SUR LES PARIS*

D'ANIERES

There is no person who does not feel that there is a difference between to play & to wager.

But there are some cases where this difference is difficult to grasp.

Perhaps it will not be useless to make on this matter some reflections, which will be able to serve as supplement to the Memoir on the games of chance printed in 1785.

These reflections become so much more necessary, as there exist some penal laws against the games of chance, & as in certain complicated cases the wager would be able to be confounded with the game, without reason, as in some other cases it would be able, still without foundation, to escape from the severity of the law.

In all the wagers the simplest is the one which attaches whatever advantage to an isolated event, in which neither the one nor the other of the bettors contribute anything to it, an advantage to the profit of the players who the event favors.

A city is besieged in Germany, in London an Englishman wagers one hundred pieces that it will be taken; another wagers against; here is the case of the simplest wager: the question is only of an isolated event, & the bettors have no influence on the event.

In 1720 Marshall d'Estrées & Controller General Law wagered 30,000 livres on the subject of the course of the change with London & Amsterdam. It seems first that Law had some influence on the change; but he lost the wager; his influence was therefore null, & this wager appears to me to be able to be assimilated in the one of which I just spoke.

When Consul C. Lutatius & Praetor Q. Valerius disputed the honor of the triumph, the Judge of the wager, Atilius Catalinus, decided between them; the question is to know which of the two had contributed most to the victory; at the moment where the question was decided, none of the bettors contributed to the event. This wager seems to me to be of the simplest number.

The assurance contract seems to be a wager of the same sort, in the case where neither the assurer nor the assured have any part in the behavior or in the provisioning of the vessel, either directly or indirectly.

The wagers of this sort have evidently nothing in common with the game, which supposes a sequence of combinations procured in all or in part by the players.

Let me be permitted to name this sort of wager the wager of the first Class, of the first Genre.

If of two persons who wager on an isolated & unique event, one of the two contribute to give rise to the event, the wager begins to change in nature.

An individual possessed a very lively horse in the race & engaged himself to travel through with this horse a given space, in a given time; another refusing to supply faith, there is formed between them a wager on the event.

I will name this wager, the wager of the second Class of the first Genre.

Of this Class is perhaps the wager between Cleopatra & Marc Anthony of which Pliny[1] speaks. Cleopatra had engaged herself to dispense at a dinner ten thousand sesterces, that the ancient translator of Pliny, Antoine du Pinet, evaluated in 1566 at 250,000 écus. She will win the wager by swallowing a glass of vinegar in which she had made a pearl without price dissolve.

It seems that one could yet report in this genre the wager of Samson with the Philistines[2]; as Cleopatra was able to decide alone the wager, likewise the Philistines alone were able to contribute to the decision by guessing the enigma of Samson, or by intercepting his secret.

The wager changes immediately in form, if each of the bettors contribute on his part to give rise to the event of the issue on which the decision depends.

This wager is of the third Class of the first Genre.

If two players of piquet wager on a given coup, to whom the levies will stay, their wager returns to this Class.

One would be able

Si liceret magna componere parvis[3]

to return to this class the agreement of the Romans with the Albains, who would make the event to depend on a bloody war, of a particular combat between the Horaces & the Curiaces.

The second & the third Classes of the first Genre would appear to have some affinity with the game; I believe however that the affinity is only apparent, because it seems that who says game, supposes a sequence of combinations & of linked chances.

These three cases appear to me to form three Classes of the first Genre of wagers, which I will name the three Classes of this first simple Genre, because they revolve only on a simple event, on an isolated chance.

But the bettors can link their chances, & attribute a consequence of loss & of gain not only to the total result of all the chances levied, but to each among them taken

---

[1]Natural History L. IX. Ch. LVIII.119-122. The story is this. Cleopatra owned the two largest pearls in history which she wore as earings. Now Antony daily entertained himself at elaborate banquets. When he asked what more could be contrived, Cleopatra announced that she would spend 10,000,000 sesterces on a single banquet. Antony thought this impossible and wagered accordingly. The next day, Cleopatra set forth a splendid banquet for the two of them. But Antony chided her that it was nothing extraordinary. She replied that her own dinner would cost 10,000,000 sesterces. Her second course was a single vessel of strong vinegar. Cleopatra dropped one of the pearls into the vinegar. After it dissolved, she drank the mixture. Lucius Plancus, who was refereeing the wager, prevented her from destroying the other pearl, and declared Antony the loser.

[2]Judges XIV. 13.

[3]If one may compare small things with great. Virgil, *Georgics* 4, 1.176.

separately.

In this case I name the wager *composed*: it forms the second Genre.

I will observe in passing that this Genre of wagers appears to have been absolutely ignored by the Ancients, perhaps because the doctrine of probabilities, & the calculus of Algebra, which alone can guide the bettors in the composite wager, were not enough known to them.

Here it is already more difficult to distinguish the wager of the game.

However there is a kind of composite wager which is certainly not gambling.

It is the one where the bettors do not agree, neither the one nor the other, to produce the event, to make the chance come forth.

A & B live in a city which contains one hundred thousand inhabitants; A sustains that there die ten of them by day; B denies it: they wager. Each day they themselves are given the list of deaths; each day A pays to B a ducat if there are dead less than ten persons; if there is dead more than ten, B pays a ducat to A. Here is a case of a composite wager, which can not be named gambling, A & B having no influence on the events which determine the loss or the gain.

I believe to be able to name this kind, the composite wager of the first Class, of the second Genre.

