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# Imagining Trust and Justice – The Rise and Fall of the English State Lottery 1694–1826

Almost all European realms sanctioned both private and state lotteries for periods between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. The same states enacted a range of laws and regulations to protect state lottery monopolies but also, after early public support and confidence, encountered growing disenchantment which in turn contributed to both distaste and enthusiasm for other forms of gambling, chancing and risk-taking. Histories of lotteries and their dependence on and promotion of fantasy include various accounts of expectations and income projected at the time, together with past censure, some in relation to the institution's origination and modes of operation and some in relation to contemporary concerns and attitudes. The fantasy of winning tests the extensiveness of issues of assurance and risk – the perils of playing, the hazards of addiction, as well as the dangers of both loss and the massive win, of the oversetting of rational and moral behaviour. Risk-taking rarely avoids negative connotations, and most lottery schemes have invited social concern about irresponsible and unfair gain and even of corruption.

A distinguished discussion exists of the history of gaming tendencies and of anthropological, historical, and pathological theories of the propulsion towards games of chance.<sup>1</sup> The history of the lottery, however, is at once a history of popular recreations and attitudes but also a history of state finance and private investment and risk-taking, of public policy, the advance of state bureaucracy, the response of the market, law enforcement and policing, corruption, and the tension between fiscal expediency and moral concern.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Led by Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1949); Oskar Morgenstern and John von Neuman, *Theory of Games and Economic Behaviour* (Princeton University Press, 1944); Domenico Scafoglio, ed., *La vita in gioco: Antropologia, letteratura filosofia dell'azzardo* (Marlin, 2006); Roger Caillois, *Les Jeux et les hommes: le masque et le vertige* (Gallimard, 1958); Susanna Millar, *The Psychology of Play* (Penguin Books, 1968); Luigi Volpicella, *La vita del gioco*, 2nd ed. (A. Armando, 1966); John Dunkley, *Gambling: a Social and Moral Problem in France 1685–1792* (Voltaire Foundation, 1985); and Philippe Ariès and Jean-Claude Margolin, eds., *Les Jeux à la renaissance* (Librairie philosophique J. Vrin, 1982).

<sup>2</sup> Pierre Coste, *Les Loteries d'État en Europe et la Loterie Nationale: Historique – Caractéristiques* (Payot, 1933); Edith Saurer, *Strasse, Schmuggel, Lottospiel: Materielle Kultur und Staat in Niederösterreich, Böhmen und Lombardo-Venetien im frühen 19. Jahrhundert* (Max-Planck-Institut für Geschichte, 1989); essays by Robert Muchembled, Bruno Bernard, Claude Bruneel, and Helma Houtman-De Smedt in *Loteries en Europe: Cinq siècles d'histoire*, ed. B. Bernard and M. Ansiaux

The focus of this chapter is the English state lottery which ran almost annually for 132 years from 1694 (with tickets sold in Britain and Ireland) and argues that questions of trust and justice, and of confidence and fairness, were crucial to the assessment and representation of lotteries, and especially of those sponsored by the state. Relatively neglected since their abolition,<sup>3</sup> the operation and consequences of the English (and associated Irish<sup>4</sup>) state lotteries are capable of new interpretation in relation to risk-taking and the development of trust and stability. Trust in gambling in the lottery as an investment in the national interest increased during the first half of the eighteenth century, in line with greater acquaintance with financial risk. In turn, such trust weakened markedly in the later eighteenth century, before suffering a precipitous collapse in the early nineteenth century. The following argues that these changes in the perception of trust and fairness related to three main features.

The first consideration is that structural variations to the many lottery schemes fundamentally affected contemporary perceptions of trust and appraisals of risk – and in consequence, our understanding of the relationship between lottery participation, policing, and the eventual abandonment of the lottery as a fiscal device. Almost all state lotteries in England from 1694 until 1769 incorporated investment – akin to bonds – with the chance of prize returns in the form of additional annuities. After 1769, however, (and after 1790 in Ireland) most lot-

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(Loterie nationale; Snoeck-Ducaju & Zoon, 1994); Günther G. Bauer, ed., *Lotto und Lotterie, Homo Ludens – Der Spielende Mensch* 7 (Verlag Emil Katzbichler, 1997); Thomas M. Kavanagh, *Dice, Cards, Wheels: A Different History of French Culture* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005); Thomas M. Kavanagh, *Enlightenment and the Shadows of Chance: The Novel and the Culture of Gambling in Eighteenth-Century France* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); Robert D. Kruckeberg, “The Wheel of Fortune in Eighteenth-Century France: The Lottery, Consumption, and Politics” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2009); Marie-Laure Legay, *Les Loteries royales dans l’Europe des Lumières 1680–1815* (Presses universitaires du septentrion, 2014); Manfred Zollinger, ed., *Random Riches: Gambling Past & Present* (Routledge, 2016); and Bob Harris, *Gambling in Britain in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge University Press, 2022).

3 John Ashton, *A History of English Lotteries* (Leadenhall Press, 1893); C. L’Estrange Ewen, *Lotteries and Sweepstakes: An Historical, Legal, and Ethical Survey of their Introduction, Suppression and Re-establishment in the British Isles* (Heath Cranton, 1932); Richard D. Richards, “The Lottery in the History of English Government Finance”, *Economic History* 3, no. 9 (1934): 57–76, refined by Jacob Cohen, “The Element of Lottery in British Government Bonds, 1694–1919”, *Economica* 20, no. 79 (1953), 237–246; J.E.D. Binney, *British Public Finance and Administration, 1774–1792* (Clarendon Press, 1958), 86–88, 262–263; James Raven, “The Abolition of the English State Lotteries”, *Historical Journal* 34 (1991): 371–389; James Raven, “Debating the Lottery in Britain c. 1750–1830”, in *Random Riches*, ed. Zollinger, 87–104; and Harris, *Gambling in Britain*, chs. 3 and 4.

4 Commencing in 1780, the connected Irish state lotteries were discontinued with the Act of Union of 1801; see Rowena Dudley, *The Irish State Lottery 1780–1801* (Four Courts Press, 2005).

tery draws operated as direct revenue and not annuity investment-type lotteries. Trust in material return declined.

The second consideration is that the fantasy of acquisition in the long eighteenth century related to concepts of fairness in the context of a growing consumer society and increased emulative interest in the possibility of material acquisition. Participation in the lottery involved the acceptance of choice and chance, where an elemental concept of the casting of lots invited broad moral and political consideration of fairness dependent on the changing form and perception of the lottery operation.

The third consideration is that the attraction of the state lottery diminished with increasing accusations of corruption, related to the lottery's structural changes and the increase in subsidiary betting. Charges of dishonesty damaged the fantasy of winning the lottery and invited further comparison with participation in other forms of gambling, notably the playing of cards, dice, and betting on sports activities.

## 1 Trust and risk

Changes to the structure and organisation of the English state lottery contributed very largely to the development of trust in the institution by the middle of the eighteenth century. Much of the borrowing to the Treasury allowed by the state lotteries remained extremely inefficient, but they became a ready fixture of government annual budgets and compensating in their early years for the relative lack of public trust in other borrowing schemes. Public confidence increased after the initial problems of government non-payment of certain prizes in the 1690s and early 1700s and the qualms about high risk; but then weakened as lotteries lost investment potential in the late eighteenth century. By the early nineteenth century, a more vociferous moral crusade accompanied increasingly poor fiscal returns from what was effectively now a privatised operation. Distrust and suspicions about operational fairness contributed to this debate about the lottery's efficiency as a revenue raising device and to its continuance as an instrument of government policy.

From the outset, the broader objectives of lottery schemes encouraged trust. Successive governments lauded state lotteries as patriotic contributors to the financing of budget deficits. The lottery takes its place in the advance of the so-called fiscal-military state and of commercialisation on the back of increasingly successful and sophisticated indirect taxation. In England in the 1690s, as innovative schemes developed to attract funds, the Treasury oversaw the selling of between three and four million lottery tickets, while private schemes also flour-

ished. Between the “Million Lottery” Act of 1693/4 and 1784, the state lotteries raised more than £144 million in convoluted borrowing, debt retirement, and joint-stock operations associated with state lotteries. Lotteries underwrote state loans, reduced the capital or interest on the National Debt (a system that evolved during the eighteenth century and proved to be remarkably effective), funded specific projects, and collected revenue directly. Lottery schemes largely built Westminster Bridge (only the second bridge crossing of the Thames at London after London Bridge), supplied the navy, and established what was to become the British Museum. Especially in wartime, annual Bills announcing lottery schemes emphasised their support of military spending. By 1762, more people subscribed to the state lottery than to any other government fund. The lure of winning an exceptional prize ensured that successful lotteries provided loans of £35 million during the Seven Years’ War and over £70 million in the war with the American colonies.

