftelsestilsynet* in Norway as to why one cannot compare the results across countries.<sup>11</sup> However, the prevalence of problem gamblers is well within the normal range for both countries, as WHO stated in 2017 that pathological gambling prevalence rates range from 0.1% to 6.0%.<sup>12</sup> The important thing to note from this table is not necessarily the difference between the countries, but the fact that the numbers are high in both countries. Even though England “only” has 4.0% at-risk gamblers, it

<sup>9</sup> “Key figures for the population,” Statistics Norway, Statistisk Sentralbyrå, last modified 11 March, 2021, <https://www.ssb.no/en/befolkning/nokkeltall/population>.

<sup>10</sup> “Population, all persons aged 16 and over in England,” LGInform, accessed 17 March, 2021, [https://lginform.local.gov.uk/reports/lgastandard?mod-metric=1754&mod-area=E92000001&mod-group=AllRegions\\_England&mod-type=namedComparisonGroup](https://lginform.local.gov.uk/reports/lgastandard?mod-metric=1754&mod-area=E92000001&mod-group=AllRegions_England&mod-type=namedComparisonGroup).

<sup>11</sup> “Undersøkinga er vanskeleg å samanlikne med resultat frå andre land,” Lotteri- og stiftelsestilsynet, last modified 19 May, 2020, <https://lottstift.no/omfang-av-penge-og-dataspelproblem-i-noreg/undersokinga-er-vanskeleg-a-samanlikne-med-resultat-fra-andre-land/>; They are also working on a study of gambling prevalence in all the Nordic countries, which would provide a better knowledge base.

<sup>12</sup> Max Abbott, “The epidemiology and impact of gambling disorder and other gambling-related harm,” *World Health Organization* (2017), 1.

still entails that almost two million Englishmen are addicted to gambling, which makes it an addiction too large to be overlooked.

A major consequence of online gambling seems to be addiction. Addiction manifests itself in a variety of different ways, according to the PGSI-list of nine questions, but the common factor is that there is some element of loss of control, leading to negative consequences, because of overwhelming engagement. On top of addiction, there are a variety of other consequences, all with their positive and negative sides, the first of which relates to the fact that it allows normal people to dream.

### **The dream**

The vision of the national gambling corporation in Norway, called *Norsk Tipping*, is *Vi gir drømmen en sjanse* (We give the dream a chance).<sup>13</sup> This corresponds well to the underlying motivation of people to gamble and why many people appreciate gambling as a good supplement to their normal life. According to research, ‘the dream of winning’ was identified as the leading reason why people gamble.<sup>14</sup> Playing could be considered as a form of entertainment for the gambler. When betting on a football match, there is not necessarily an expectation of winning, but the mere possibility of doing so serves as a great source of entertainment. Winning in itself simply provides additional entertainment if it occurs, which will be addressed in the next sub-chapter. Thus, gambling can be an important positive aspect in people’s lives through providing hope. Brenner and Brenner go as far as claiming that this ritualized hope, which they call it, serves as a substitute for religious hope.<sup>15</sup> By this, they mean that hope is an important part of human life and that people tend to look for this sustained state of hope elsewhere in times of increased secularization.

It seems clear that hope is a key part of human nature and that there exist legitimate ways to create hope and expectations for people. However, there is a difference between legitimately creating hope for people and illegitimately hijacking this human need to profit from it. Simply because human beings use gambling to fulfill this need for hope, it does not necessitate the natural place of the gambling industry in society. It can well be argued that the gambling industry have just identified a human need and tried to create a world where they are

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<sup>13</sup> “About us,” Norsk Tipping, accessed 17 March, 2021, <https://www.norsk-tipping.no/selskapet/engelsk>.

<sup>14</sup> Rufus Black & Hayden Ramsay, “The ethics of gambling: guidelines for players and commercial providers,” *International Gambling Studies* 3, no. 2 (2003), 202.

<sup>15</sup> Black & Ramsay, “The ethics of gambling”, 202-203.

indispensable because they serve this need. Thus, society can hope in many ways, and although gambling does allow them to do this it is not necessarily the legitimate source of this hope. This is an aspect of gambling which is important with regards to the psychology of human beings. However, there is a much more tangible consequence of gambling which relates to winning and losing money.

## Money

In gambling, it is implicit that one side will lose money while the other side will win, thus, gambling can have both positive and negative effects. As an example, when placing a maximum bet of €50 on MrGreen.com's slot machine Mega Fortune, you could, theoretically, end up with anything from winning €17.800.000 to losing €50.<sup>16</sup> At face value, it seems like a very lopsided game where potential wins outweigh potential losses, even if you consider the fact that jackpots are very rare. Due to 'The Probability Weighting Function', people tend to overestimate the chance of unlikely events happening to them.<sup>17</sup> Although they see it as unlikely, they do not realize how extremely unlikely it is. Most online casinos have an RTP (return-to-player) of between 93% and 99%.<sup>18</sup> Even the bookmakers for sports betting charge a premium for the risk they are exposed to by setting odds early. Additionally, they can change the odds depending on which bets are popular to optimize profits. Additionally, it is clear, simply from the fact that the gambling providers are still in business, that the players lose out in the long run. However, people still gamble in times when they need money. Those who are most appealed by this aspect of gambling seem to be people with little money, as they might be in dire need to pay their rent and thus want a quick payout. The paradox is that even though they are the ones who have the strongest motivation to win the money (covering basic needs), they are also the ones who have the least money to spend on gambling. Therefore, they also have the most to lose by not winning. Effectively, they both have the biggest upside and the biggest downside of the coin while gambling. The problematic side of this increased risk is that the RTP is not over 100%. Thus, this group of players will, on aggregate, face losses they cannot afford more frequently than wins they desperately need. Of course, group-level statistics cannot be applied to

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<sup>16</sup> "Mega Fortune," MrGreen, accessed 18 March, 2021, <https://www.mrgreen.com/slots/mega-fortune>.

<sup>17</sup> Kazuhisa Takemura, *Behavioral Decision Theory: Psychological and Mathematical Descriptions of Human Choice Behavior* (Japan: Springer, 2014), 86.

<sup>18</sup> "What Does RTP (Return to Player) Mean?," Gambling, last modified 19 September, 2019, <https://www.gambling.com/ca/online-casinos/knowledge/what-is-return-to-player-2092400>

individual cases, doing this would be an ecological fallacy.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, it is important not to forget the success stories of people in severe debt winning millions of euros and having their lives changed, which is a major positive side of gambling. These things do happen, and they are without doubt motivating in their appeal to hope.<sup>20</sup> However, the losses will inevitably outweigh the wins in the long run.

