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Chapter 12

Legality

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this chapter, you should understand the following:

1. The types of contracts (bargains) that are deemed illegal
2. How courts deal with disputes concerning illegal contracts
3. Under what circumstances courts will enforce otherwise illegal contracts

12.1 General Perspectives on Illegality

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Understand why courts refuse to enforce illegal agreements.
2. Recognize the rationale behind exceptions to the rule.

We have discussed the requirements of mutual assent, real assent, and consideration. We now turn to the fourth of the five requirements for a valid contract: the legality of the underlying bargain. The basic rule is that courts will not enforce an illegal bargain. (The term *illegal bargain* is better than *illegal contract* because a contract is by definition a legal agreement, but the latter terminology prevails in common usage.) Why should this be? Why should the courts refuse to honor contracts made privately by people who presumably know what they are doing—for example, a wager on the World Series or a championship fight? Two reasons are usually given. One is that refusal to enforce helps discourage unlawful behavior; the other is that honoring such contracts would demean the judiciary. Are these reasons valid? Yes and no, in the opinion of one contracts scholar:

[D]enying relief to parties who have engaged in an illegal transaction...helps to effectuate the public policy involved by discouraging the conduct that is disapproved. Mere denial of contractual and quasi-contractual remedy [however] rarely has a substantial effect in discouraging illegal conduct. A man who is hired to perform a murder is not in the least deterred by the fact that the courts are not open to him to collect his fee. Such a man has other methods of enforcement, and they are in fact more effective than legal process. The same is true in varying degrees where less heinous forms of illegal conduct are involved. Even in the matter of usury it was found that mere denial of enforcement was of little value in the effort to eliminate the loan shark. And restraints of trade were not curbed to an appreciable extent until contracts in restraint of trade were made criminal.

In most instances, then, the protection of the good name of the judicial institution must provide the principal reason for the denial of a remedy to one who has trafficked in the forbidden. This is, moreover, a very good reason. The first duty of an institution is to preserve itself, and if the courts to any appreciable extent busied themselves with “justice among thieves,” the community...would be shocked and the courts would be brought into disrepute. Harold C. Havighurst, review of *Corbin on Contracts*, by Arthur L. Corbin, *Yale Law Journal* 61 (1952): 1143, 1144–45.

Strictly enforced, the rule prohibiting courts from ordering the parties to honor illegal contracts is harsh. It means that a promisee who has already performed under the contract can neither obtain performance of the act for which he bargained nor recover the money he paid or the value of the performance he made. The court will simply leave the parties where it finds them, meaning that one of the parties will have received an uncompensated benefit.

Not surprisingly, the severity of the rule against enforcement has led courts to seek ways to moderate its impact, chiefly by modifying it according to the principle of **restitution**¹. In general, restitution requires that one who has conferred a benefit or suffered a loss should not unfairly be denied compensation.

Pursuing this notion, the courts have created several exceptions to the general rule. Thus a party who is excusably ignorant that his promise violates public policy and a party who is not equally in the wrong may recover. Likewise, when a party “would otherwise suffer a forfeiture that is disproportionate in relation to the contravention of public policy involved,” restitution will be allowed. Restatement (Second) of Contracts, Section 197(b). Other exceptions exist when the party seeking restitution withdraws from the transaction contemplated in the contract before the illegal purpose has been carried out and when “allowing the claim would put an end to a continuing situation that is contrary to the public interest.” Restatement (Second) of Contracts, Section 197(b). An example of the latter situation occurs when two bettors place money in the hands of a stakeholder. If the wager is unlawful, the loser of the bet has the right to recover his money from the stakeholder before it is paid out to the winner.

Though by and large courts enforce contracts without considering the worth or merits of the bargain they incorporate, freedom of contract can conflict with other public policies. Tensions arise between the desire to let people pursue their own ends and the belief that certain kinds of conduct should not be encouraged. Thus a patient may agree to be treated by an herbalist, but state laws prohibit medical care except by licensed physicians. Law and public policies against usury, gambling, obstructing justice, bribery, corrupt influence, perjury, restraint of trade, impairment of domestic relations, and fraud all significantly affect the authority and willingness of courts to enforce contracts.

In this chapter, we will consider two types of illegality: (1) that which results from a bargain that violates a statute and (2) that which the courts deem contrary to public policy, even though not expressly set forth in statutes.

1. The return or restoration of some specific thing to its rightful owner or status.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Courts refuse to enforce illegal bargains notwithstanding the basic concept of freedom to contract because they do not wish to reward illegal behavior or sully themselves with adjudication of that which is forbidden to undertake. However, fairness sometimes compels courts to make exceptions.

EXERCISES

1. Why is *illegal contract* a contradiction in terms?
2. Why do courts refuse to enforce contracts (or bargains) made by competent adults if the contracts harm no third party but are illegal?

12.2 Agreements in Violation of Statute

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Understand that various types of bargains may be made illegal by statute, including gambling, some service-for-fee agreements involving unlicensed practitioners, and usury.
2. Recognize that while gambling contracts are often illegal, some agreements that might appear to involve gambling are not.

Overview

Any bargain that violates the criminal law—including statutes that govern extortion, robbery, embezzlement, forgery, some gambling, licensing, and consumer credit transactions—is illegal. Thus determining whether contracts are lawful may seem to be an easy enough task. Clearly, whenever the statute itself explicitly forbids the making of the contract or the performance agreed upon, the bargain (such as a contract to sell drugs) is unlawful. But when the statute does not expressly prohibit the making of the contract, courts examine a number of factors, as discussed in [Section 12.5.1 "Extension of Statutory Illegality Based on Public Policy"](#) involving the apparently innocent sale of a jewelry manufacturing firm whose real business was making marijuana-smoking paraphernalia.