The trust established in the English state lottery in the early eighteenth century also benefited by comparison to earlier sporadic and controversial affairs, both at home and abroad. English occasional lotteries dated back to that of Elizabeth of 1567–1568 (the so-called Great Lottery designed to assist with the defence of the realm) and included local lotteries, such as that to establish a grammar school at Bury St Edmunds in Suffolk. None of the promoters of early pre-1690 English lotteries intended them as permanent, and certainly not annual affairs. In many other European states also, sporadic lotteries (in which plate and other treasure often stood as the prizes) set precedents for numerous seventeenth-century schemes, large and small, designed to support specific defence, educational, building, and semi-charitable initiatives. Many of the early schemes failed, although by 1690 at least some state-supported lotteries had raised public monies in Paris, Milan, Naples, Venice, Rome, Vienna, Brussels, and especially in Genoa, whose long-held lotteries became influential models for numerous further lottery schemes in Continental Europe in the eighteenth century. Drawing on these examples, contractors and projectors took a slice of the profits including, in England, Thomas Neale who set up the lottery in 1693 that preceded the first English Million state lottery. Many of the early lotteries sanctioned by state authority also comprised what we might now term “raffles” of valuable jewels and other property.

The first English Million Lottery of 1694 (under an Act of 1693) aimed to provide the government with a £1,000,000 advance, with £2,200,000 returned to the investors, spread over sixteen years. Entry to the lottery depended on the purchase of annuities, which at least appeared to guarantee an added return. The pay-off was that in return, often for lower interest paid on the loan to the government, the investor stood the chance of a bonus return in annuities. In these early £10 and £100 ticket lotteries, guaranteed annuities were paid in instalments over a fixed term, usually one of thirty-two years. Other lottery loan types offered the

lender perpetual annuities (but also tradable like the other lottery returns) which could be redeemed in full or maintained with payment of interest (between 3 and 6%). In eighteenth-century financial markets, lenders and borrowers together established the relative values of different securities and allowed the secondary transfer of already-issued securities. Bonds and securities raised short-term revenues, conspicuously offset by interest payments and dividends, and accompanied by extensive and increasing taxation and customs and excise boosts to the asset side of the Treasury's balance sheet. For the lottery player, however, the spreading of this return over several decades diminished real returns. It is questionable whether all of the early bond-type lotteries proved a good investment given, in some cases, a capital depreciation over a twenty-year bond of some 30–50%. A large accumulation remained unlikely, and participants really did need to win a large prize to justify ticket purchase.

As lotteries from the 1690s onwards and especially the more successful state lotteries after 1710 contributed to the permanent funded National Debt, such broadening participation in government funding taught investors about levels of risk. These lessons allied to a range of writings whose increasing generic distinctiveness amounted, it is argued, to a separation between the fictional and the factual and the mediation of value in an emergent credit economy.<sup>5</sup> Despite the continuing inefficiency for government of this method of borrowing and raising revenue, the early state lotteries offered an attractive fiscal strategy when the lure of the wheel and its additional chance return offset the lack of “credible commitment” necessary for potential lenders to put trust in other government bonds and borrowing schemes.<sup>6</sup> Even if lottery bonds suffered long-term capital depreciation, purchasers might trade tickets when even those drawn as blanks might be worth something because they carried a return (albeit one limited by years). After subscriptions closed, notices advertised the prices of lottery tickets alongside those of stocks and government bonds. Comparisons taught investors much, and greater quantification of financial risk further supported the formulation of probability theories and the application of those theories to financial undertakings and the human controllability of “chance”. As a result, books on probability theory

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5 Mary Poovey, *The Genres of the Credit Economy. Mediating Value in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Britain* (University of Chicago Press, 2008), building on observations by Marieke de Goede, *Virtue, Fortune, and Faith. A Genealogy of Finance* (University of Minnesota Press, 2005), esp. 50–57, of the “moral problematization of gambling”; and James Raven, *Judging New Wealth: Popular Publishing and Responses to Commerce in England, 1750–1800* (Oxford University Press, 1992).

6 Anne Murphy, *The Origins of English Financial Markets: Investment and Speculation before the South Sea Bubble* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 4–5, 54–58, 61–64.

burgeoned. Both popular guides (with often bogus advice) and scholarly treatises pursued the taming of chance by the rational investigation of unpredictability, building on celebrated advances in the seventeenth century.<sup>7</sup> Jacob Bernoulli's posthumously published *Ars Conjectandi* in 1713 drew on the work of mathematicians such as Christiaan Huygens, Blaise Pascal, Pierre de Fermat, and Gerolamo Cardano, the latter a compulsive gambler. Bernoulli demonstrated that from a large number of trials the average of the outcomes is likely to be very close to expected values, and its fourth section discussed practical applications of probability to personal, judicial, and financial decisions. Five years later, Abraham de Moivre's *The Doctrine of Chances* probed complex probabilities by mathematical calculation. Evaluation of risk reached scientific levels.

Partly as a ploy to direct attention away from other gambling and to give the state lottery greater authority and invest it with "trust", in London, as in Continental cities, formal rituals and theatricals attended the drawing of each lottery. Theatricals also injected excitement to the lottery draw where participation was evidently not as entertaining as prolonged gaming at the card table or betting at the races. Procedures therefore became more elaborate. Before every London draw, the two lottery wheels processed from the Lottery offices, first at Whitehall and then at Somerset Place, to the Guildhall and then, in later years, to Coopers' Hall. The procession was conducted with the elaborate pomp of state ceremonial, the wheel given full military escort.

As in most European state lotteries, young boys were employed to draw the fortunate tickets from the wheel. In London, orphans of Christ Hospital drew the tickets, just as children had drawn the 1612 Virginia lotteries. The symbol of blind innocence – "indifference" was the term used – continued in the Irish lottery draws. Small children, very often blindfolded, drew the Amsterdam and Hague lotteries, as they did at Augsburg and many venues besides. Dozens of different engraved images from different countries illustrate the draws.<sup>8</sup> In Spain, the state lottery was drawn by boys under eight years old from the Colegio de San Ildefonso, each boy wearing a white gown and powdered wig.<sup>9</sup> As on the Continent, in confirming trust in the lottery, the clerical establishment also appeared

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7 Florence Nightingale David, *Games, Gods, and Gambling: The Origins and History of Probability and Statistical Ideas from the Earliest Times to the Newtonian Era* (Charles Griffin and Co., 1962).

8 Including, for example, the 1785 print reproduced in Helma Houtman-de Smedt, "North-West Europe under the Spell of Lotteries and Lotto", in *Loteries en Europe*, ed. Bernard and Ansiaux, 78; and the 1769 Augsburg print in *Lotto und Lotterie*, ed. Bauer, 195.

9 An engraved print is reproduced in Bruno Bernard, "Aspects moraux et sociaux des loteries", in *Loteries en Europe*, ed. Bernard and Ansiaux, 55–87; and another in José Altabella, *La Lotería Nacional de España (1763–1963)* (Dirección General de Tributos Especiales, 1962), 48.





**Figure 1:** “The Guards escorting the Government Lottery wheel from Somerset House to Coopers Hall to be Drawn”, hand-coloured aquatint, Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Fund HG6185.E54; File number: 11046495 – 0013.

more supportive than condemnatory. The archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Herring, for example, was trustee for the British Museum and Westminster Bridge lotteries of the 1750s. Bishops and clerics appear among the few records surviving of state lottery winners.<sup>10</sup>

What is now clear is that, in its early years, the English state lottery brought enthusiastic participation and positive as much as negative reaction. Revisionist historians (and notably Anne Murphy<sup>11</sup>) have noted Peter Dickson’s significant side-lining of risk-taking (and also of the state lotteries) in his classic account of what he helped define as the “Financial Revolution”.<sup>12</sup> We might now dispute the belief of Dickson and others that wagering and gambling proved a “contradictory trend” to the development of private and public finance in England and Eu-

<sup>10</sup> Including, for example, in the register of successful ticket holders for the 1711 lottery, National Archives, E, 401, 2600.

<sup>11</sup> Murphy, *Origins of English Financial Markets*, 3.

<sup>12</sup> P.G.M. Dickson, *The Financial Revolution in England: A Study in the Development of Public Credit, 1688–1756* [Macmillan, 1967] 2nd ed. (Gregg Revivals, 1993).



