

Casino In Our City? – A Moral Perspective (A letter to the Feedback Unit)

Gambling - I have been thinking hard to find a justification for it. I have listened to the views on two sides. I have read the arguments carefully to follow their line of reasoning. But in the end, when I have to decide on the matter, I could not find any ethical justification for it. There are political reasons, social reasons and economic reasons for allowing gambling. But honestly, I don't think anyone can come out with an ethical reason to justify it. There will always be reasons to argue for legalizing it. But when you weigh the matter ethically rather than pragmatically, there are no valid reasons to endorse it morally. We can of course permit it, or even legalize it, but it will never be done on moral grounds. The view that we should legalize it in order to control the underworld gambling is itself an ethical problem. One perhaps may argue that by legalizing gambling, the governing authorities is at least able to take it from the hands of those who use the gain to finance illegal and immoral activities. But a legal act like this only prevents the crimes, but it does not remove the sin and stop the ill consequences. Then there is the current view in our own country where casino gambling should be opened only to the rich and elite, that is, for those who have the money to gamble. Setting up gambling clubs for an exclusive crowd is of a course a powerful way to bring in the tourists, and boost our reputation as a fun city. But then again, an approach like this has its risks. And I believe that our policy makers are aware of the risks. They have their reasons for going ahead with it. But in the end, a moral issue like this ought to be considered morally.

So what are some of the moral problems of placing a casino in our city?

1. The methodology involved is itself morally confusing. If it is finally allowed on purely pragmatic grounds, then it may confuse the thinking of the next generation. Our children may grow up thinking that the end justifies the means. The case under discussion is especially confusing because the means involved is sinful.
2. By opening up casinos, we inevitably encourage gambling amongst the populace. It is not true as have been claimed, "that every one is gambling already". No doubt there are already people who frequent overseas for their occasional kicks. But that is still a small fraction of the entire population. But to put a casino in our own backyard is sure to stir curiosity, arouse interests, excite passions and increase the number of social gamblers and addicts.
3. Then there is the problem of addiction. People who gamble and win will want to up their stake to go on winning. People who lose will want to go on gambling to regain their lost. Such cravings often lead eventually to an uncontrollable compulsive behaviour. And when a person finally becomes addicted to it, it will be hard to kick the habit. And by the time the addict realizes his wrongs, he may have already caused an irreparable damage in the lives of others, not to mention even his own life.
4. Then there is the question of national security. Not all the avid gamblers are just professionals with money to spare. Some of them are gamblers belonging to syndicates and triads. No doubt some of these will be in Singapore when the casino opens. This thought alone frightens me. By opening a casino, we inevitably increase the operation of organized crime. How safe will our society be in the future?
5. Then there is the danger of what it may do to the family unit. Here in Singapore we have always recognized a good family as one that is important for a cohesive society. Our future as a country depends on good, moral families. We are well aware of the damage gambling can bring to a home. Is it right to shake the foundation of the home for the sake of having more tourists

dollars? Placing a casino has long term social effects. And most of these effects are negative. They are effects that will be detrimental to the family unit.

6. There are other many other related moral problems besides the few I mentioned here. There is the problem of greed and deception, and the effect gambling has on the virtue of hard work

In considering a matter like this, I feel that we must never confuse what is legal with what is moral. By legalizing gambling, we are allowing an activity permitted under the law. But a legal act like this does not itself remove the unethical elements in gambling. Both legalized and illegal gambling continues to be a moral dilemma. I have always told my friends that what is legal is not always moral. And I think it is time to view the whole issue from a moral point of view as well.

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