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Legitimizing Gambling - A Study of the 'Liberal Warfare Toolbox'

- Prof. Dr. Kai-Alexander Schlevogt -



According to George Bernard Shaw, the most popular method of distributing wealth is the method of the roulette table.

As a result of rapid deregulation and mesmerizing technological change, such a spinning round of fortunes has recently reached epic proportions in the US, where revenues from gambling (which is euphemistically called “*gaming*” by its respective lobbying associations) has exploded in a short span of time. Bearing in mind that the Irish playwright’s aphorism constitutes one of his “*Maxims for Revolutionists*,” considerable upheaval and possibly a powerful backlash, too, may thus well be in store for the so-called land of opportunities.

According to the American Gaming Association (AGA), commercial gross gaming revenue (GGR), which includes sales in the three verticals of traditional casino gaming, sports betting and iGaming (also called online gaming), increased from about \$30bn in 2020 to \$67bn in 2023 (the last year for which a full data set is available). The rise in GGR represents a growth rate of 122% over a period of only four years or a smoothed compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 22%. Since gross gaming revenue, also called game yield, is the difference between the amount players wagered and their gains, it also



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constitutes the total amount lost by gamblers. Consequently, the above trajectory shows that punters' losses have been increasing at a high rate. The stellar performance of the gambling sector continued in 2024.

In the first eleven months of that year, GGR, driven by a strong showing of sports betting and iGaming, reached about \$66bn. The total amount of money spent on sports betting (which until 2018 was permitted only in Nevada) **rose from \$7bn in 2018 to an estimated \$150bn in 2024** (with revenues totaling about \$14bn in that year). This is equal to a compound annualized growth of sports-betting spending of 55%. **According to the National Council on Problem Gambling**, a staggering 60% of adults in the US had gambled in the preceding year; about 40% of Americans **admit** to placing sports bets. The US by now is the largest online gambling market in the world.

What is more, the betting bonanza in the US is predicted to continue unabated. Online gambling businesses alone **are predicted** to rake up revenues of roughly \$60bn-70bn annually by 2030. In the near future, a commercial casino may even be built in New York's Times Square, which would have been anathema only a few years ago.

As regards gambling products, new, fast-growing and potentially dangerous types of wagers include, among other things, betting on election outcomes and making bets on very short-term moves in shares. Furthermore, long-shot compound bets, called parlays, which combine betting on the occurrence of several events occurring at the same time (such as several football teams winning their matches on a given day), are getting increasingly popular. Such accumulators are riskier than single wagers, but payouts are larger in case of success. Finally, peer-to-peer betting without intermediaries is on the rise, too. Obviously, the unfolding revolutionary drama of the deregulatory high-stakes gamble needs powerful backers with a convincing script not only to sustain itself, but to build further momentum.

In this context, it comes as no surprise that the radical changes in the US gambling industry are hailed by influential liberals in politics and the media, who cushion the gambling malaise in an ensnaring narrative. Their rhetoric reveals common, interrelated patterns with respect to the manipulative techniques employed. It is therefore worthwhile studying the specific cloak-and-dagger stratagems, which are synthesized in my new model entitled the *'Liberal Warfare Toolbox'*. Familiarity with these hidden methods of chicanery will help critical



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thinkers to reveal manipulation and thus catch the put-up jobbers in their attempts to justify, normalize, and popularize gambling and other social evils, such as drugs, prostitution, abortion, and euthanasia.

At the start of our journey of exposing and debunking harmful liberal sophistry, let us uncover the first stratagem in the *'Liberal Warfare Toolbox'*, which relies on leveraging the typical philosophical grounding of a laissez-faire approach.

1. Appealing to higher-order good

The core argument used by liberal plotters in their advocacy for deregulation is that people should be free to enjoy – and even harm – themselves. Applied to the gambling case, laissez-faire proponents argue for granting people full latitude when it comes to having a flutter.