**Figure 2:** Joseph Constantine Stadler after Augustus Pugin (1812–1852) and Thomas Rowlandson (1757–1827), “Lottery Drawing: Cooper’s Hall”, hand-coloured aquatint, Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Fund, HG6185.E54; File number: 11046495–0011.

rope, and rather suggest that quantified risk-taking accorded with financial and even, for governments, fiscal adventuring. Dickson’s account did, however, underscore apparent social contradictions – of what he points to when he writes of “the addiction of contemporaries to gambling on a massive scale [...] an age of wagers on the lives of private and public men, the chances of war; and the occurrence of natural events, as well as the issue of a horse-race, the fall of a dice, the turn of a card”.<sup>13</sup> What stands out is what we might deem a pragmatic selectivity in contemporary attitudes to risk that in relation to government lotteries (and state protectionism) goes back at least to the 1699 statute suppressing non-state lottery schemes. The statute establishing the next state lottery in 1710 reinforced distinctions, with subsidiary gambling on lottery results, somewhat confusingly known as lottery “insurances”, technically outlawed in 1719 and recurrently proscribed. Other statutes suppressed differing activities connected with lotteries, with the

<sup>13</sup> Dickson, *Financial Revolution in England*, 45.



Gaming Act passed in 1739 consolidating this legislation. Acts of parliament permitted a few private lotteries during this period, but following the 1739 Gaming Act no statute authorised a private lottery until 1774. As has been observed, the Gaming Act served not simply as a prohibition but as a regularising protocol, codifying and normalising certain practices. In that sense, the Act served to maintain trust in the official state lottery.<sup>14</sup>

Nonetheless (and perhaps assisted by the codifying of the acceptable and the clearer identification of the intolerable), concern about excessive risk advanced. Writings about the lottery hugely expanded over the eighteenth century and into the early nineteenth century. *Eighteenth-Century Short-Title Catalogue* lists more than 700 separately printed items with “lottery” in the title (including some official publications, unauthorised printed lists of winning numbers and many more tables and guides and miscellanies), but this tally obviously excludes important references, episodes, and vignettes in many other publications, and certainly excludes the huge popularity of the lottery as a subject of magazine and review articles and stories. The lottery appeared frequently in eighteenth-century engravings, drama, and novels, including William Hogarth’s *The Lottery* (1724), with its images of Fortune condemning the effects of the lottery (and following on from a multitude of post-South Sea Bubble pictorial jeremiads).

Other, more established critiques positing the replacement of trade by finance and of land by funds repay careful reading and a certain, if uneven censure can be identified. Even the early and more positive critiques, for example, included alarms such as that raised by John Briscoe in 1694,<sup>15</sup> focusing on traders who were now financiers, and warning that “now almost their whole Discourse is of Lottery-Tickets, Annuities, Bank-Bills etc”.<sup>16</sup> Forty years later, Henry Fielding’s musical farce *The Lottery* (published in 1732) included the celebrated assertion that “A Lottery is a Taxation, Upon all the Fools of Creation”.<sup>17</sup> Importantly, this “taxation” remained as a means of revenue collection self-evidently voluntary but liable to addiction and an activity inherently bound with the assessment and taking of risk (by both promoters and purchasers). Among others, Fielding maintained his critical interest in this balance of interests, with lottery ticket sellers appearing in his play *Miss Lucy in Town* (1742) and in *Tom Jones* (1749).

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<sup>14</sup> De Goede, *Virtue, Fortune, and Faith*, 57; Lorraine Daston, *Classical Probability in the Enlightenment* (Princeton University Press, 1988) 175–176.

<sup>15</sup> Cited by Dickson, *Financial Revolution in England*, 29–30.

<sup>16</sup> John Briscoe, *A Discourse on the Late Funds of the Million-Act, Lottery-Act, and Bank of England* (R. Baldwin, 1694), 20.

<sup>17</sup> Henry Fielding, *The Lottery. A Farce. As it is Acted at the Theatre-Royal in Drury-Lane* (J. Wat[t]s, 1732), 1.

The most obvious turning-point in financial trust in English state lotteries came in 1769 after which they almost always operated as direct revenue and not variable investment-type lotteries. Although some carried offers of preferential entry for existing annuity holders and the lure of gambling in a new lottery (but with a concomitant reduction in annuities), most late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century English state lotteries constituted simple win-or-lose gambles (usually amounting to about a one-in-five chance of winning something). In lotteries after 1769 tickets cost less than £10, purchasers were not guaranteed any return, and only fortunate ticket holders won annuities. After 1770, schemes replaced the largest prizes for first and last drawn tickets by greater variation, including, for the first drawn tickets on specified days, prizes of up to £20,000 – and £30,000 and £40,000 in consols in the final lottery. The hit-or-miss lotteries contrasted to former investment lotteries where some return over and above the ticket price was guaranteed and where annuities and prize winnings arrived in instalments over a fixed term – usually of thirty-two years. In a few early lotteries, the government had effectively repaid lenders almost immediately, with blanks sometimes bearing interest, as in the schemes of 1721 and 1722, and sometimes not, as in the case of the lotteries of 1723 and 1724. The only ones where return could be nil were in the annuity ones of 1719 (two) and 1760, and the cash ones of the Bridge, Museum and Guinea adventures.<sup>18</sup> After 1770, participation in the lottery meant greater or even full chancing on real “blanks”. The state lottery also became what might now be termed “privatised”, its organisation contracted out to commercial firms bidding against each other to win the government contract.

With the reduction of investment opportunities in the state lottery came a reduction in material trust. The Treasury’s reliance on something more akin to straight gambling led to broader consideration of whether trust hinged on a folly that was hurtful or not. As Sébastien Antoine Parisot later argued in 1801 in his *L’Art de conjecturer à la loterie*, the institution simply represented a form of indirect taxation (“une branche d’impôts indirect”).<sup>19</sup> According to Cobbett, Lord North, when Prime Minister, declared in his budget speech that “a lottery being a tax on the willing only, though many might object to it, as an encouragement to gaming, yet he [North] thought the public would be right to avail them-

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<sup>18</sup> De Goede, *Virtue, Fortune, and Faith*, 50–51, notes that subscribers to the 1719 lotteries were “not entitled to any prize or periodic payment” and implies that this practice continued. But nil return schemes remained rare before 1770, most being annual joint-stock annuity draws where even blanks retained some value. See Ewen, *Lotteries and Sweepstakes*, table [163].

<sup>19</sup> Sébastien Antoine Parisot, *L’Art de conjecturer à la loterie... avec des tables de combinaisons et de probabilités* (Bidault, 1801), preface.

selves of the folly of mankind, especially as it laid no burthen on the poor”.<sup>20</sup> This critical allusion to the poor advanced a moot question about social discrimination in gambling and its consequences given that the terms of lottery participation had just changed.

In addition to the fall in the price of state lottery tickets, the increasing division of tickets into “shares” brought the English and Irish state lottery within the discretionary income of perhaps a quarter of the population. Broadening participation invited broadening alarm about risk. By the mid-eighteenth century, division of otherwise high-priced and thereby socially exclusive lottery tickets was common, with several friends clubbing together to buy a ticket. Official lottery agents such as Hazard and Delegal (see figure 3) even sold part-shares in a ticket.

Increasingly, a winning ticket produced diverse and numerous beneficiaries, unknown to each other. The division of tickets also increased the likelihood of sharers with humble origins. In 1798, for example, the jackpot went to one of these divided tickets, with £20,000 shared “amongst a number of poor persons”. The winners included a woman servant from Holborn, a woman keeper of a fruit stall in Gray’s Inn Lane, a servant of the Duke of Roxburghe, and a Covent Garden vegetable carrier, all holding a sixteenth share. A one-eighth share belonged to a poor family from Rutland.<sup>21</sup> Given the changes after 1769, however, most part-sharers in tickets lost the guarantee of any return.