### **The zone**

In ‘Addiction by Design’, the great appeal of gambling is described through interviews with addicts.<sup>21</sup> Several of the people described what could be characterized as ‘being in the zone’. Specifically, they talk about the zone as a state of mind where only themselves and the machine exists. In this state of mind, the gambler feels full control over their world, because they know that winning or losing are the two only possible outcomes. This zone is in stark contrast to the “human world” with its kaleidoscope of different possible outcomes at any given moment. Thus, some people experience gambling, both online and offline, as a form of insulation from the outside world, somewhere they can escape for as long as they have money on their account. As opposed to the players previously discussed, these people do not play to win, they play to stay in the game. In some ways, ‘the zone’ can be compared to what Lev Vygotsky called ‘the zone of proximal development’.<sup>22</sup> It is often applied to learning new things, where the next challenge should not be too hard nor too easy. The same concept is used by gambling providers where they do not let you win all the time (too easy) nor never let you win (too hard). By letting you win sometimes, you are kept entertained and avoid boredom, as both too hard and easy tasks tend to lead to boredom. Thus, gambling providers use the ‘zone of proximal development’ to create this feeling of insulation from the outside world that is so appealing for gambling addicts.

How some people are influenced by online gambling can also be likened to what David Kessler calls *Capture*. *Capture* is a very common mechanism that is the root of many of our emotional issues and mental illnesses today. It occurs when one’s attention becomes increasingly focused

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<sup>19</sup> David A. Freedman, “Ecological Inference and the Ecological Fallacy,” *Prepared for the International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences* (1999): 1.

<sup>20</sup> Mentioned in chapter titled “The dream”.

<sup>21</sup> Natasha D. Schüll, *Addiction by design: Machine Gambling in Las Vegas* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2012), 1-27.

<sup>22</sup> Mark B. Tappan, “Moral Education in the Zone of Proximal Development,” *Journal of Moral Education* 27, no. 2 (1998), 144-147.

on a given stimulus, resulting in an altering of one's behavior. The three elements which characterize *capture* are narrowing of attention, perceived lack of control, and change in emotional state.<sup>23</sup> All of these are present in observations of those who are addicted to gambling and describe the experience in the zone, like in Natasha Schüll's interviews. However, a key point in the book of Kessler is that *capture* can occur in almost any activity, like when one is on a plane and cannot help not to focus on the conversation of the people behind oneself. On the other hand, there are cases where people can get so fixated on perceiving themselves as bad people that they are driven to suicide. Thus, the potential for generating *capture* is nothing special for gambling. However, when you combine this tendency of people to get *captured* by things to smaller or lesser extents, with a gambling system which feeds into the mechanism through the zone of proximal development, you end up with a zone with enormous potential. A potential to pull people in and exploit their weaknesses when they feel the most comfortable and have their guard down. Despite some people getting *captured* and gambling for the zone, other people are motivated by their wish to be entertained or engage in a social activity.

### **The social- and entertainment-aspect**

Despite the reputation of online gambling as something which is done in isolation, there are social communities related to gambling. An example of this is the recent emergence of apps like BetBull, which works like a social medium where you can see the bets of other users and join them.<sup>24</sup> There has also been a rise in virtual communities, where people with a shared interest in online gambling can communicate. Thus, some people could find an increased sense of belonging and social life through gambling. However, Frank Freeman argues that gambling destroys the solidarity of social life and makes us anti-social.<sup>25</sup> This has its roots in the fact that gambling springs from desires to gain from non-cooperative work. So, gambling seems to influence social life both positively and negatively. It can produce the feeling of 'belonging' to a community in some sense, but it can also produce alienation from pre-existing social life. Thus, there might be a stronger motivation to gamble for people with few strong social relations. However, the important thing to notice is that online interactions are measurably worse than

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<sup>23</sup> David A. Kessler, *Capture: Unraveling the Mystery of Mental Suffering* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2016), 7.

<sup>24</sup> "Betbull," Betbull, accessed 18 March, 2021, <https://m.betbull.com/>.

<sup>25</sup> Freeman, "The Ethics of Gambling," 83.

real-life interactions, because “empathy can’t flourish without immediate feedback”.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, it seems apparent that for most people, gambling will have an alienating effect on their social life. Despite this, many people still want to play because of entertainment and feel like they can justify this tradeoff. This is possibly the biggest positive aspect of gambling, namely that it serves as extraordinarily immersive and exciting entertainment for the players. Adam Alter calls this surface layer of feedback, which engages the player on top of the game itself, *juice*.<sup>27</sup> He uses the example of Candy Crush Saga, which remarkably resembles many online slot machines. Such games, he claims, use lights and colors to reinforce the behavior of the player, releasing hormones in the brain, leading to for example increased risk tolerance. Thus, gambling providers know that by providing players with a genuinely entertaining experience, they can make them spend more and get into the zone. The entertainment aspect is very real, but it cannot be separated from the other effects. The same is true for Candy Crush Saga, where the entertainment cannot be separated from the social alienation and the zone. The only difference is that there are a wider variety of effects related to gambling. Therefore, some of the effects will carry over to other parts of life.

### **The carry-over effect**

On average, each problem gambler has four family members who are affected by their excessive gambling.<sup>28</sup> This number does not include people outside family relations,<sup>29</sup> and should thus be seen as a minimum for the number of people affected. Using the example of gambling leading to increased risk tolerance, this is one effect on the individual that carries over to close relations. Increased risk-tolerance could make it easier for you to gamble with things like family relations and work relations. This is apparent through the simple example that more risk-loving people get married later than risk-averse people.<sup>30</sup> They are not necessarily triggered by the safe boundaries of marriage and want to have more excitement in their lives. It follows that increasing your risk-tolerance through problem gambling could lead to behavior that is consciously or subconsciously aimed at stirring up the safe and established boundaries of your

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<sup>26</sup> Adam Alter, *Irresistible: The rise of addictive technology and the business of keeping us hooked* (New York: Penguin Press, 2017), 40.

<sup>27</sup> Alter, *Irresistible*, 137.

<sup>28</sup> Jim Orford, *An Unsafe Bet? The Dangerous Rise of Gambling and the Debate We Should be Having* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2011), 54.

<sup>29</sup> Colleagues, friends, etc.

