

Geoffrey Caldwell, Bryan Haig, Mark Dickerson and Louise Sylvan (eds.), *Gambling in Australia*. Croom Helm, Surry Hills, 1985. pp.288. \$24.95.

This book is a collection of twenty-six separate articles which were originally presented as papers at a conference sponsored by the Australian National University's centre for continuing education, in July 1984. As such it contains all the strengths and weaknesses inherent in most books derived from conference papers. Many of the articles are excellent. Many are important contributions to knowledge of a subject long neglected by serious scholars. A few are less impressive.

The editors have attempted to overcome the problems posed by a large collection of disparate articles by arranging the work into six sections, each accompanied by a brief introduction which attempts to provide some unity for the section. The attempt fails to achieve its aims because in most cases the articles classified together do not contain sufficient similarities in theme, argument or approach. The classification is based simplistically on either the academic discipline of the authors or the subject matter.

In one notable case a highly entertaining piece which discusses a number of successful professional gamblers, including C.D. Wells who 'broke the bank at Monte Carlo' and 'Betamillion' Gates, is included in the section on "Compulsive Gamblers - Theory, Diagnosis and Treatment". It has been placed there mainly because its

author, Clive Allcock has been treating compulsive gamblers in Sydney for some years and because elsewhere in the same section he contributed a chapter which discusses psychiatry's attitude to gamblers who seek help. Despite problems such as these, which few editors of conference papers overcome, the book does, quite literally, have something for everyone - at least, everyone who is interested in gambling. The wide range of approaches to the study of gambling in Australia is illustrated by the section headings, namely, Historical Perspectives, Aboriginal Gambling, Economic Perspectives, Compulsive Gamblers, Ethical Legal and Political Perspectives and Types of Australian Gambling.

Most sections are concerned with specific academic disciplines and whilst this helps the book to achieve an interdisciplinary flavour it does have its disadvantages. The scholars are almost unanimous in observing that their disciplines have neglected the serious study of gambling and they set about rectifying the deficiency. In too many cases this has resulted in articles addressed to the particular discipline. Whilst their disciplinary colleagues might find the articles of great value, unfortunately too few of us are sufficiently read in anthropology, economics, psychology, philosophy, politics, sociology etc. to appreciate all the arguments provided.

This is not to suggest that the book fails to cater for the general reader. In fact for such a person there are a number of highlights. Ken Inglis glances at reasons why Australians are heavy gamblers and discusses protestant opposition to gambling in a skilful and entertaining paper. Aboriginal elder, Reg Dodd's and anthropologist John Altman's complementary examinations of the ways in which the aborigines adopted gambling from the Europeans and adapted it to fit within their own cultures on aboriginal missions and outstations provide the most fascinating section in the book.

Other chapters which contain discussions of value or interest to the general reader include Stuart A. Reid's description of the churches' increasingly ecumenical and professional approach in their submissions to government inquiries into gambling, Michael Walker's account of the various attitudes which gamblers have towards their own gambling and Bernard B. Bongiorno's survey of recent government enquiries into gambling and its relationship with

crime. Jan McMillen's discussion of casino gambling in Queensland, written before the opening of Jupiter's casino, offers a new dimension for our understanding of political decision-making concerning the Queensland casinos and also raises many important questions about the social impact of their legalisation.

Almost all the remaining chapters either contribute something of importance to the author's discipline and its understanding of gambling or provide useful information about various types of gambling and Australian attitudes towards them. If I have neglected the contributions of the economists and the psychologists in this review, the fault is largely mine. My training in these fields is inadequate for me to even attempt to comment critically.

The problem faced by books derived from conference papers is compounded in this instance by the multi-disciplinary nature of the conference. The result is a book which lacks any consistent theme, argument or approach. Nevertheless, for the student of gambling this book is an essential text. It is a significant work precisely because it contains so many chapters which expand the frontiers or redirect the focus of their authors' disciplines by treating seriously a subject long regarded as trivial by almost everyone except the state treasuries, who as Jim Johnson reminds us, have found in it the source of about 13% of their annual tax revenue.

John O'Hara  
Tasmanian State Institute  
of Technology