Moreover, from 1774 an increasing number of Acts reintroduced private lotteries whose drawing was often combined with that of the state operation. The Lottery Office exercised control over private lotteries as it did over state ones, but insuring, other subsidiary chancing, and unauthorised private lotteries continued to alarm, and in a manner which indicates an increasing inclination at all social levels to risk participation in schemes with a high chance of complete wager-loss. An expansive secondary gambling industry developed from bets offered on the mere likelihood of certain tickets appearing in the draw, without the chancer having to buy any official tickets. Because winning numbers were publicly announced and then posted in newspapers, derivative betting might also be organised. In subsidiary betting, “chances” or “insurances” simply turned on the likelihood of a certain number being drawn in the main state lotteries of London and (after 1780) Dublin. The subsidiary gambler did not hold the original ticket. This became a hugely important feature of participation in and policing of the lottery. Insurances and other chances were possible because all the numbers in the wheel were al-

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<sup>20</sup> William Cobbett, *Cobbett’s Parliamentary History of England. From the Norman Conquest, in 1066. To the Year, 1803*, 36 vols. (R. Bagshaw, 1806–1820), 16: 608.

<sup>21</sup> *The Times*, 19 March 1798.



**Figure 3:** Advertisement for Hazard and Delegal, Lottery ticket agents, engraving, Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Fund, HG6185.E54; File number: 11046495 – 0010.

ready known, and such betting thrived even though the government recurrently proscribed lottery insurances, most notably in the announcement of the state scheme in 1787.

Other illegal lotteries comprised self-contained draws, with betting on the likelihood of certain tickets being drawn from those available in the house. Growth continued in illegal and ambiguous “insurances” and in “hiring” where tickets were rented for a day or more during the drawings (the “horses” of Fielding’s play). Longer length hiring allowed adventurers to remain in successive classes of lottery draws (which might last several weeks), with participants effectively paying more by the end than if they had been able to buy the full ticket (in share or whole) at the outset. In a scene Fielding added to his enduringly popular *The Lottery* farce, one of the spectators at the draw at the Guildhall explains: “Pox take their Horses! I am sure they have run away with all the Money I have brought

to Town with me”.<sup>22</sup> During the next decades, distrust in the state lottery and its subsidiary gambling brought numerous fictional reproofs such as *The Lottery or Midsummer Recess* (1797), together with cautionary tales such as Maria Edgeworth’s “The Lottery” (1804) which offered a parable against a risk so excessive that it overturned sense and led to catastrophe: “Many of these ignorant imprudent poor people had hazarded guinea after guinea, till they found themselves overwhelmed with debt; and their liberty, character, and existence, depending on the turning of the wheel”.<sup>23</sup>

## 2 Fairness

Participation in the lottery inevitably invited consideration of the fairness involved in chancing. Evaluation of fairness underpinned considerations of material or financial trust in the state lottery and thus further justification for trust in a well-managed and responsible lottery and for mistrust when the institution appeared mismanaged and generating subsidiary and chaotic gambling. As was well known, lots had been used since ancient times to determine a course of action by an accepted reliance on chance (albeit a chance that might be driven by fate or providence). Evidently, the state lottery and private lotteries had a purpose, and an end that might result in riches. Hence, lottery involvement and observation encouraged fantasies, but to buy into those (and literally so), participants accepted that the purchase of a ticket was like the rolling of a dice or some other determinate wholly based on chance. And that determinant – fate or providence, or whatever it might be called – might be a good thing in itself, that it might be given sanction indeed by a higher authority than the individual, and even ordained by a higher authority than Man.

From antiquity, the casting of lots served as an acknowledged method of making decisions, and especially critical decisions affecting large numbers of people or matters perceived to be of historic significance. The casting of lots removed any perception of bias or prejudice from the parties involved or from an adjudicator. The process might also be public, verifiable and what we now call “transparent”. Lots might be checked for any bias or malpractice, and methods could be various, from the type of lot to the manner and organisation of the casting and to its application to various matters. Following dozens of similar examples, the Flemish

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<sup>22</sup> Henry Fielding, *The Lottery. A Farce. As it is Acted at the Theatre-Royal in Drury-Lane*, 5th ed. (A. Millar, 1761), 26.

<sup>23</sup> Maria Edgeworth, “The Lottery”, in *Popular Tales* [1804], 3 vols., 6th ed. (R. Hunter et al., 1817), 2, 59–60.



physician Jan Baptist van Helmont, involved in a 1648 medical dispute about the efficacy of bleeding and purging patients, proposed a lottery to divide trial groups in an unbiased way.

Let us take out of the hospitals...200 or 500 poor people that have fevers, pleurisies. Let us divide them into halves, let us cast lots, that one halfe of them may fall to my share, and the other to yours; I will cure them without bloodletting and sensible evacuation; but you do, as ye know...We shall see how many funerals both of us shall have.<sup>24</sup>

Chance served as a basis for that religious approval of the fairness of the lottery that surfaced (and to modern eyes to a surprising extent) in early modern and eighteenth-century Europe. Ancient approval of lots might also suggest why the Church condemned gambling and extravagant risk, but somehow sanctioned and even blessed lottery activities when these apparently depended on equal chance. Defenders of the lottery equated ticket buying as an activity commensurate with the securely and openly managed casting of lots. Eighteenth-century German and Danish-Norwegian Pietist Christians regularly followed the New Testament precedent of drawing lots to determine the will of God, a tradition particularly associated with Nicolas Ludwig, Count Zinzendorf, who in 1722 established a Moravian Brethren retreat at Herrnhut in Saxony. It was here that John Wesley encountered the Pietists' practice of casting lots, following his meeting with Moravians on his passage to North America and subsequent attendance at their prayer and study meetings in London. Although the General Synod of the worldwide Moravian Unity in 1818 led to the curtailment of lots, the practice continued until the 1880s and many Amish to this day select ordinary preachers by lot.

Wesley is part-credited with the Methodist Church's long-established concern that gambling is divisive and a means of gaining money at the expense of others. His sermon, *The Use of Money* (Sermon 50 in the standard editions), suggests that gambling is a means of gain inconsistent with the love of one's neighbour, while in Sermon 52 he refers to gamblers: "who make a trade of seizing on young and unexperienced men, and tricking them out of all their money, and after they have beggared them, they frequently teach them the same mystery of iniquity".<sup>25</sup> Wesley did not, however, object to softer forms of gambling, recognising these as a

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<sup>24</sup> Jan Baptist van Helmont, *Ortus medicinae: Id est initia physicae inaudita. Progressus medicinae novus, in morborum ultionem, ad vitam longam* [The dawn of medicine: That is, the beginning of a new Physic. A new advance in medicine, a victory over disease, to [promote] a long life.] (Elzevir, 1648), 526–527.

<sup>25</sup> John Wesley, Sermon 52, "Preached before the Society for Reformation of Manners on Sunday, January 30, 1763 at the Chapel in West-Street, Seven-Dials", section 7.

form of entertainment and relaxation (“I never bought a lottery ticket myself, but I blame not those who do”) and notoriously, in trying to decide whether to marry or not, he chose to cast lots, a practice to which Benjamin Franklin (among many others) found no objection.<sup>26</sup>

Both divination as the discernment of divine will and as the adherence to a concept of fairness thereby underpin the rationale of the casting of lots. The lot principle seemed above all to rest on fairness. In all cases, whoever and whatever causes the outcome of the draw, the desired attainment is fairness, even though that “fairness” is more complex than simple or binary choices, and especially when the quest for fairness proceeds in what is regarded as an unfair world. Importantly, malign fate weighed against happy chance, but the acceptance of either might still be deemed either deserved or undeserved. The justice of the random – of calculating on the incalculable – does not therefore eliminate blame or suspicion. In question is the relationship between reliance on the utility or justice of lot-casting and participation in a lottery of variable returns and outcomes in which a ticket *purchaser* undertakes deliberate and dangerous risk and where those levels of risk relate to his or her resources. This is far more than a simple yes or no prediction. Above all, in this justification of reliance on chance, lots, and the lottery, a fundamental and critical concern increasingly attended to the elimination of any dishonesty, corruption or other impediment to fairness in the operation of the schemes.

Scrutiny of fairness applied widely to revenue collection in general and therefore in critical comparison to the methods and effects of the lottery. Without the ability to appropriate the wealth and earnings of its citizens efficiently and reliably, the British government could not have borrowed on what became an unprecedented scale. Successive governments honoured their fiscal commitments by regularly making interest payments on the National Debt, tempting greater personal lending to the government, but equally, the ability and capacity of the British government to levy taxes explained the success of its funding system.<sup>27</sup> Taxation proper maintained the British system of financing warfare by the permanent National Debt.<sup>28</sup> As the National Debt increased from £14,522,925 in 1694 to £834,262,726 in 1815,<sup>29</sup> so also did British taxation increase eighteen-fold in real terms. The increased revenue that British governments raised from war-

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26 John Wesley, Journal entry, 4 March 1737, cited in David, *Games, Gods and Gambling*, 14; Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography and Other Writings* (Signet, 1961): 163–164.