The philosophical underpinning for such a line of reasoning is the concept of *negative* freedom – or “*freedom from,*” paired with an obvious penchant for hedonism. According to the view of those who advocate giving people maximum latitude of action, freedom, understood as a scalar social good, is the absence of constraints imposed by other social actors and thus a maximum number of opportunities.

On the surface, the appeal to freedom per se, due to its *prīmā faciē* persuasiveness, appears to be a clever gambit. Few people would openly and publicly profess that they oppose freedom and want to limit others' possibilities. After all, freedom is based on a noble value, that is, the belief that it is right for people to determine their own destiny by being able to make their own choices. As a consequence, enhancing freedom by removing a legal constraint, in our case, by deregulating gambling, seems to be a good policy.

Yet liberal schemers who promote the removal of encumbrances to action usually fail to adhere to the full doctrine of an influential thinker who is widely considered to be one of the classic proponents of negative freedom. More specifically, the philosopher John Locke, in his *Second Treatise of Government*, clearly distinguished freedom from license and postulated that man needs to act in accordance with the Law of Nature, understood to be reason. The Christ Church don concluded that man is *not* free to do whatever he wants (§ 57). For example, he has no right to harm himself or others. Reasonable limits designed to protect man from “*bogs and precipices*” are *not* deemed to be confinements (§ 57). Given



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that unrestrained gambling constitutes immoral license, which most likely will harm the one who indulges in it and other stakeholders, too, wagering thus needs to be rejected even on the theoretical ground of the philosophy of liberalism.

It is important to note that whereas Locke viewed freedom as a *normative*, morality-based concept, the modern proponents of the deregulation of gambling and other domains consider it to be a content-free and value-neutral construct. Their position is akin to radical neoclassical free-market advocates, who argue that there is no intrinsic value and the only thing that counts is the question whether there is a demand for a particular good, even if it may be harmful. Here is an example of such neoclassical value neutrality: When GDP is calculated, the market value of both harmful gambling products and beneficial services aimed at reducing the harm (such as the treatment of gambling addicts) are added up to arrive at an estimate of a nation's national income.

At a deeper level of philosophical analysis, the concept of negative freedom, promoted by liberal non-interventionists, can be exposed as being one-sided, since it fails to take into account another pivotal concept, that is, *positive* freedom, or "*freedom to.*" For instance, a real or metaphorical gate may be open to you - which would constitute negative freedom - but, for various reasons, in contrast to a resourceful and empowered individual, you may not be able to walk through the opening - which means that you lack positive freedom.

Proponents of negative freedom, who view latitude of action only as a social relation (focusing on obstacles imposed by others), miss the point that freedom is not only an external construct, but also an inner concept, including the lack of internal constraints, which act as inhibiting factors counteracting various enabling factors. For example, someone who is addicted to alcohol cannot be said to possess full freedom, since, because of this enslaving and debilitating condition, his capabilities are significantly reduced, and he is consequently prevented from exploiting many valuable opportunities. Since gambling ensnares punters and tends to make them addicted, it clearly risks undermining positive internal freedom.

Positive freedom hinges on various internal and external resources. Those include a person's own capabilities and abilities, such as a high degree of self-mastery, without which he will be a slave to disordered desires, and the creative and critical faculties needed to



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detect and evaluate different options, in order to avoid being brainwashed. The availability of financial resources - an external resource - can also amount to positive freedom. Given that money is coined freedom, an activity with high odds of losing money, such as gambling, tends to reduce positive freedom.

The presence of both forms of freedom, that is, the negative and positive variant - each in optimal doses and in the best possible blending - is vital for building and sustaining an enlightened and well-functioning society with high odds of providing an effective context for people to lead happy lives.

