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978-1-107-09120-7 - Moral Jeopardy: Risks of Accepting Money from the Alcohol,
Tobacco and Gambling Industries

Peter J. Adams

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University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

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www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107091207

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First published 2016

Printed in the United Kingdom by Clays, St Ives plc

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

Names: Adams, Peter J., 1956–, author.

Title: Moral jeopardy: risks of accepting money from the alcohol, tobacco and gambling industries / Peter J. Adams.

Description: Cambridge, United Kingdom; New York : Cambridge University Press, 2016. | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2016004904 | ISBN 9781107091207 (hardback)

Subjects: | MESH: Ethics, Business | Financing, Organized – economics | Charities – economics | Health Care Sector – ethics | Behavior, Addictive – economics | Tobacco Industry – economics | Gambling – economics | Alcoholic Beverages – economics

Classification: LCC RA427.25 | NLM HF 5387 | DDC 174.2–dc23

LC record available at <http://lccn.loc.gov/2016004904>

ISBN 978-1-107-09120-7 Hardback

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Preface

It is surprising just how easy it is for one's mind to find justifications for what one wants to do. Similar to the way a knee reflex responds to a strike from a doctor's rubber mallet, justifications seem to emerge smoothly and automatically; they swing into action to counter even the slightest prod of conscience: I eat meat because where else will I get sufficient protein; I drive a car to work because the city's public transport system is so lousy; I avoid giving to that charity because that organization is corrupt.

But, of course, one's mind does not pull these justifications out of thin air.

This was brought home to me some time back while in the throes of preparing a grant application on behalf of our department. Our university had established a new fund available for staff to invite international experts into departments to promote teaching and research endeavors. It was a generous allowance with enough money to host an overseas visitor for one to three months. Since such opportunities were rare, we quickly arranged a meeting of interested staff and began brainstorming a proposal. We settled on the idea of inviting a leading academic in community development from overseas who could help boost our fledgling development initiatives. That person could present in seminars, guide our current projects, input into student research and help us devise and compile a funding application for a large new project. We were excited. The visit would raise our efforts to a new level.

I took the ideas from the meeting and sat down at my computer to fill in the application form. The first boxes asked for the usual information about the location, the people involved, their roles ... this was easy enough to complete. The boxes then asked for the aims of the visit and the activities we had in mind ... this took a little longer to formulate ... then my eyes scanned a box at the bottom of the page. Inside the box was a familiar brand logo and next to it a statement: "Proudly supported by the Lion Foundation." I instantly recognized the logo as belonging to the nation's largest brewery. I also knew that the Lion Foundation was one of the biggest of the six main organizations involved in distributing community benefit grants from the profits of gambling machines.

This complicated matters considerably. I could see the association was very inconvenient. The money we were seeking had come directly from people playing gambling machines in bars and, as I knew very well, it was these machines that contributed to the majority of gambling-related harm in our country. An unwelcome query was prodding from the back of my mind: Is this acceptable? Is it okay to proceed?

My first response – I am ashamed to admit – was to pretend I hadn't seen the logo. Well, we had already put so much work into the ideas for the project and our hopes were ablaze. The initiative now had momentum and the financial support would be an ideal stimulus for what our department was seeking to achieve. Maybe I could pretend I hadn't seen it? That's it, I didn't really see it. Perhaps later, if people were to point it out, I could claim I didn't know and by then it would be too late to stop. Maybe my colleagues would follow my example and choose to ignore it as well. It would be so simple to turn the page and continue filling in the boxes without thinking about the logo any further. But, alas, I had seen it and I was already worrying about it. The idea of deceiving myself was beginning to lose its appeal. I was going to have to try something else.

My second response was more measured. Okay, I can't pretend I didn't see it, but perhaps it's not really such a bad thing to receive money from this source. After all, gambling has its

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positive side: most people gamble purely for enjoyment and gambling venues help create rich opportunities for family and friends to gather together and to have some fun. Only a churlish spoilsport would stand in the way of people having fun. Besides, it is really only a very small minority of those who gamble who experience serious problems, and they would probably have formed an addiction to that or another product anyway. No harm would be done in making good use of this money.

Such justifications might work in an ordinary university department but, unfortunately, in this arena our department was not so ordinary. It contained three active groups devoted to research on harm from tobacco, alcohol and gambling. How would it look to others if we were seen to fund our activities from the very source that generates these harms? On a daily basis our work reminds us of the widespread harm and misery inflicted on individuals, communities and populations by these consumptions. On top of the conflict we would experience in our own minds, we would find it difficult to stand up and, with any credibility, criticize the activities of these industries. We could not with any seriousness get away with pretending the impacts of addictive consumptions are minimal. Besides, we had known for a long time that locating the origins of these harms with certain individual “addictive personalities” was in reality a convenient fiction, a fiction that only industry spokespeople appear committed to promoting.

My third response drew on a complex mix of justifications. Its spontaneous logic flowed somewhat as follows: the money is sitting there already; our views regarding how it was collected won't make any difference; it is still going to be distributed, so someone has to make use of it, and if we don't access it then somebody else will. Similar to the way gambling profits are distributed to sports clubs to fund overseas travel or new uniforms, if we don't access these funds then it is likely to end up supporting activities far less deserving than our own. It could end up funding obscure research projects in fields such as sports science or literary criticism or plant morphology or archaeology – areas of research with little relevance to the problems associated with these consumptions. Surely it is better that these profits are channeled back into addressing the source of these harms? And our work on strengthening communities will in the long run provide a very important platform for relevant initiatives. We almost have, therefore, a duty to apply. We mightn't succeed, but, after all, you need to be in to win. Besides it would be very irksome to watch researchers in these unrelated fields scoring without us having at least had a shot at obtaining some of it for our more worthy endeavors.