27 As emphasised by Patrick K. O’Brien, “The Political Economy of British Taxation, 1660–1815”, *The Economic History Review* 41, no. 1 (Feb., 1988): 1–32 (4).

28 I am grateful to Simon Sherratt for providing analysis of taxation regimes for this section.

29 Eric L. Hargreaves, *The National Debt* (Frank Cass and Co., 1966), 291, table A.

time taxation between 1793 and 1815 was unprecedented. In 1790, British annual tax revenues amounted to £16,900,000; by 1815 this total had increased to £62,670,000.<sup>30</sup> Success resided in the shifting focus of taxation, the increase in the amount of revenue raised and the methods by which governments collected the various taxes. Lending to government by bonds contributed centrally to the funding regime – and government crucially intended the introduction and development of investment-type state lotteries to encourage new lending.

The lottery operated very much in the context of this escalating and successful voluntary funding *and* tax regime founded upon a unique combination of centralised control, localised collection and a modern emphasis on fairness, efficiency, and professionalism. Justice and fairness, if often challenged, remained the core values, and the arrangement allowed the British government to make ever-larger monetary demands of its citizens. Such demands reached their peak at the conclusion of the Napoleonic Wars when the government obtained from its citizens 18% of total national income in the form of taxation.<sup>31</sup>

What we might now call “transparency”, or the assurance of fair play, thus underpinned the growing trust in the English state lottery during its first half century or so of operation. The lottery draws, based on fair chance, offered a very particular demonstration of public credit at work. They revealed “credible commitment” anchored in broadening participation and what was actually enforced participation in “chance” (even though, for the state, it remained a relatively expensive way of borrowing). The growing confidence in the lottery in the first half of the eighteenth century effectively amounted to the further creation of marketable debt, an operation confirmed by a wealth of positive references in contemporary diaries and correspondence. Repeated and confident allusions to investment in lottery tickets appear in letters by Jonathan Swift, Joseph Addison, and Alexander Pope. John Gay even held a post as lottery commissioner which gave him an annual stipend of £150 between 1722 and 1731. For these men, the lottery offered a fairly and publicly responsible method for the loan and repayment of government debt, a presence apparently built on sound reputation with trust assessed by state commitment to fair and just conduct.

At issue, in so many of these accounts, is the relationship between trust, chance and justice, fortune and fairness, whether this be economic, social or political. Before the greater complexities of the late eighteenth century, Fielding's *The Lottery* offered both satire *and* reassurance. The play's satire supports a genial but targeted critique of the effects of lottery gambling and of its relation to corrup-

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<sup>30</sup> O'Brien, “Political Economy”, 3, table 2.

<sup>31</sup> O'Brien, “Political Economy”, 3, table 2.

tion, false aspiration, and good or bad fortune. In the revised edition of the play, more characters were added, all desperate to win the lottery. Notwithstanding its original ambivalence towards gaming, the work also provided a template for dozens of further plays, novels, poems, and short essays on the dangers of the lottery – of the more entertaining but therefore more injurious lottery. Fielding derided and condemned both those who sold and rented tickets and those who purchased the tickets. The portrayal of the ticket vendors emphasised the potential for deceit and the pervasiveness of scams. The lottery fantasy is exploded by revealing the unfairness of its operation. The expected happy ending is retained by Fielding, but the emphasis throughout is upon the foolishness of playing upon chance and the susceptibility of those taken in by risking their funds on the lottery. Stocks, the play's lottery ticket seller, is dishonest and creates unfairness. Chance invites cheating – and a cheating paralleled in the Fielding play by false love. Fielding develops a specific critique of short-term, compulsive *and* impulsive betting, which encourages cheating and deceit.

Such mid-century critiques of injustice thus rested on a sense of declining fairness in the lottery's operation but also on the subsumption of the schemes within a broader perception of misconduct. Over the next three decades, mounting concern focused less on the heightening of inequalities in general than on the corruption of state lotteries by new contractors who not only reduced returns to government in what was already an inefficient operation but apparently brought vice and moral harm to a large proportion of the population.

### 3 Corruption

In the revised later versions of Fielding's play, the pervasive charge is of corruption. In the added third scene of *The Lottery*, a spectator at the drawing in the Guildhall opines: "Never tell me, Thomas, it is all a Cheat; what do those People do behind the Curtain? There's never any Honesty behind the Curtain". A second spectator replies: "Harkye, Neighbour, I fancy there is somebody in the Wheels that gives out what Tickets he pleases; for if you mind, sometimes there are Twenty Blanks drawn together; and then two or three Prizes". The other agrees: "Nay, if there be twenty Blanks drawn together, it must be a Cheat; for, you know, the Man where I hired my Horses [lottery tickets rented for a day] told me there was not quite ten Blanks to a Prize".<sup>32</sup> Less overtly corrupt, those selling tickets and promoting the lottery also falsely and malevolently disguise risk as safety.

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<sup>32</sup> Fielding, *The Lottery*, 5th ed., 25–26.

The further contrast, allied to the charge of corruption, distinguishes between earned and unearned wealth – the very essence of the “fantasy”. As another of Fielding’s stage buyers of tickets exclaims, “How long a Man may labour to get that at Work, which he can get in a minute at Play!”<sup>33</sup> The lure of lucre and of getting rich quick induces playing the lottery but undermines the natural order of society. The get-rich-quick imaginary aligns with the expansion of a consumer society, of the appreciation if not the availability to all of a novel abundance of material goods.<sup>34</sup> An emulative consumerism, also linked to the marriage prospects advanced by new wealth, fuels the fantasy. In Fielding’s play, Chloe, “the Countess of Seven Dials”, sings: “Oh how charming my Life will be, / When Marriage has made me a fine Lady! / In Chariot, six Horses, and Diamonds bright, / In Flanders Lace, and ‘broidery Clothes, / O how I’ll flame it among the Beaus! / In Bed all the Day, at Cards all the Night....”<sup>35</sup>

Drawing on the preceding notions, *The Lottery* continues the debate over the entitlement to riches. Stocks, the ticket-seller, observes to his brother, “my Riches, if I have any, are owing to my Industry; as your Poverty is to your Laziness, and Extravagance – and I have rais’d myself by the Multiplication-Table, as you have undone yourself at the Hazard-Table”.<sup>36</sup> Comic inversion contrasts the “industry” of the seller of risk to the “poverty” of the more properly propertied. The lesson, however, is clear. The calculation of probabilities might detain some, but others pursue fortune-telling and its irrational appeal (reasserting the charge against fools and credulity). Foolish risk invites superstition. Lottery wins encourage fantasising about riches and an irresponsible spending and squandering that is dreamt of by those unused to riches. As Chloe concludes when all is lost: “So the Devil take all Lotteries, Dreams, and Conjurers [sic]”.<sup>37</sup>

To rehearse an earlier part of this history, the warnings offered by the Fielding play came in the very years after the state lottery and even a secondary trading market in tickets had gained greater trust and respectability. As the number of lotteries and the chancing on them increased, however, governments attempted broader regulation of gaming not only to preserve the state monopoly but to defuse alarm about excessive and irresponsible gaming. Despite the trust developed in the official state lottery, concerns mounted. The successive editions of Fielding’s

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<sup>33</sup> Fielding, *The Lottery*, 5th ed., 3.

<sup>34</sup> See the founding work of what has become a major (but not uncontested) research field, Neil McKendrick, John Brewer, and J.H. Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England* (Europa, 1982).

<sup>35</sup> Fielding, *The Lottery*, 5th ed., 21, Air XIV.

<sup>36</sup> Fielding, *The Lottery*, 5th ed., 6.

<sup>37</sup> Fielding, *The Lottery*, 5th ed., 31.



*The Lottery* appeared either side of the major Gaming Act of 1739, an apparent turning-point in attempted legislative control over gambling and perceived social divisiveness. The 1739 Gaming Act (12 Geo. II, c. 28), the foundation of all subsequent gaming and gambling Acts (and parts of which are still in force) appears to have been finally brought about after a Mr Foubert flaunted a mathematical engine that inspired a rage for dozens of private raffles and lotteries for houses and other property in London and Westminster. Although there were already five Acts in force,<sup>38</sup> jointly prohibiting the erection and exercise of every description of non-state lotteries, games of chances for money and their advertisement, and the selling of foreign lottery tickets, the Foubert affair demonstrated to many the need for further legislation.<sup>39</sup> The 1739 Act took particular notice of raffles and mathematical engines, all forbidden after 24 June 1739. Under the Act, successful prosecutions awarded one-third of the £200 fine to the informer with the remaining two-thirds directed to the support of the poor in the parish where the offence was committed. Such charitable consideration gave significant counterpoint to later jeremiads about the effects of gaming and the lottery on the poor.