<sup>30</sup> Christy Spivey, “Desperation or desire? The role of risk aversion in marriage,” *Economic Inquiry* 48, no. 2 (April 2010): 499.

life. This can manifest itself through taking economical risks, being less present in the lives of your children or spouse, and lower adherence to deadlines and time schedules.<sup>31</sup> Thus, it seems that having a problematic relationship to gambling has effects far beyond the scope of the individual. This will be explained in greater detail in the next part, where the effects of gambling on society at large will be discussed.

## Societal effects

The high diversity in consequences of online gambling makes it prevalent on multiple societal levels. On one side, the carry-over of economic and social consequences outside the individual influences society. When individuals and whole families are put into poverty, it follows logically that this will be a burden for any society concerned with the general welfare of its citizens. Additionally, gambling is considered parasitic behavior.<sup>32</sup> Despite this, it is important to remember that in the current system of many Western countries, the state profits massively from the gambling industry. This cements the importance of the gambling industry in society. In the fiscal year from 2019 to 2020 alone, over £3 billion were collected in taxes from the gambling industry.<sup>33</sup> Although the total taxes collected in the United Kingdom in the same period was £635 billion, the gambling industry is arguably not negligible when it alone provides for almost 0.5% of tax incomes.<sup>34</sup> On top of this, all corporations, especially those concerned with maintaining or uplifting their reputation (gambling-/alcohol-/tobacco-industries),<sup>35</sup> engage in both ‘Cause-Related Marketing’ (CRM) and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). CRM entails relating the company to a self-evidently worthy issue to create awareness around both the issue and the organization, while CSR entails longer commitments to good practices to gain status as an altruistic company.<sup>36</sup> Both these types of engagements seem good for society whether they are done out of altruism or not, at least in the short term.<sup>37</sup> Here, the direct earnings

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<sup>31</sup> Schüll, “Addiction by design,” 196-203.

<sup>32</sup> Freeman, “The Ethics of Gambling,” 82; Calling it parasitic behavior addresses the fact that, if a gambler is successful, he or she takes resources (money) from society without offering any utility in return. Thus, gambling as an activity does not, at least in its purest/most fundamental form, add any value to society.

<sup>33</sup> “Betting and gaming tax receipts in the United Kingdom from 2000/01 to 2019/20,” Statista, last modified 3 November, 2020, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/284338/betting-and-gaming-united-kingdom-hmrc-tax-receipts/>.

<sup>34</sup> “Tax receipts in the United Kingdom from 2000/01 to 2019/20,” Statista, last modified 3 February, 2021, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/284298/total-united-kingdom-hmrc-tax-receipts/>

<sup>35</sup> Gambling industry, alcohol industry, tobacco industry, etc.

<sup>36</sup> Gerard Hastings, *The Marketing Matrix: How the Corporation Gets Its Power – And How We Can Reclaim It* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 125.

<sup>37</sup> Whether these are attempts to increase long-term RTP or sponsoring youth football teams, they both represent major incentives for the state to keep the gambling industry alive and strong.



for the state from state lotteries and similar practices are disregarded, since they are not the main problem of the gambling industry, due to less addictive and more transparent games. Thus, it is intended to show the consequences of the gambling industry from the perspective of the state to understand why they might have incentives to oppose further regulation of the online gambling industry. They have incentives to endorse the online gambling industry if they do not try to treat the problems caused by it. The state doing its job and serving the general will, like proposed by Rousseau in *The Social Contract*,<sup>38</sup> would be likely to spend more than they earn from taxation of the gambling industry to fix the problems caused by it. However, because of the complexity and seemingly individual nature of the consequences, they can get away with ‘cheap’ solutions which allow them to gain economically from the situation. This concept is also addressed by Akerlof and Shiller, who say that lobbyists influence those in power to a very large extent.<sup>39</sup> The politicians, according to them, have incentives to please both the voters and the industries from where political parties and the state get their money. In many cases, when it is impossible to please both, they end up trying to please the businesses and sell it as a win with the help of lobbyists. Thus, there are clear incentives for the state, through politicians, to uphold such an industry as the online gambling industry.

After having considered the effects which online gambling has on individuals and society, both positive and negative, it is time to move on to exploring whether this industry is morally bad. That is what the next chapter will be devoted to.

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<sup>38</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, ed. Jonathan Bennett (2010), 12-15.

<sup>39</sup> George A. Akerlof & Robert J. Shiller, *Phishing for Phools: The Economics of Manipulation & Deception* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2015), 77-80.

## Chapter 3: Online gambling as exploitation

In this chapter, the morality of the online gambling industry will be investigated. A mere feeling is not enough to claim immorality of the industry. It is key to have a strong theoretical and philosophical foundation if one is to condemn it in any way. Without this, it would be difficult to propose legitimate solutions, given that the source of the problem is not accurately known. To do this, this chapter will study the ‘exploitative nature’ of gambling. If online gambling can be understood as exploitative, it will also be morally wrong. This claim has its starting point in the generic account for exploitation, where A exploits B if and only if: (1) A benefits, (2) from a social relationship with B, (3) by taking advantage of B.<sup>40</sup> The last criterion is key for establishing something as exploitative, because ‘taking advantage’ is an ambiguous term. All the different ways of understanding advantage-taking identify the wrongness of exploitation in different ways. They all agree on the moral wrongness of exploitative behavior but disagree on the criteria used. Therefore, three different theories, from the three different classes of exploitation theory, will be considered to increase the robustness of the conclusion.<sup>41</sup> Since all these theories can be criticized, those which appear most relevant for gambling will be investigated. These are, in chronological order: (1) The theory of exploitation as failure of reciprocity; (2) the theory of exploitation as a violation of rights; and (3) the theory of exploitation as domination.

### Exploitation as failure of reciprocity

The first theory is a teleological theory, meaning that it identifies the wrongness of exploitation as injury to the good.<sup>42</sup> Here, the injury to the good lays in one party receiving something from another party without returning something which would be considered of equivalent value. To act ‘good’, you would have to give something of equal value back, regardless of distribution of resources prior to the transaction. Hence, not reciprocating the other party would entail an injury to the good. From this view, gift-giving is a practice which would often construct an exploitative situation. Sheldon Cooper, a character from the popular television sitcom *The Big Bang Theory*, seems to support the theory of exploitation as failure of reciprocity, at least based on the following quote: “Oh, Penny. I know you think you are being generous, but the

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<sup>40</sup> Nicholas Vrousalis, “Exploitation: A primer,” *Philosophy Compass* 13, no. 2 (2018): 2.

<sup>41</sup> Vrousalis, “Exploitation: A primer,” 2-3.