Now, this is indeed a complex cluster of rationalizations. How do I sort out what these thoughts all mean? Behind it I recognized my primary motive was a raw desire to take the money. I so much wanted to be able to proceed with the application. But can I trust these thoughts when my desire is so strong?

I sat back and reflected on some of what I was telling myself: gambling is okay, you need to be in to win, we deserve to succeed, our cause is more worthwhile ... I could see how these messages resonated with the many very familiar messages we use to justify engagement in addictive consumptions: drinking is fun, it's worth having a flutter, I deserve a smoke ... I realized that, while my justifications appeared to bubble up from within, they were in fact connected to the many messages that circulate in advertisements, in films and in everyday conversations about the permissibility of such consumptions. I concluded that instead of me coming up with these justifications, they were coming from outside; they were already a resource out there, standing ready to service decisions that enable me to attain what I desire. The link between the justification and my desire for the money was too strong

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and I could not trust it. What I really needed was some way of weighing up and sifting out what is important in this decision; some sort of guide that would assist in methodical deliberation on the issues.

The following book sets out to describe the dilemmas and pitfalls when people and organizations are faced with the opportunity of accepting funds from an ethically questionable source. It will provide a step-by-step guide for how to make decisions on such matters and places them in the wider context of government and global interests.

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Acknowledgments

I began this book in August 2014 and submitted a complete draft by the end of January 2015. Much of the information supporting arguments for the book was collected during this period. So the book came together in a relatively short and intense period of time. Along the way, I am very grateful to a wide range of people for their support, encouragement and practical help. I want first-off to express my gratitude to Tom Babor and Audrey Chapman who, at a critical period in the writing, hosted my visit to the UConn Health Center at the University of Connecticut in Farmington. I thank them for their hospitality and encouragement. During this visit, I was grateful to Kate Robaina for her patient help and her willingness to share her vast knowledge of the alcohol industry. I was also grateful to Lisa Cook and Denise Parris, who helped make things happen. Special and warm thanks to Gareth Witkewicz, who for six weeks kindly provided me with accommodation in the trees of Avon Connecticut during which I shared many lively evening conversations with her and her friends.

I am grateful for the helpful input from people I visited and consulted during the course of writing the book. These included: Lisa Bero at the University of Sydney, Ben Hawken at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, Jim McCambridge at the University of York, Katherine Brown at London's Institute for Alcohol Studies, Peter Miller at Deakin University, Rebecca Cassidy at Goldsmiths University of London, Nick Freudenberg at City University of New York, Natasha Dow Schüll at MIT in Boston, Richard Daynor and Mark Gottlieb at the Public Health Advocacy Institute in North Eastern University in Boston, Ingeborg Rossow at the Norwegian Institute for Alcohol Research, Anita Borch and Janne Nikinnen at the University of Helsinki and Alan Vendrame at the Federal University of São Paulo. I am especially grateful to Charles Livingstone at Monash University in Melbourne for his ongoing support and for hosting my time in Australia.

A critically important part in development of the book was the feedback from those who read the first complete draft. I appreciate how big a task it is to read through a manuscript which is still in development. Those who read drafts and provided feedback included: Tom Babor, Kate Robaina, Charles Livingstone, Alistair Woodward and my daughter Josie. Their feedback was crucial to helping me sharpen up the main argument that runs through the book. I also wish to acknowledge my friend John Raeburn with whom I met for lunch on a regular basis and who provided feedback on my chapters as they emerged in exchange for me commenting on chapters in the book he was writing. In addition, I am very grateful for the guidance and feedback provided by the Cambridge University Press editor, Richard Marley.

On the home front, I want to thank the University of Auckland for granting me six months of research and study leave, without which this book would never have been possible. I am also grateful for support from my immediate colleagues in our Centre for Addiction Research, particularly David Newcombe, Fiona Rossen, Sam White, Janie Sheridan, Natalie Walker, Susanna Galea, Robin Shepherd and Chris Bullen, plus the support of others at our School of Population Health, in particular Elsie Ho, Janine Wiles, Peter Huggard, Evie Kinane, Ngaire Kerse, Jude McCool, Kashmira Irani, James Clark, Peter Carswell, Janine Wiles and Janet Fanslow. They all contributed in various ways, including covering for my absences.

Finally, I need to thank members of my family for their support and tolerance. These include my wife Judith, our four children, Emily, William, Josie and Stephanie, and my mother, Nelly.

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Portions of the Preface and Chapters 4 and 14 are drawn from Peter J. Adams (2012) “Should addiction researchers accept funding derived from the profits of addictive consumptions?” pp. 122–38 in *Genetic Research on Addiction: Ethics, the Law and Public Health* edited by Audrey Campbell. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Portions of Chapter 2 are drawn from Peter J. Adams and Charles Livingstone (2015) “Addiction surplus: The add-on margin that makes addictive consumptions difficult to contain.” *International Journal of Drug Policy* 26(1):107–11.

Portions of the third section (“Managed partnerships”) of Chapter 10 are drawn from, Peter J. Adams, Stephen Buetow and Fiona Rossen (2010) “Poisonous partnerships: Health sector buy-in to arrangements with government and addictive consumption industries.” *Addiction* 105: 585–90.

Portions of Chapter 18 are drawn from Peter J. Adams (2013) “Addiction industry studies: Understanding how proconsumption influences block effective interventions.” *American Journal of Public Health* 103(4): e35–38.