The case where one of the bettors agrees to produce the event which must successively or finally decide on the loss or on the gain, does not seem to me to belong any longer to the genre of the games, even in the composite wager.

I am spectator to a game of hombre; one of the players proposes to bet me, at each coup what is worth to him of the gain or what causes a loss to him, the same sum which he wins or which he loses; I accept it, without touching cards, without counsel, without taking any part in the game; I believe that one cannot say that I play; this is a composite wager of the second Class.

It is necessary to remark in passing that the case is the same absolutely, if the bettors, instead of wagering on each chance, wager only on the final result of the combinations of all the chances.

Thus the one who sets himself the half with a player, without agreeing in anything to produce or to modify the event, is only punter.

It becomes playing if he takes sometime the cards, if he recommends, that which is permitted in certain games, if he oversees the events, as the croupiers in pharaon &c.

A composite wager which I will name of the third Class, seems to return entirely in the definition of the game.

This is the case where two persons wager for & against a sequence of events which they agree both to produce.

It does not appear to me possible to distinguish this wager from the game.

This is evident in the case where this kind of wager is in some matter entered or grafted onto a game.

I play at hombre: I propose to one of the players to wager any sum whatever on each bête which we make to him or to me. This here becomes for we two an element of the game.

But when a wager of this nature draws not at all in this game, it seems that there are some cases where the bettors do not play.

Suppose two persons who amuse themselves doing some fencing; they agree to pay themselves reciprocally a given sum for each thrust which carries.

It appears that this is not a game.

However in what consists the difference between this agreement & that of two men who play at billiards & pay each ball made?

I believe therefore all the composite wagers return to the Class of the game, when the two bettors cooperate to produce the event.

There remains to determine the cases where the wager can be assimilated into a game of chance.

One sees first that the simple wager, which carries only on an isolated event, can not be assimilated into the games of chance, because it is not possible to imagine in this case a progression, even arithmetic, still less geometric.

In the composite wager one senses that the bettors can, in establishing the rules of the wager, admit one or the other progression.

If they themselves permit reciprocally only the arithmetic progression, the wager takes the nature of the games of commerce.

But if one of the two alone has stipulated to be able to double at each chance the agreed stake, certainly the wager changes in nature.

Let me be permitted to name this kind of wager, a wager of chance.

I am spectator in a game of billiards; I agree with one of the player to pay him each ball that he makes in sequence, before the other player has made one of them, an écu; but I reserve to myself to be able, in the case of the loss, to double the stake, quadruple it &c. in a way that if my adversary made the first ball, instead of paying him an écu, I owe him two écus; if he makes the second before the other player has made one of them, I owe four of them; in the third that he makes in sequence, I owe eight of them & thus in sequence, until the other player has made a ball; it is evident that this wager is as dangerous as any game of chance: because finally my antagonist can make twenty & thirty balls, before the other player has made one of them, & if he makes 20 in sequence, I lose beyond 500000 écus.

In this case an impassioned man can ruin himself entirely as in a game of chance, especially if the money is not paid on the field, one is content oneself to mark with some tokens, or alternately, the number of unlucky chances.

The one who has no clear idea of the astonishing rapidity of the geometric progression, can be the victim of a wager of this nature, without a doubt.

Ovid says[4]

> *Sic ne perdiderit non cesset ludere lusor,*
> *Et revocat cupidas alea saepe manus.*

Ovid supposes that the player continues to play only when he wins.

I agree from this that the gain is able to be enticing for a player or a bettor; but the loss accelerates it still more surely in the misfortune, especially if the abyss is not indicated by discovery.

---

[4]*Ars amatoria*. I.451-452. So the gambler, in order that he may not lose, does not cease to lose; and the alluring dice *ever* recall the anxious hand. Translation by Henry T. Riley, *The Heroïdes or Epistles of the Heroines, the Amours, Art of Love, Remedy of Love* 1893.

I believe ought to insist on this last article, so many players or bettors pay each chance counting, the danger is not so great.

It appears that the Romans did not play alternately, at least to judge by this passage of Juvenal[5]

Et quando uberior vitiorum copia? quando
Major avaritiae patuit sinus? alea quando
Hos animos? neque loculis enim comitantibus itur
Ad casum tabulae; posita sed luditur arca.

Our players & bettors are more refined; when they draw a rich dupe, they do not let him perceive the precipice; they do not demand money; one is content to score; the unfortunate does not suspect the intensity of his misfortune & his eyes open only at the moment of the result.

I believe to be able to hazard an idea which appears to me to explicate the reason for which the ancient Greeks & Romans; thus all the modern nations, which have not taken the manners of the Europeans, neither played, nor play nor wager at credit. In any time & in any country the player, creditor on promise, can resort to the Judge. But in Europe the feudal system, & the false point of honor entered into this system, forces the debtor to draw the sword if he is not paid. It is without doubt by this reason that almost all players of profession are duelists

I sense that the theory that I just presented is very imperfect; but I have found on this matter absolutely nothing satisfying in any work, some pain that I have given in order to profit from the knowledge of those who have treated it, even in passing. It is difficult to not error when one is destitute of guides or of pilots.

---

[5]Sat. I. v. 88. And when was the crop of vices more abundant? When were the sails of avarice more widely spread? When had gambling its present spirits? For now men go to the hazard of the gaming-table not simply with their purses, but play with their whole chest staked. Translation by Lewis Evans, *The Satires of Juvenal, Persius, Sulpicia, and Lucilius* (1889).