In the event, the Gaming Act and its successors proved relatively ineffective. Indeed, the necessity for later Acts revealed much about continuing disquiet and the later diminution of trust in the state lottery. For some, English gaming became so excessive and dangerous as to create real moral panic, and especially so in the aftermath of the French Revolution. For others, the priority remained a defence of the state lottery against competitors and derivatives. Elsewhere in Europe, similar challenges required intervention. The Emperor Joseph II banned all gaming at Court for moral reasons while also, without pause, arguing that the ban on gambling channelled all gaming habits into the state lottery which he himself championed. Joseph thereby condemned the practice of gaming while offering monopoly status and protection to his state lottery, providing much needed assistance to the Imperial Treasury and military expenditure.

Despite the recurrent legislation to ban it, subsidiary betting on the lottery flourished, while in telling contrast to the arrest of illegal lottery organisers, gambling itself remained a pillar, or perhaps we should say sink, of eighteenth-century aristocratic and gentry life. For many of the *beau monde*, eighteenth-century gambling carried social approval and gambling debts signified a distinction repudiated, it seemed, only by the marginal and the Methodist.<sup>40</sup> According to its foremost

<sup>38</sup> Notably, 10 Will. III, c. 23, ss. I, 2: 9 Anne, c. 6; and 8 Geo. I, c. 2, s. 36.

<sup>39</sup> Ewen, *Lotteries and Sweepstakes*, 294–295.

<sup>40</sup> See Gerda Reith, *The Age of Chance: Gambling in Western Culture* (Routledge, 1999), and Roger Munting, *An Economic and Social History of Gambling in Britain and the USA* (Manchester University Press, 1996); older accounts for the nineteenth-century include John Ashton, *The History of*

modern historian, the court of Queen Anne revolved around “incessant gambling”;<sup>41</sup> Richard Annesley, 6<sup>th</sup> Earl of Anglesey (1693–1761), became kidnapper and bigamist to sustain his gambling, and, most notoriously of all, Charles James Fox, “the doyen of the gambling craze” according to Leslie Mitchell, lost £140,000 in bets before his twenty-fifth birthday.<sup>42</sup> Between 1772 and 1774, Fox’s father paid off a £120,000 debt from his son’s gambling at Brooks’s Club and Newmarket. The younger Fox twice faced bankruptcy and despite £61,000 raised by friends in 1793, he left at his death in 1806 a debt of more than £10,000. The judge, Sir William Henry Ashurst (1725–1807) claimed in the 1790s that gambling “ruined more lives than did drink”. Those ruined by gambling included Oliver Goldsmith, novelist, and (among many recounted in Horace Walpole’s letters) John Damer, eldest son of Lord Milton whose debts reached £60,000, and who ended as an infamous suicide.<sup>43</sup> In a letter to William Mason, Walpole related how the gaming debts of Lord Foley had amounted to so great a sum that he had entirely disposed of an estate worth £20,000, a year before he came into possession of it.<sup>44</sup>

Nonetheless, by the end of the century, as betting continued intensely in the above-ground salons of the rich and famous, governments outlawed and prosecuted below-ground betting with new energy, and the origins of social discrimination in gambling control certainly appear in broader gaming regulation. Horace Walpole writing to the Countess of Ossory reported that of current fads in London

the reigning one amongst *the quality*, is to go after the opera to the lottery offices, where their Ladyships bet with the keepers. You choose any number you please; if it does not come up next day, you pay five guineas; if it does, receive forty – or in proportion to the age of the *tirage*. The Duchess of Devonshire in one day won nine hundred pounds.<sup>45</sup>

In their actions, nothing in theory separates the subsidiary betting of the Duchess and that of the many arrested for illegal lottery betting. Licensed lottery ticket sell-

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*Gambling in England* (Duckworth, 1898) and Andrew Steinmetz, *The Gaming Table: Its Votaries and Victims*, 2 vols. (Tinsley Brothers, 1870).

<sup>41</sup> Edward Gregg, “Queen Anne”, *ODNB* entry.

<sup>42</sup> David, *Games, Gods, and Gambling*, 88.

<sup>43</sup> See W. S. Lewis, ed., *The Yale Edition of Horace Walpole’s Correspondence*, 42 vols. (Yale University Press, 1937–1980), 32: 314–315, letter to Lady Ossory, 15 Aug. 1776.

<sup>44</sup> Lewis, ed., *Walpole’s Correspondence*, 28: 392, 2 May 1778; I am indebted to Justine Crump, “The Perils of Play: Eighteenth-Century Ideas about Gaming”, unpublished paper, University of Cambridge, 1999.

<sup>45</sup> Lewis, ed., *Horace Walpole’s Correspondence*, 33: 255, Horace Walpole to the Countess of Ossory, 17 Dec. 1780.

ers themselves set up the so-called “little goes”, additional private gambles, operating, according to the writer William Hone, under the aegis of the “parent” state lottery and for five or six times a year by the 1790s.<sup>46</sup> According to *The Times* of 22 July 1795:

amongst the various species of Gaming that have ever been practised, we think none exceeds the mischiefs, and calamities that arise from the practice of private lotteries... ‘the little go’, which is the technical term for a private lottery, is calculated only for the meridian of those understandings, who are unused to calculate and discriminate between right and wrong, and roguery and fair dealing; and, in this particular case, it is those who compose the lower order of society, whom it so seriously affects, and, on whom, it is chiefly designed to operate.

The little goes used separate lottery wheels, and some adventurers did not simply bet on numbers drawn in the state lottery but on separate schemes – although often the two ran together in the same evening’s play. Reports increasingly charged little goes and associated ventures with being unfairly organised and rigged. As the same *Times* article charged

for, by the art, and contrivance, of the wheels, they are so constructed, with secret springs, and the application of gum, glue, &c., in the internal part of them, that they can draw the numbers out, or keep them in, at pleasure, just as it suits their purposes; so that the ensurer, robbed and cajoled, by such unfair means, has not the most distant chance of ever winning; the whole being a gross fraud, and imposition, in the extreme.

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the moral crusade against the lottery in Britain became a politicised rendering of earlier protests, even if sometimes disguising ministerial debate about the lottery’s efficiency as a revenue raising device and its continuance as an instrument of government policy. With bids offered each year by the rival contracting firms established from the 1790s, the English state lotteries became even less effective in supply to the Exchequer when compared to a largely acquiescent taxation regime and offered an increasing risk to the maintenance of law and order. The lottery posed further challenges to the advocacy of what now might be deemed “social policy” but was then, with varying motives, most generally expressed in terms of paternalistic concern for the poor. The tension was also a European phenomenon, with a particularly aggressive debate in France.<sup>47</sup> The petition that led to the edict banning the Loterie royale in

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<sup>46</sup> William Hone, *The Every-Day Book and Table Book; or, Everlasting Calendar of Popular Amusements*, 3 vols. (Thomas Tegg, 1830), 2: 1498.

<sup>47</sup> Literary contributions are well reviewed by Bernard, “Aspects moraux et sociaux des loteries”.

1793 (before the re-establishment of a Loterie nationale a few years later) declared that “la loterie, odieuse combinaison fiscale, envahit le produit des sueurs du pauvre, réduit au désespoir une infinité de familles”.

If the lottery's demise in England is best explained in terms of British fiscal policy, we should nonetheless not underestimate moral concern about the poor and their exposure to fraud and corruption. Crusading pamphlets and both stinging and forlorn cartoons increasingly associated the lottery fantasy with the indigent and needy poor (see figure 4).