<sup>42</sup> Vrousalis, “Exploitation: A primer,” 4-5.

foundation of gift-giving is reciprocity. You haven't given me a gift. You've given me an obligation.”<sup>43</sup>

Looking at online gambling, there seems, *prima facie*, that failure of reciprocity is occurring from the side of the gambling provider, since they, on average, always have a larger monetary gain from the transactions than its customers.<sup>44</sup> This is for example apparent based on the profits of big online gambling providers.<sup>45</sup> It is also possible to infer this based on the fact that the providers stay in business, meaning that they are profitable in the long run. Those opposing this view of gambling would argue that the customers are paying for an experience,<sup>46</sup> which means that they are reciprocated. They would claim that much of the intrigue related to online gambling is in the fact that there is no guarantee of monetary reciprocity. Thus, playing with more money than you get back while gambling is considered no different from paying to watch football matches online. In both transactions, you are entertained for a while, experience tension and excitement, and you are charged money for it.

The above argument is hard to get around since you are dealing with intangible experiences in both cases. This makes it difficult to determine the exact value of it and consequently whether reciprocity is achieved. However, in online gambling, you have long-term effects on top of the short-term experiences, which is not the case with watching a football match. After watching a football match, your mood might be affected, but you got to watch the match. However, because of the addictive nature of gambling, you might have problems along the lines of moral deterioration and increased debt after engaging in it.<sup>47</sup> This example shows that the addictiveness of gambling is the key feature which makes a solid case for gambling being exploitation viewed as failure of reciprocity. One could argue that this failure of reciprocity is only valid after someone has become addicted, and thus conclude that gambling is only exploitative in some cases. However, it is hard to draw a solid line between those who will become addicted and are thus be exploited, and those who will not, even if one uses the PGSI scale as a reference. Since the addiction strikes people arbitrarily, or at least in patterns that cannot yet be explained properly,<sup>48</sup> it would be irresponsible concerning the addicts to not

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<sup>43</sup> “Kaley Cuco: Penny,” The Bath Item Gift Hypothesis, The Big Bang Theory, IMDB, accessed March 17, 2021, <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1256021/characters/nm0192505>.

<sup>44</sup> Mentioned in chapter titled “Money”.

<sup>45</sup> “Industry Statistics - November 2020,” Gambling Commission, accessed March 17, 2021, <https://beta.gamblingcommission.gov.uk/statistics-and-research/publication/industry-statistics-november-2020>.

<sup>46</sup> Mentioned in chapter titled “The social- and entertainment-aspect”.

<sup>47</sup> Freeman, “The Ethics of Gambling,” 78-82.

<sup>48</sup> Like explained in the chapter called ‘Addiction’.

consider gambling as exploitation in this view. Thus, gambling *should* be considered exploitative in this view.

### **Exploitation as violation of rights**

Exploitation as violation of rights is a respect theory. Thus, the wrongness of exploitation is viewed as an injury to either the dignity or the rights of the individual.<sup>49</sup> A right can be either positive or negative, meaning that it entitles you or others to wither perform or not perform certain actions or be/not be in certain states.<sup>50</sup> Exploitation within this view is therefore wrong because rights are not supposed to be violated, even if it is for the best of the person whose right is violated. Identifying the violation of a right hinges on what is considered a right, which is hard to decide. However, the human rights are often considered to be the most basic rights, and thus the least controversial, making it a good starting point for applying this theory. For example, article 4 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights addresses the ‘protection against enslavement’, meaning that one human being cannot own another human being.<sup>51</sup> Consequently, supporting the view of exploitation as a violation of rights means that you will not allow ‘voluntary slavery’.<sup>52</sup> Even John Stuart Mill, who heavily opposes paternalism, argues that the liberty principle must be conditioned so that the liberty of that person is upheld. This means that Mill argues against the ‘freedom not to be free’, since it would go against the purpose of freedom.<sup>53</sup> Thus, even the most anti-paternalistic philosophers seem to agree that there are some inalienable rights. What these rights specifically are, is dependent on what rights are considered actual and how they are ranked against each other.

Applying this theory to the case of gambling, it is necessary to establish whether it violates any rights, and consider the validity of these rights. Taking the most conservative approach to rights possible, considering only the most basic human rights to avoid the worst abuses (murder, rape, kidnapping, torture, etc.), it is obvious that gambling should not be considered exploitation. However, this conservative approach to rights is rare in practice, where the rights are also more subjective than in the most conservative state. An example of a right which might be violated

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<sup>49</sup> Vrousalis, “Exploitation: A primer,” 7-8.

<sup>50</sup> “Rights,” Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, last modified 24 February, 2020, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/rights/>.

<sup>51</sup> “Human Rights and Slavery,” End Slavery Now, accessed March 19, 2021, <http://www.endslaverynow.org/act/educate/human-rights-and-slavery>.

<sup>52</sup> A situation where a person voluntarily enters a slavery-contract, making him property of someone else.

<sup>53</sup> David Archard, “Freedom Not to be Free: The Case of the Slavery Contract in J. S. Mill's on Liberty,” *The Philosophical Quarterly* 40, no. 161 (October 1990): 453-454.

is the right to complete information about a purchase you are making. When playing a slot machine online, you have very limited information about the weighted probability of the different outcomes.<sup>54</sup> Thus, you are unable to make an informed decision about whether to spin the slot machine or not and, because of that, a certain right would be violated. Although you might have the right to information about your purchase, complete information in the case of gambling would go against the intention behind the game. Taking complete information to the extreme, the machine would have to inform you what the next outcome would be so you can decide whether it is worth playing. Thus, applying this right to gambling would make little sense, since you are changing the basic premise and the reason why people engage in it. Rather, you should be fully informed about the fact that you are entering a game while receiving no information about its outcomes.

Based on this, it appears difficult to say that online gambling violates any rights. This mainly comes down to the difficulty of choosing and ranking these rights, which varies between different people. Despite online gambling not being considered exploitation as in this view, it is key that one of the criticisms of this theory is that the violation of a right is not a necessary condition for exploitation.<sup>55</sup> There are cases where no violation of rights occurs but a person should still be deemed wrongfully exploited according to a rational and disinterested person, which might include online gambling. Thus, the conclusion of this theory would need support from one of the others to be able to say for certain that gambling is *not* exploitative, meaning that its conclusion is worth little alone.