This first stratagem of appealing to a higher-order good - and the ploys that will be discussed later - are used to justify other pernicious liberal policies, too. For example, advocates of abortion and euthanasia refer to the higher-order value of the dignity of human life, in order to dialectically - and rather cynically - justify the murdering of human beings in contravention of the Hippocratic Oath (*"I will do no harm"*). The very term *"pro-choice,"* used as a euphemistic epithet to describe abortion advocates, hints at the concept of *"negative freedom,"* which is about enlarging the portfolio of possibilities.

Liberal Machiavellians intend on upending the established moral order usually employ a *"thin-edge-of-the wedge"* approach, trying to obtain initial permission in narrowly circumscribed, often extreme, vivid and emotion-invoking cases (such as rape, where abortion is argued to be justified on the ground that the victim deserves compassion and pity). The contrivers thus shatter an initial taboo, which, as a highly charged and untouchable *"third rail"* in politics, previously acted as a powerful impediment to the enactment of policy reversals. After the initial breakthrough, which opened the floodgates, the intriguants push for additional changes. To achieve their objectives, they commonly use *"salami slicing,"* gradually and often surreptitiously dismantling further prohibitions without much notice and resistance. Finally, the formerly outlawed practice, through a process of creeping normality, eventually becomes fully legitimate and widely popularized. In other words, the Overton window (also called the window of discourse), in degrees of acceptability and acceptance has expanded from utterly unthinkable deviancy to actual standard policy based on the new norm. This means that the new practice has left the sphere of controversy and entered the sphere of consensus, where it is considered normal,



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with opponents having spiraled into silence.

2. Delegitimizing and discrediting authority

Closely related to the furtherance of negative freedom is the attempt to destroy authority by claiming that it is wrong for other people, in particular individuals or groups in positions of power or entire influential organizations, to teach or simply tell others how they should live. As part of this stratagem, liberals employ the two wiles of “*damning the origin*” and “*poisoning the well*” in tandem. More specifically, they aim to discredit the authority of both past and present opponents, among other things, by using distortionary and derogatory labels evoking negative mental associations (such as unfavorable stereotypes).

To start with, permissive liberal connivers intent on promoting gambling are presenting a genetic account, arguing that the distaste for wagering has deep and unpleasant historical roots. In particular, they trace such negative attitudes back to the much-loathed Puritans, discrediting this Protestant group as allegedly being authoritative, fanatic, and driven by extreme asceticism. The liberal schemers insinuate that these purists condemn all pleasure and consider it their life’s only purpose to prevent others from enjoying themselves. In this context, it is worth noting that “*puritan*” nowadays is often used as an emotionally laden derogatory label.

As an example of genetic discreditation, the liberal magazine *Economist*, in **an article that hails gambling deregulation**, laments that America’s stance regarding intercourse, alcohol, narcotics and wagering have been molded by its puritanical heritage. Its journalist is utterly bewildered by some US states barring vendors from selling alcohol before the end of Sunday church services and Hollywood prohibiting the picturing of illegal drugs, morally offending nudity and sympathy-arousing criminals – even though all of these prohibitions are morally desirable and sensible. In this context it is worth noticing that the very terms “*sin*” and “*vice*” are being portrayed by religious deniers in many liberal quarters, who are intent on whitewashing their disordered desires and social deviancy, as old-fashioned relicts from a by-gone moralist stone age. This comes despite the fact that the occurrence of these aberrations is a sad empirical reality, occurring as a constant throughout human history.



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A related authority-undermining form of machination is the *ad hominem* attack called “*poisoning the well.*” This technique involves preemptively discrediting and thus hamstringing an opponent so that once he states his case, his credibility has already been destroyed irrespective of the force of his argument. As an example of this technique, which automatically precludes discourse, a liberal journalist, before outlining the reasoning of advocates of gambling regulation, may label them religious zealots and bigots, red-tape loving bureaucrats and mad control freaks. Likewise, once someone has been labelled a notorious liar, his subsequent statements can be easily dismissed, although even habitual liars can occasionally tell the truth.