The 1808 Select Committee investigating the Lottery focused on charges of operational corruption as well as the rioting and mayhem associated increasingly with both the official draws and subsidiary gaming and an underworld of gaming dens. The widely shared verdict of the 1808 parliamentary reports concluded that the lottery could not be reformed without enormous expense but meanwhile brought destitution to the most vulnerable.<sup>48</sup> Hone repeated the reports' declaration that the Lottery had become inseparable from illegal insurances and that “the Lottery is so radically vicious, that under no system of regulations which can be devised will it be possible for parliament to adopt it as an efficient source of revenue, and at the same time divest it of all the evils and calamities of which it has hitherto been so baneful a source”.<sup>49</sup>

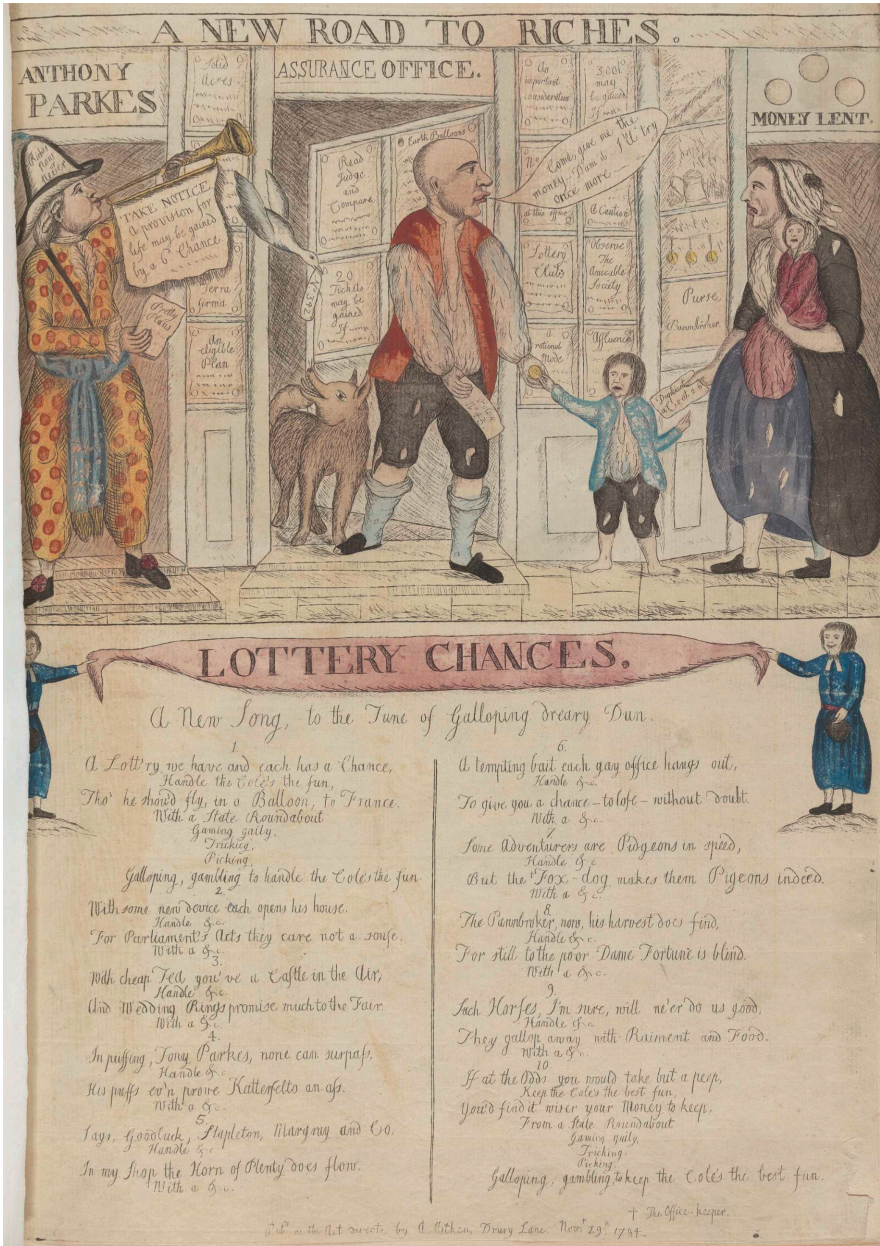
By the early nineteenth century, banking and building, property and other insurance gained more widespread and normalised acceptance. In the maturing credit-based economy, both economic and literary writings offered representations advancing popular credibility in bills of exchange, bank notes, and specific investment opportunities.<sup>50</sup> Where once, however, the state lottery had featured positively in both transparent commercial and allusive literary writings, it now appeared increasingly tainted by the charges of fraud and dishonest practice that were said to have multiplied from the 1770s. Both the lottery and insurance (whether on property, other assets or lives) involved gambling and risk, but the diminishing reputation of the state lottery obscured that conceptual similarity. Distrust of speculation advanced with the apparently commercialised lottery schemes while insurance and other institutionalised forms of risk from bank loans to investments in company shares further distanced the representation of finance from that of gambling. Literary portrayals of wealth creation, for example, retained popular anti-business caricatures but presented these as cautions about excess that specifically justified normalcies of acceptable commercial and

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<sup>48</sup> *Parliamentary Papers: Reports from the Committee on the Laws Relating to Lotteries*, 1808.

<sup>49</sup> Hone, *Every-Day Book and Table Book*, 2, 1498.

<sup>50</sup> Poovey, *Genres of the Credit Economy*, esp. 36–51.



**Figure 4:** "A New Road to Riches. Lottery Chances", hand-coloured etching, Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Fund, HG6185.E54; File number: 11046495 - 0006.



financial activity.<sup>51</sup> The lottery remained an outlier to this evolving perception of public and private finance, especially, from the Treasury's perspective, as the state lottery's fiscal return became increasingly unconvincing. It is, perhaps, less surprising that the English state lottery was abolished in 1826, than that it endured for so long after it appeared more and more inefficient and contributed less and less to net public income. The Exchequer retained the lottery, it seems, only as an expedient emergency device and also because it continued, at least in the short term, with something of an administrative life of its own.

## 4 Conclusion

These observations refine arguments made elsewhere about the English state lotteries and which, in revising older accounts, underplayed the lottery's triggering of moral outrage, panic, and fears of exorbitant risk, and understated a peculiarly British social obsession central to organised opposition to the lottery.<sup>52</sup> Many Continental states policed lotteries against foreign lottery ticket-selling; lottery protest and policing in Britain came to focus more on preventing a broadening and uncontrolled popular participation. The apprehension of chance and risk in the lottery, as in broader financial affairs, concerned much more than the calculation of potential monetary returns and loss, and depended also upon cultural, religious, and social values and expectations. Importantly, the changing undertaking, awareness, and avoidance of risk – by both government and people – mirrored the changing perception and acceptance of trust. Anxieties about trust led to further debates about the efficiency of revenue collection and the creation of a liquid market in English government debt, the wide-ranging issue of levels of acceptance of gambling on securities and stocks, and different attitudes to state financial credibility, efficiency, and effectiveness.

Because of the lottery, the toleration of chance in society at large – in the world of politics and finance – came under unprecedented scrutiny. A war-indebted realm at the end of the seventeenth century had sought to stave off bankruptcy by developing new financial operations, from the Bank of England to the revamped Royal Exchange and adventurous – and perilous – stock markets. The new operations with their variable risks were represented widely in political, religious and social commentaries and essays and in literature and drama, from stock jobbers

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<sup>51</sup> Raven, *Judging New Wealth*.

<sup>52</sup> Raven, "The Abolition of the English State Lotteries", and Raven, "Debating the Lottery in Britain".

on stage to magazine examination of paper credit. The representation of the wheel of fortune – a wheel given physical form in the state lottery draw – invoked concerns about chancing and ruinous risk, as well as related temptations of cheating and corruption. Allied questions probed the different methods and efficiencies of revenue raising and taxation, of face-to-face transactions, and of their contribution to trust. The management of trust furthered the valuation and transfer of bonds and securities and involved debate about probabilities, promises, and assurances that could be relied upon in negotiations and transaction (or what we might now term “credible commitment”). Above all, those writing about the lottery, imaginatively, critically, and philosophically, engaged with wider social, cultural, and intellectual consequences of chance in the world. Debate concerned the resourcing of government debt, the bringing in of new lenders (as encouraged by the investment bond type lotteries), the financial credibility of the state, and the morality and propriety of sudden immense wealth or catastrophic loss, all as the chance, accidental, result of numbers drawn from a wheel.