### **Exploitation as domination**

Exploitation as domination is a freedom theory, meaning that what makes the exploitation wrong is the injury to freedom or autonomy.<sup>56</sup> In the case of domination, it is considered that “A exploits B if and only if A and B are embedded in a systematic relationship in which A instrumentalizes B’s vulnerability to extract a net benefit from B”.<sup>57</sup> This systematic relationship is key to the domination view and refers to A having a certain power over B which dictates the choices of B. Thus, without this systematic relationship being in place, B would not

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<sup>54</sup> Schüll, *Addiction by design*, 86-95.

<sup>55</sup> Vrousalis, “Exploitation: A primer,” 7-8.

<sup>56</sup> Vrousalis, “Exploitation: A primer,” 10-11.

<sup>57</sup> Nicholas Vrousalis, “Exploitation, Vulnerability, and Social Domination,” *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 41, no. 2 (Spring 2013): 132

have done action X for reason R. He might have done action X for another reason than R, but not for reason R. As an example, a purely capitalist economy is a system that helps capitalists exploit workers. The capitalists have most of the money and make the workers do specific tasks (action X) for money (reason R), although they would not do these tasks if they would not receive the money. What makes most Western-European economies un-exploitative in this view is the existence of unions to even the power-relations between workers and their bosses. Without this clear power of bosses over workers, there is no exploitation occurring.

Initially, it does not appear to be a systematic relationship between the gambling providers and the gamblers in the online gambling industry. The gamblers seem to be free to choose when to gamble and the gambling providers do not have exclusive access to anything which the gambler needs. However, the last point is highly debatable. Because of the addictive nature of gambling, gamblers end up in a position in which they, to a lesser or greater extent, *need* to gamble. As shown in the chapter about addiction, a significant percentage of all Englishmen and Norwegians, taken as examples of developed Western societies, are defined as problem gamblers. This differs from the previous example of watching football as entertainment. Although you can get addicted to anything, fewer people are likely addicted to watching football than gambling. This is because of the efforts made by gambling providers to boost the addictiveness of their services and *capture* you like mentioned in the chapter called ‘The zone’. Additionally, being addicted to football is economically less harmful than gambling and thus has a smaller effect on the other parts of life.<sup>58</sup> Thus, it seems like the addictive features of gambling make its users vulnerable to the providers. Since gambling providers keep offering their customers their services, they uphold the systematic relationship which allows them to instrumentalize the vulnerability of the gamblers. Additionally, it seems natural, given the profits made by the industry, that the instrumentalization of the gamblers’ vulnerability is aimed at extracting a net benefit from them. Based on these assumptions, and especially rooted in the addictive nature of gambling, it is evident that online gambling should be viewed as exploitation within the domination view.

### **Degree of exploitation in online gambling**

In conclusion, the claim that gambling should be considered a form of exploitation has been supported by several theories of exploitation. There has been an investigation of three different

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<sup>58</sup> Mentioned in chapters titled “Money” and “The carry-over effect”.

theories of exploitation, each from a different class of theory. It has been argued that gambling should be considered exploitation as failure of reciprocity. This is because the addictive nature of gambling gives the gambler negative long-term consequences on top of losing money on average, which is not weighed up for by the short-term experience of gambling. There was no evidence to establish gambling as exploitation viewed as violation of rights, because of the difficulty in establishing a universal right which gambling violates. Lastly, it was established that gambling should be considered exploitation within the domination view because the addictive features of gambling make gamblers vulnerable within a systematic relationship with the gambling providers. Overall, there is clear evidence within two of the classes of exploitation theory that gambling should be considered exploitation. Additionally, a major criticism of viewing exploitation as violation of rights is that the violation of a right is not a necessary condition for something to be exploitative if one is to follow what a rational and disinterested person would consider exploitative. Thus, it is very possible that gambling is exploitative without this specific theory picking it up. Especially when none of the other theories supported the conclusion of the theory which views exploitation as a violation of rights, its results are worth very little and should not be looked further into. It is important to remember that all these theories have flaws and that neither of them is free from counterarguments when it comes to necessity and sufficiency. However, based on this inquiry into three widely different theories of exploitation, all the evidence strongly indicates that gambling is exploitative. Having established that the online gambling industry is in fact exploiting its customers, it follows, as argued at the start of this chapter, that the industry is morally bad in its current form. A follow-up question would now be how we can get out of the current state and transition into one where exploitation is limited. There are several ways to approach this problem, both from the perspective of the individual, institutions, and local community, which will all be explored in the following chapter.

## Chapter 4: Solutions

Problems can often be solved at different levels. Problems of individuals, like for example obesity, can be solved by individuals who watch what they eat, politicians making healthy food less expensive, or by grassroots projects creating a culture of healthy eating and exercising in a specific society. All these three solutions have the potential to be effective/ineffective in the case of the individual, which implies that there is rarely a one-size-fits-all solution when it comes to solving problems. Person 1 might lose weight because of their determination, while Person 2 could (indirectly) benefit from developments of grassroots projects in some society. Additionally, person 1 might not benefit at all from society catering to being healthier, while person 2 could gain weight if only relying on her determination. This is also the case for the problems in the online gambling industry outlined earlier in this paper. Because a one-size-fits-all solution is unlikely to be fully effective, the reasonable thing to do is to apply solutions at different levels. Henk Oosterling, while talking about solutions for the climate crisis through ECoPolitics, distinguishes three levels of action: Micropolitics, Macropolitics, and Mesopolitics.<sup>59</sup> The micropolitical level refers to our bodies and our desires. Thus, this level includes actions which the individual can undertake to make changes, much like the individual watching what they eat in the previous example. The macropolitical level refers to national, or even global, institutions and organizations. Therefore, it includes any action taken by governments or by large corporate firms, like lowering the prices of healthy food in the previous example. The mesopolitical level can be found between the micropolitical and the macropolitical, as the word ‘meso’ implies. This level is about connecting the two other levels through the local communities or societies. This level includes grassroots initiatives and social relations, like the example of creating a culture of eating healthy and exercising. It is clear in everyday life that we do not simply have the national level and the individual level, but that there is a large in-between connecting the two.<sup>60</sup> We are, according to Aristotle among others, social animals.<sup>61</sup> However, we cannot fulfill this social need in isolation, nor by only relating

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<sup>59</sup> Henk Oosterling, “Mesopolitical Interests: Rotterdam Skillcity as Rhizomatic, Ecosophical, Reflective Event,” in *This Deleuzian Century: Art, Activism, Life*, ed. Rosi Braidotti & Rick Dolphijn (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 271-276.