The above-described trick is self-sealing, since any attempt at refutation can be taken as further evidence for the correctness of the initial label. If, after being called a control freak, you argue for putting constraints on gambling, opponents can rebut by claiming that what you have just said only provides more evidence that you are obsessed with lording it over others. The poisoning maneuver is often combined with the “*strawman*” technique, whereby the opponent’s thesis itself may also be presented in a distorted way so that it can be more easily dismantled thereafter.

Both “*damning the origin*” and “*poisoning the well*” aim at eliminating all opposition at the source before a debate has actually started, thus preventing opponents from getting a fair hearing. They are fallacies, though, since the alleged intellectual heritage of a view or argument - including its source and genesis - and the presumed characteristics and deeper motivations of its proponents have nothing to do with its merits, soundness, credibility, and viability in terms of logical validity. Moreover, there are many examples of greatness emanating even from humble and contaminated sources. After all, the model for Auguste Rodin’s famous sculpture “*Le Penseur*” (The Thinker) was a notorious prizefighter not known for mental prowess. The French artist, after finishing his work purportedly depicting “*deep thought,*” famously told Jean Baud, the wrestler who had posed for him: “*O.K., stupid. You can come down now.*”

In general, opposing authority per se obviously courts disaster, since firm, central and discipline-instilling direction is needed to put the world in order and prevent a return to primordial chaos. There are many different types of authorities whose wise advice and



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guidance are essential and indispensable in life, including teachers, doctors, and priests. Oftentimes, they act as role models who inspire another person and give him valuable orientation with respect to how he needs to conduct himself to achieve true happiness. Such a positive influence is especially important in view of the well-known limits of human beings. For example, due to bounded rationality or outright irrationality, they tend to do certain things (such as smoking), even though they know that they are bad for them.

Without an ultimate central and ideally transcendental authority, there will be anarchy, since there is nobody who sets and enforces binding standards. In Dostoyevsky's novel *The Brothers Karamazov*, Mitya (Dmitri) Karamazov, in a self-quote, **asks**: "*Without God and the future life? It means everything is permitted now, one can do anything?*"

Liberals who delegitimize and discredit authority are dishonest, since they - in the same vein as everyone else - cite or implicitly rely on authorities themselves. An example is their recourse to influential classical philosophers of liberalism such as John Locke. This is reminiscent of the behavior of Protestants. They reject the Catholic Church's *magisterium* (which literally means the "*office of a teacher*") and claim that they will follow only scripture (*sola scriptura*). But in reality, they rely on other authorities, such as local ministers, for exegetical purposes and direction. This is because all texts need to be interpreted and explained, which often involves making subjective value judgments and using philological ruses to arrive at the desired meaning and ostensibly prove one's point.

What is more, as we have seen, even the views of the liberals' foremost witnesses are often presented in a distorted light to fit the propagandist purposes of the schemers. Furthermore, proponents of the liberal creed themselves are usually eager to act as authoritative teachers. They callously call the entirety of their opponents a mob, which, according to the revolutionists, needs to be thoroughly educated to prevent them from being swayed by "*populist demagogues*."

Like all stratagems in the '*Liberal Warfare Toolbox*', the genetic fallacy and contrivance of poisoning the well are used not only to promote gambling deregulation, but to achieve ignoble ends in other fields, too. For example, as regards the preemptive slandering of an opponent, a man - including a Catholic priest - who opposes abortion can be easily discredited before he even has a chance to state his case. Permissive liberal abortion



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activists, as the first step, may simply highlight the mere fact that he is male. Then, they can draw the seemingly obvious, but in truth erroneous conclusion that because of his nature, he does not understand the predicaments of women and is driven by a deep-seated natural instinct to dominate females, which involves restricting their choices. Moreover, using verbal acrobatics, liberals may call him a “*pro-forced-birth*” person. The arsenal of liberal sophists is not limited to the above-described two methods of machination, though.

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