Furthermore, the extraordinary increase in revenue generated by taxation during the eighteenth century and particularly from 1800 onwards, accompanied a shift in methods by which taxation was raised. Most significantly for the argument advanced here, the contribution provided by the lottery fell from 7% of total net public revenue income in 1769 to 1% in the 1810s.<sup>53</sup> Trust in alternative revenue-raisers to the lottery advanced in line with moral criticism of its unfairness and corruption. Since the 1690s, indeed, the burden of taxation moved towards taxes of consumption. In 1695, the year after the draw of the first state lottery and also of the establishment of the Bank of England, direct taxes on land and property stood at £1,400,000 and made up 47% of total British tax revenue; on the eve of war with America in 1776 direct taxes stood at £1,900,000 and comprised only 18% of total revenues, the other 82% consisting of taxes on consumption.<sup>54</sup> The shift away from direct forms of taxation represented government success in raising greater revenue from its population without significant resistance. As Peter Matthias and Patrick O’Brien compute: “On a per capita basis... taxes [in Britain] [...] were more than *double* the level attained in France at the beginning of the century (1715–1730), remained at about *twice* the level of those in France for most of the rest of the period up to the revolution and [...] [1793–1815] [...] reached almost *three times* the level imposed on the French popula-

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<sup>53</sup> O’Brien, “Political Economy”, 9, table 4; Raven, “Abolition of the English State Lotteries”, 380; *Parliamentary Papers*, 1890–1891, xlv.

<sup>54</sup> O’Brien, “Political Economy”, 9, table 4; John Brewer, *The Sinews of Power: War, Money and the English State, 1688–1783* (Routledge, 1989), 91.

tion”.<sup>55</sup> John Brewer offers similar comparisons about the effectiveness of the British taxation system, observing that in the 1670s taxes contributed 3.5% of *per capita* income, by the 1780s 23%, and by 1815 35%, a total far in excess of the amounts raised by the French government during the same period.<sup>56</sup>

Also fundamental to the acceptance by the British populace of these increases in taxation was its low visibility when compared to the tax collecting methods employed by governments of mainland Europe. What was remarkable was the ability of British governments to levy high levels of taxation from its citizens without causing violent protest or revolution. Unlike France, where tax-farmers used bitterly resented methods, local property-owners collected and administered the British Land Tax which “remained ‘invisible’ when passed on [to tenants] as an element in rents”.<sup>57</sup> Critically, however, trust in lottery revenue collection declined as its schemes changed, investment opportunities diminished, subsidiary gambling increased, and the collection of other revenues and official taxes became more widespread and successful. The engagement with risk proved double-edged: at first an incentive to lend to government, but later fear of disorder and even revolution accompanied concern about the effects of undue risk-taking by the poor and the irresponsible.

Trust, fairness, and corruption all interrelated, therefore, in the history of the popularity and then abandonment of the state lottery; or, in other words, in the promotion and then tarnishing of the lottery fantasy. By the 1820s, trust in the lottery reached a nadir. William Hone famously wrote of the final drawing of the English state lottery at Coopers’ Hall on 18 October 1826:

As the time approached, a show was got up to proclaim that the deplorable ‘Death of the Lottery’, would certainly take place on the appointed day; but on some account or other, the pathetic appeal of the benevolent contractors was disregarded, and the gentlemen about to be ‘turned off’, were as unheeded, and as unlamented as criminals, who say or sing in their last moments.<sup>58</sup>

Some shouted for the continuation of the lottery but many more objected to a revenue raising device that, as had been volubly argued for decades, immorally impoverished the most vulnerable.

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55 Patrick K. O’Brien and Peter Mathias, “Taxation in Britain and France 1715–1810: A Comparison of the Social and Economic Incidence of Taxes Collected for the Central Governments”, *Journal of European Economic History* 5, no. 3 (1976): 601–650 (610–611).

56 Brewer, *Sinews of Power*, 91.

57 O’Brien and Mathias, “Taxation in Britain and France”, 636; see also Martin Daunton, *Trusting Leviathan: The Politics of Taxation in Britain, 1799–1914* (Cambridge University Press, 2001).

58 Hone, *Every-Day Book and Table Book*, 2, 1502.

The broader context concerned the unprecedented appropriation in Britain of large revenues by an increasingly centralised and powerful government in London. Together with practical questions such as how much tax should be paid, by whom, and upon which objects and behaviours, questions increased about the rights of government to tax and the appropriateness of simple tax-raising intrusion into a private citizen's financial affairs. For the less wealthy citizenry – indeed for most of the population – taxation without meaningful representation in parliament remained a simmering debate. These were also questions relatable to social judgments about the lottery, that a “taxation upon all the fools of creation” involved crucial assessments of risk, fairness, and trust.

The burden of war financing fell not on the wealthiest alone but culminated in the on-off imposition of the Income Tax in 1799 which was repealed in 1802 after the Piece of Amiens, re-imposed in 1803 with the resumption of war, and repealed again in 1816 with the restoration of peace. As Simon Sherratt demonstrates, despite contemporary claims of the desire to avoid taxation on the impoverished, higher food prices, increased rents, and taxes on consumption all resulted from the demands of the National Debt, with wars against France continuing for more than twenty years.<sup>59</sup> Few endorsed the long-term levy of income tax on a large proportion of the population, a judgment that supported criticism of elite financiers and paralleled the increasingly shrill protests against lottery contractors and alarmist accounts of relative risk.

The outcry represented a particular change in attitudes over the past hundred years or so. Ruminations about good fortune and publications about probability had accompanied the advance of lottery schemes from the early eighteenth century. The designers of and participants in state lotteries thought earnestly about the “taming” of chance in relation to the success (for the state and for the individual) of the schemes, including a policing of the state lottery to suppress rivals and maximise returns. Risk on the lottery became an accepted element in fiscal and government strategy – and contributed to the development of trust in new financial institutions. In regularising the state lottery operation, most commentators took less interest in technologies such as the drawing wheel and ticket security-printing than in the theatre and ritual of the lengthy drawing periods – an interest that eventually turned to negative conclusions. To many at the end of the eighteenth century, voluntary participation in a lottery “taxation” still bested any increased and enforced personal taxation, but this obtained only so long as lottery managers, now contractors, remained unassociated with financial corruption, and

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59 Simon Sherratt, “Re-contextualising Resistance to the National Debt 1793–1815” (MPhil diss., University of Essex, 2022).

so long as the poor remained protected from the malign and violent consequences of excessive risk. The playfully titled 1825 cartoon in figure 5 decries the lottery lucre evident in the bulging bags of coins beneath the persona of chance but also satirises the abolition of a “voluntary tax” just when the poor protest against unavoidable levies on goods.



**Figure 5:** “The Chance Seller of the Exchequer Putting an Extinguisher on Lotteries”, hand-coloured etching, Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Fund, HG6185.E54; File number: 11046495 – 0024.

Lotteries therefore faced more general condemnation as critics argued that excessive risk in lotteries compromised not only commercial and financial progress but social order and justice. By the early nineteenth century, the contractors now charged with organising the state lotteries on behalf of the Treasury became increasingly desperate as participation thinned out and returns declined. The 1807 lottery included prizes of bundles of lottery tickets. From 1819 prizes were given to tickets awarded either side of capital prizes, so that one had to be awarded retrospectively.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>60</sup> *Morning Herald*, 18 June 1819.



In many ways, the parliamentary investigations of the first decade of the nineteenth century publicly despoiled the profit-making fantasy of the eighteenth-century state lottery. As widely reported then and for the next three decades, the 1808 parliamentary report concluded that as a result of the operation of the state lottery

idleness, dissipation, and poverty, were increased – the most sacred and confidential trusts were betrayed – domestic comfort was destroyed – madness was often created – suicide itself was produced – and crimes subjecting the perpetrators of them to death were committed.<sup>61</sup>

Three final observations might be made. First, the adoption, regularisation – and necessary enforcement – of national lotteries are telling and far-reaching measures of the character and growth of state power, but also of a certain fiscal maturity and an understanding of risk and the problematics of measuring excess. This is especially so in comparative European perspective. A second consideration is that even if the British government abolished the state lottery more for fiscal than moral reasons (and especially after the disastrous series of lotteries 1820–1822 when shackled to inept commercial interests), a strongly puritanical and socially filtered attitude developed towards lotteries and lower-class gambling in late eighteenth-century Britain. That observation modifies recent scholarship which stresses, at least for the earlier years, broadening participation, “credible commitment”, and the role of the lottery in quantifying acceptable risk and making economic probability calculations more professional and widely adopted. Such challenge to the premise of gaming as a “contradictory trend” to the development of private and public finance in England and Europe, therefore invites further qualification for the later years of the lottery’s operation. A fundamental axiom persisted that only those who could afford to gamble should do so. The viciousness of the poor and the wretched remained a given. Without the financial concerns of government, the broader drive against illegal lotteries might not have been undertaken; yet the determination to police those laws continued in the cause of keeping the peace and, in the eyes of reformers from Henry Fielding to Patrick Colquhoun, to protect the working classes from an evil to which they were naturally tempted and practically unable to resist.

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<sup>61</sup> Hone, *Every-Day Book and Table Book*, 2, 1498.

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