<sup>60</sup> This ‘in-between’ refers to the mesopolitical level. Henk Oosterling, “Chapter 4. Integral Resistance,” in *Verzet in ecopanishe tijden (The Netherlands: Uitgeverij Lontano, 2020)*, 5-6 claims that these three levels are distinct but that all of them are interconnected. He sees ‘inter-esse’ as what allows us to transition between the levels, but he also sees it as a mode of being where everything is interconnected. Thus, actions on one level will have effects on the other levels. It is important to not simply see action as restricted to either individual or national but recognize the interconnectedness of human existence.

<sup>61</sup> Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. Benjamin Jowett (Kitchener: Batoche Books, 1999), 6.



to the state institution. Thus, the mesopolitical level is arguably the most important of the three levels of action.<sup>62</sup> On this level, the role of religion will be explored as a sort of counterculture to the society in which we live. Religion, which was dethroned by the foundation of modern society, namely the Enlightenment, could be a way to balance out the shortcomings of society. This can be seen as a kind of dialectics where two opposing views form a superior position when combined. The practical way to do this is what will be explored in the mesopolitical sub-chapter. When going through the proposals for solutions at the three different levels, the starting point will be the micropolitical level, then the macropolitical will be discussed, and lastly, the mesopolitical level will be addressed to further explore and explicate an ‘effective’ relationship between the former two.

### **Micropolitical solutions**

Micropolitical solutions to the problem of gambling in society are probably the most widely addressed. Historically, there has been a narrative that gambling is an individual problem and requires individual solutions. The American Gaming Association says that “the problem is not in the products they abuse, but within the individuals.”<sup>63</sup> Based on the addictive nature of online gambling, it seems clear that this is a grave understatement of the problem at hand. The problem with treating gambling at a micropolitical level is that it does not influence everybody in the way for example climate change does. Thus, most of the action taken on the micropolitical level must be taken by those who already have a problem with gambling. Acting on this level, as a problem gambler, means that you must overcome the desires produced in you by addiction, which many gamblers experience as difficult.<sup>64</sup> On the one hand, the desire to gamble might be produced and fueled by addiction.<sup>65</sup> On the other hand, a desire for financial predictability in your family life might be produced in you. The two contradicting desires lead to a struggle and create internal difficulties that may be hard to resolve.

One solution that is often presented is to ‘just gamble responsibly’. Statements like “only use the money you can afford to lose”, “don’t chase losses”, and “set a limit beforehand” all fall under the category of regulating how much of your life you devote to gambling. In a world

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<sup>62</sup> According to Oosterling, “Chapter 4. Integral Resistance,” 11, the sharing of ideas at the mesopolitical level helps root the resistance which leads to change in society. An unrooted effort will be exposed to a greater risk of dissolving.

<sup>63</sup> Schüll, *Addiction by design*, 258.

<sup>64</sup> Mentioned in chapters titled “Addiction” and “The zone”.

<sup>65</sup> Oosterling, “Chapter 4. Integral Resistance,” 5.

where gambling is rational, this is all well and good, but evidence has already been presented that online gambling is highly addictive.<sup>66</sup> Thus, while these solutions might work for some people, they are unlikely to work for the people with the biggest problem potential. These people tend to struggle with such self-regulation because addiction is – as shown – irrational. Additionally, this is such a common solution to the problem that most people are likely to have already tried, and failed, to regulate their behavior if they are still problem gamblers. Thus, this appears to be a sub-par solution that would only help some of the less at-risk gamblers.

What seems to be the best solution to the problem of gambling at this level is to remove yourself completely from online gambling. Doing this for online gambling is harder than doing it for regular gambling since it is easily accessible. However, an individual who experiences being addicted to online gambling can delete gambling apps from his phone, have certain hours without using the internet, or simply try to engage in another activity when feeling the urge to gamble. It has been argued that when you try to take away a major component of your life, you should replace it with something else.<sup>67</sup> Thus, for instance, going for walks, joining an organization, or reading a book might help trying to quit gambling. Much like David A. Kessler claims, we need to actively change what receives our attention to escape such a capture.<sup>68</sup> Additionally, self-exclusion is not an unknown tool for gamblers trying to quit. There were 65,000 self-exclusions from gambling in Britain in 2009, a number that can only be expected to have risen in the last 12 years.<sup>69</sup> By excluding yourself you effectively remove all your possibilities to gamble, at least in legal and accessible ways. Thus, this technique may be the most effective of these micropolitical solutions to the problem of gambling. However, like mentioned earlier, such solutions must come from within, and the effectiveness of the solution thus depends wholly on the gambler himself acknowledging that he has a problem.

To draw conclusions about the effectiveness of these micropolitical solutions: These seem to be incapable of solving the problem at hand alone, especially because they rely on individuals becoming aware of their situation. However, even though it is apparent that you cannot solve the problem through micropolitical action alone, it seems utterly impossible to solve the problem *without* any form of micropolitical action. No matter how many macropolitical and

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<sup>66</sup> Mentioned in chapter titled “Addiction”.

<sup>67</sup> Alter, *Irresistible*, 249.

<sup>68</sup> Kessler, *Capture*, 267.

<sup>69</sup> Orford, *An Unsafe Bet?*, 52.

mesopolitical solutions are implemented, there needs to be some form of individual motivation or inclination to break free from the internal power struggle of desires.

### **Macropolitical solutions**

Acting on the macropolitical level entails action being taken by national and global institutions, like for example the laws which the Dutch government passes, or actions taken by big multinationals like Unilever. This appears to be the level where people have the highest expectations for actions to be taken to achieve change. When global problems occur, like the climate crisis, people tend to first call for governments to pass new laws or multinationals to make their production process more sustainable, rather than call for individual action. This is because the actions of big actors are thought to have a greater impact. In gambling, the picture is more complicated since it could be viewed as a problem of the individual and not society. However, as has been shown earlier, gambling is *also* a major societal problem. Thus, several actions are possible to take on a macropolitical level to solve this problem.

Outright banning gambling would likely be the most effective measure to be taken since the people who would gamble illegally on foreign sites would be microscopic compared to those doing it legally today. Thus, you would achieve a great reduction in problem gambling. However, it would be hard to enforce politically since it would be perceived as a drastic measure by those who like to gamble for fun. Although gambling is far from a human right, it still appears to be a change that would meet too much political resistance to be enforceable, at least in the short term.<sup>70</sup> Instead, a feasible and effective solution could be to nationalize gambling, like for example Norway has done. This entails a state-driven organization having responsibility for all gambling activity in the country. This helps address several of the topics for debate suggested by Jim Orford.<sup>71</sup> It would be feasible to put a certain percentage of gambling profits towards charitable causes, like in Norway, where all of the profits of Norsk Tipping are required, by law, to go to ‘socially beneficial purposes’. Additionally, nationalization would

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<sup>70</sup> This relates to the topic of paternalism. According to Gerald Dworkin, “Paternalism,” Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, last modified September 9, 2020, paternalism is when the state or an individual interferes with the actions of another person to protect that person from themselves. The paternalistic element of banning gambling is clear in that you, as the state, proclaim to have a better risk assessment of gambling than the individual, meaning that you need to protect them from gambling since they do not know any better. Liberal western societies in general value autonomy and freedom of the individual, which is why they tend to view paternalism negatively. Thus, there is likely to be hard resistance, at least in the affected environments, against such a clear example of hard paternalism.

