

Gordon Brown is right on child poverty and gambling, an...

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I [note that the FT](#) has reported:

Ministers should raise taxes on the gambling industry in order to fund removing the two-child benefit cap and lift half a million children out of poverty, former prime minister Gordon Brown has said.

Reforming the way gambling is taxed could generate £3.2bn a year for the Treasury, Brown said, citing a report from the IPPR think-tank also published on Wednesday.

In principle, this is hard to argue with, but I will, nonetheless.

There are two issues here.

They are that gambling is harmful, and that harm needs to be eliminated. Tax can help achieve that goal. Addressing social, policy, and market failure is a key role for tax.

The other is that we are suffering from utterly unacceptable levels of child poverty in the UK. The government can address this issue through the benefits system, regulation, labour market, and other social policy reforms. The problem is not just about money, although money is obviously key.

The two issues might occasionally be related. Usually, they are not. The Venn diagrams of incidence undoubtedly overlap, but not enough to link the two in the way Gordon Brown is doing.

And most especially, the two can be tackled separately, and both should be tackled irrespective of the other, which is my key point. They are essentially independent. Brown's mistake is to conflate the two because he thinks taxes fund spending when they do not.

There is, in that case, a massive problem in his argument that conflates the issues. That is that if he was successful in tackling gambling - and we should be, because it is a massively addictive activity causing great harm - by his logic we would then have no

money to tackle child poverty and so children would then still need to suffer because there was not enough gambling in the world to ensure they could be provided for.

But that is very obviously wrong. Children do not require gambling to survive. They require households with parents who are present, who can provide, in housing that is safe and available for the long term so that children can live in stable communities and can attend schools where they can be encouraged to flourish.

If only we stopped pretending tax funds anything, when government money creation does that, we could avoid nonsense arguments of the sort Brown has presented, and the world could be a better place because we could stop pretending that we can only tackle child poverty if we can find a harm to tax enough, but by not too much to prevent it from being eliminated as a funding source, to let that happen. We could, instead, just do the right thing for both children and those who are the victims of the gambling industry, and I would call that a win. Brown is not delivering that, and it is the fault of his understanding of tax that this is the case. And that is why this is such a big intellectual issue, and an essential part of the politics of care.