<sup>71</sup> Orford, *An Unsafe Bet?*, 234.

allow for greater control over how much people gamble and more tools to regulate this (limits, advice to seek help, etc.). On top of this, a licensing arrangement could be beneficial if those providers which receive licenses can uphold the standard of the nationalized provider.<sup>72</sup>

The main problem of such a nationalization is that the provider(s) can still exploit the players through marketing. As shown earlier, Norway cannot be considered better than other countries when it comes to problem gambling, which implies that nationalization alone is not enough. Banning the marketing of gambling would appear to be an effective complementary measure. Marketing not only refers to advertising, but every effort made through Price, Place, Promotion, or Product.<sup>73</sup> It would stop advertising, but it would also stop inadequate price information, meaning that the player must be informed of the exact odds of hitting every combination on for example the slot machine. Additionally, all types of free spins or bonuses would disappear. It seems clear that this would have a major effect on the modus operandi of gambling providers, making the industry much less exploitative and more transparent. This is all in line with the principle proposed by Gerard Hastings that the default should be no corporate marketing at all until they have made a convincing case that their product/service is good for society.<sup>74</sup> This would reduce the number of gamblers and consequently the number of problem gamblers since the communication of the gambling providers would be restricted to information-only.

In conclusion about the macropolitical solutions, it seems like banning gambling would be most effective but also relatively unrealistic in the short term. A combination of nationalizing gambling and banning the marketing of it would be the ideal solution as it would provide control over gambling in society and help reduce it by not allowing corporations to exploit possible addicts. Such solutions are a good step on the way but would not give lasting effect without also having micropolitical action. To bridge this gap, mesopolitical action is needed.

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<sup>72</sup> This standard could entail, but is not limited to, committing profits to socially beneficial purposes, keeping track of those who gamble too often and help them reduce this, adhering to guidelines against aggressive advertising (addressed in next paragraph), payment of taxes to local authorities instead of operating out of countries like Malta and Estonia, transparent rules for cash withdrawal, and clear rules on how to win.

<sup>73</sup> Hastings, *The Marketing Matrix*, 153-156.

<sup>74</sup> Hastings, *The Marketing Matrix*, 177; When speaking about ‘the good for society’ in the context of this paper, gambling is not considered *good* because it was recognized as morally wrong in chapter 3. The key element of adding this condition is that it is not enough to simply refute the argument made in chapter 3. The gambling industry would have to prove the opposite, namely that it has a significant *good* impact on society.

## Mesopolitical solutions

Action at the mesopolitical level is probably the most important type of action. It helps support individuals undertaking micropolitical action and is helped in this pursuit by macropolitical measures. This level is highly focused on relations between people and within the local community. This is, in essence, how problems *really* get solved. When it comes to for example the climate crisis, the state can make as many laws as they want, but without the action of people in the lower levels, it is eventually going to be futile. Additionally, acting as an individual to solve the climate crisis without the community around you pushing in the same direction seems impossible. Thus, establishing a mentality of “we are in this together” and forming collective undertakings is key to make the macropolitical action effective and help individuals adjust their behavior. This also applies to the problem of online gambling.

The goal of macropolitical solutions to this problem is to *revive* the local community. Throughout his book *The Globalization of Addiction*, Bruce Alexander argues that the modern free-market society has left us dislocated, implying poverty of the spirit, entailing a lack of attachment, belonging, purpose, etc.<sup>75</sup> This can be solved through concerted social action, according to him. This means creating an attachment to the community around the individual where he can find purpose and belonging. An example of such a measure to revive the local community could be through reclaiming Christianity. Christianity, applied in the right way, could be a way to create belonging and purpose for a larger group of people in a community. For example, the Bible distances itself from gambling and fixation on money and therefore provides a counterweight to society at large. Thus, a Christian community which promotes values that put the focus of the individual elsewhere than personal gain, would suffice as an application of Christianity to solve this problem. Of course, this does not work for everybody, but it can help some people in their micropolitical efforts to shift attention away from gambling. Additionally, a strong religious community in society could provide platforms for everyone (even atheists or people from other religions than the one in question) to develop a certain attachment to their local community. This could also be done with secular means, but the most important thing is to create a local community that is approachable, calm, informed, and

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<sup>75</sup> Alexander, *The Globalization of Addiction*, 22-23; Poverty of the spirit refers to the effect of the breaking down of social cohesion and belief through technological innovation and increased wealth. Thus, because of this capitalistic progress, Alexander claims that we no longer have the same strong relationship to the people around us and that the purpose in many people's lives has disappeared because they are just a single part of a larger machine. Put bluntly, one could say that the only purpose of human being in the free-market society is as means of production and consumption. Thus, the use of the expression poverty of the spirit describes the fact that less and less of our lives exists outside the structures of the free-market.

realistic.<sup>76</sup> Such a community promotes other values than the free-market society from which gambling springs naturally. Through this, you fulfill what Adam Alter calls “the missing piece of the treatment puzzle”, which entails redesigning your environment in such a way that temptations are as close to inexistent as possible.<sup>77</sup> He also says that how we perceive addictive experiences depends on culture. If we create a culture where one is not constantly embedded in the system which led us to addiction,<sup>78</sup> it is easier for everyone to avoid such behavioral addictions.<sup>79</sup> The following quote from Ernst F. Schumacher shows exactly this, that inner action should be facilitated by the connection between human beings and be derived from the community of people:

Everywhere people ask: what can I actually do? The answer is as simple as it is disconcerting: we can each of us work to put our own inner house in order. The guidance we need for this work cannot be found in science and technology, the value of which utterly depends on the ends they serve; but it can still be found in the traditional wisdom of [hu]mankind.<sup>80</sup>

On top of this, many authors have advocated for the implementation of Buddhist principles in society. Buddhism can also be used as a cornerstone for the community just mentioned, but it also has another function that can be applied separately. Buddhism has a large focus on mindfulness, and it has been shown that this, along with other Buddhist practices (insight-meditation, ‘middle-way’ principles, etc.), can help in becoming aware of and controlling mental urges.<sup>81</sup> Evan Thompson claims that the goal of this is “a balanced, poised state of mind that’s ready to respond or act in a positive way but is not biased by either sensory salience or affective salience.”<sup>82</sup> Implementing such Buddhist practices in school could for example be a good way to prevent problems with gambling later in life and teach youth how to shift their attention to where they want it to be. The advantage of such an approach is that it goes beyond just gambling and can create a wider change in society.

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<sup>76</sup> Alter, *Irresistible*, 251.

<sup>77</sup> Alter, *Irresistible*, 273.

<sup>78</sup> Thus, poverty of the spirit means that less and less of our lives exist outside the structures of the free-market.

<sup>79</sup> Alter, *Irresistible*, 274-276.

<sup>80</sup> Hastings, *Marketing Matrix*, 151; the ‘traditional wisdom of [hu]mankind’ would here be interpreted as the wisdom from before the scientific revolution and the introduction of the free-market society. This wisdom precedes the overwhelming focus on numbers, profit, and evidence. It is not an argument that these principles are not important to a certain extent. However, they should not replace interpersonal relations and community. These are more intangible forms of wisdom, which are key to ‘putting your inner house in order’.

<sup>81</sup> Edo Shonin, William Van Gordon, and Mark D. Griffiths, “Buddhist philosophy for the treatment of problem gambling,” *Journal of Behavioral Addictions* 2, no. 2 (April 2013): 63-71.

<sup>82</sup> Kessler, *Capture*, 259.

To conclude, the mesopolitical solutions are all aimed at strengthening the local community and facilitating micropolitical change. These communities serve as counterweights to the modern enlightened society, which can result in a better society than any of the views would manage individually. Whether an individual community chooses to apply a Christian, Buddhist, or secular approach, the important thing is to create an environment where gambling and values connected to it are placed as far away as possible.<sup>83</sup> Creating as many free-spaces as possible for potential and actual problem gamblers will help them in dealing with their problem, benefiting society at large.

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<sup>83</sup> An example of such a secular approach could be that of the famous composer Richard Wagner. He wanted to find a way to counteract the alienation of today's society, which is quite similar to the dislocation which Bruce Alexander speaks about. Wagner claims that the problem of alienation should not be solved through myths other than religion. He for example argued for the destruction of modern society using a musical return to myth. Thus, one could place art, music and culture at the center of society in order to facilitate a return to myth in a similar way to the Christian or Buddhist approach; Peter C. Caldwell, *Love, Death, and Revolution in Central Europe: Ludwig Feuerbach, Moses Hess, Louise Dittmar, Richard Wagner* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 99-106.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

This paper set out to argue that online gambling should be considered exploitative, and thus morally wrong and that this problem should be solved through a combination of micropolitical, macropolitical, and mesopolitical solutions. A thorough exploration of the effects of online gambling, both on an individual level and a societal level, was conducted. It is shown that online gambling is highly addictive and that it influences a significant number of people in society, both directly and indirectly, through its effects on areas like money, dreams, and social relations. Further, it was argued that online gambling should be considered exploitative and thus morally wrong. This was based on three different theories of exploitation, where they in combination strongly indicated that online gambling should be considered as exploitative. As a solution to the problem of online gambling, a mix of micropolitical, macropolitical, and mesopolitical solutions was suggested. The individual should try to distance themselves from online gambling as much as possible, for example through self-exclusion. The local community should be strengthened and should serve as an environment where individuals can get help to distance themselves from online gambling, by experiencing a culture that counteracts the dislocation in current society. The state should apply a combination of nationalizing gambling and banning the marketing of it, which would increase the control over gambling and give reduced room for exploiting players. Action at all these three levels combined will lead to the optimal solution to the problem of online gambling. This is a pressing problem and one which can only be solved together. Thus, we should all act on any level we can to improve the situation and get a slightly better society, both locally, nationally, and globally.

The conclusions in this paper are limited in several ways. Although the paper tries to take a wide approach by including three different theories of exploitation, it is still very possible that a person with another view of exploitation would conclude differently. Additionally, the fact that exploitation was used to establish moral wrongness could be contested,<sup>84</sup> and one could therefore end up at a different conclusion if one uses other moral theories for establishing moral wrongness. Lastly, the solutions are bound to work differently in different countries and cultures. The starting point for the solutions proposed was a free-market western society, which means that it is there the primary applicability can be found.

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<sup>84</sup> Argued in Chapter 3



## Appendices

### Appendix 1

#### Problem Gambling Severity Index

This self-assessment is based on the Canadian Problem Gambling Index. It will give you a good idea of whether you need to take corrective action.

##### Thinking about the last 12 months...

Have you bet more than you could really afford to lose?

**0** Never. **1** Sometimes. **2** Most of the time. **3** Almost always.

Still thinking about the last 12 months, have you needed to gamble with larger amounts of money to get the same feeling of excitement?

**0** Never. **1** Sometimes. **2** Most of the time. **3** Almost always.

When you gambled, did you go back another day to try to win back the money you lost?

**0** Never. **1** Sometimes. **2** Most of the time. **3** Almost always.

Have you borrowed money or sold anything to get money to gamble?

**0** Never. **1** Sometimes. **2** Most of the time. **3** Almost always.

Have you felt that you might have a problem with gambling?

**0** Never. **1** Sometimes. **2** Most of the time. **3** Almost always.

Has gambling caused you any health problems, including stress or anxiety?

**0** Never. **1** Sometimes. **2** Most of the time. **3** Almost always.

Have people criticized your betting or told you that you had a gambling problem, regardless of whether or not you thought it was true?

**0** Never. **1** Sometimes. **2** Most of the time. **3** Almost always.

Has your gambling caused any financial problems for you or your household?

**0** Never. **1** Sometimes. **2** Most of the time. **3** Almost always.

Have you felt guilty about the way you gamble or what happens when you gamble?

**0** Never. **1** Sometimes. **2** Most of the time. **3** Almost always.

##### **TOTAL SCORE**

Total your score. The higher your score, the greater the risk that your gambling is a problem.

Score of 0 = Non-problem gambling.

Score of 1 or 2 = Low level of problems with few or no identified negative consequences.

Score of 3 to 7 = Moderate level of problems leading to some negative consequences.

Score of 8 or more = Problem gambling with negative consequences and a possible loss of control.

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