Types of Bargains Made Illegal by Statute

Gambling Contracts

All states have regulations affecting gambling (wagering) contracts because gambling tends to be an antiutilitarian activity most attractive to those who can least afford it, because gambling tends to reinforce fatalistic mind-sets fundamentally incompatible with capitalism and democracy, because gambling can be addictive, and because gambling inevitably attracts criminal elements lured by readily available money. With the spread of antitax enthusiasms over the last thirty-some years, however, some kinds of gambling have been legalized and regulated, including state-sponsored lotteries. Gambling is betting on an outcome of an event over which the bettors have no control where the purpose is to play with the risk.

But because the outcome is contingent on events that lie outside the power of the parties to control does not transform a bargain into a wager. For example, if a

gardener agrees to care for the grounds of a septuagenarian for life in return for an advance payment of \$10,000, the uncertainty of the date of the landowner's death does not make the deal a wager. The parties have struck a bargain that accurately assesses, to the satisfaction of each, the risks of the contingency in question. Likewise, the fact that an agreement is phrased in the form of a wager does not make it one. Thus a father says to his daughter, "I'll bet you can't get an A in organic chemistry. If you do, I'll give you \$50." This is a unilateral contract, the consideration to the father being the daughter's achieving a good grade, a matter over which she has complete control.

Despite the general rule against enforcing wagers, there are exceptions, most statutory but some rooted in the common law. The common law permits the sale or purchase of securities: Sally invests \$6,000 in stock in Acme Company, hoping the stock will increase in value, though she has no control over the firm's management. It is not called gambling; it is considered respectable risk taking in the capitalist system, or "entrepreneurialism." (It really is gambling, though, similar to horse-race gambling.) But because there are speculative elements to some agreements, they are subject to state and federal regulation.

Insurance contracts are also speculative, but unless one party has no insurable interest (a concern for the person or thing insured) in the insured, the contract is not a wager. Thus if you took out a life insurance contract on the life of someone whose name you picked out of the phone book, the agreement would be void because you and the insurance company would have been gambling on a contingent event. (You bet that the person would die within the term of the policy, the insurance company that she would not.) If, however, you insure your spouse, your business partner, or your home, the contingency does not make the policy a wagering agreement because you will have suffered a direct loss should it occur, and the agreement, while compensating for a possible loss, does not create a new risk just for the "game."

Sunday Contracts

At common law, contracts entered into on Sundays, as well as other commercial activities, were valid and enforceable. But a separate, religious tradition that traces to the Second Commandment frowned on work performed on "the Lord's Day." In 1781 a New Haven city ordinance banning Sunday work was printed on blue paper, and since that time such laws have been known as blue laws. The first statewide blue law was enacted in the United States in 1788; it prohibited travel, work, sports and amusements, and the carrying on of any business or occupation on Sundays. The only exceptions in most states throughout most of the nineteenth century were mutual promises to marry and contracts of necessity or charity. As the Puritan fervor wore off, and citizens were, more and more, importuned to consider

themselves “consumers” in a capitalistic economic system, the laws have faded in importance and are mostly repealed, moribund, or unenforced. Washington State, up until 2008, completely prohibited hard alcohol sales on Sunday, and all liquor stores were closed, but subsequently the state—desperate for tax revenue—relaxed the prohibition.

Usury

A usury statute is one that sets the maximum allowable interest that may be charged on a loan; **usury**² is charging illegal interest rates. Formerly, such statutes were a matter of real importance because the penalty levied on the lender—ranging from forfeiture of the interest, or of both the principal and the interest, or of some part of the principal—was significant. But usury laws, like Sunday contract laws, have been relaxed to accommodate an ever-more-frenzied consumer society. There are a number of transactions to which the laws do not apply, varying by state: small consumer loans, pawn shop loans, payday loans, and corporate loans. In *Marquette v. First Omaha Service Corp.*, the Supreme Court ruled that a national bank could charge the highest interest rate allowed in its home state to customers living anywhere in the United States, including states with restrictive interest caps. *Marquette v. First Omaha Service Corp.*, 439 US 299 (1978). Thus it was that in 1980 Citibank moved its credit card headquarters from cosmopolitan New York City to the somewhat less cosmopolitan Sioux Falls, South Dakota. South Dakota had recently abolished its usury laws, and so, as far as credit-card interest rates, the sky was the limit. That appealed to Citibank and a number of other financial institutions, and to the state: it became a major player in the US financial industry, garnering many jobs. See Thomas M. Reardon, “T. M. Reardon’s first-hand account of Citibank’s move to South Dakota,” *NorthWestern Financial Review*, September 15, 2004, accessed March 1, 2011, <http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1P3-708279811.html>. Mr. Reardon was a member of the South Dakota Bankers’ Association.

Licensing Statutes

To practice most professions and carry on the trade of an increasing number of occupations, states require that providers of services possess licenses—hairdressers, doctors, plumbers, real estate brokers, and egg inspectors are among those on a long list. As sometimes happens, though, a person may contract for the services of one who is unlicensed either because he is unqualified and carrying on his business without a license or because for technical reasons (e.g., forgetting to mail in the license renewal application) he does not possess a license at the moment. Robin calls Paul, a plumber, to install the pipes for her new kitchen. Paul, who has no license, puts in all the pipes and asks to be paid. Having discovered that Paul is unlicensed, Robin refuses to pay. May Paul collect?

2. Charging interest in excess of the legal limit.

To answer the question, a three-step analysis is necessary. First, is a license required? Some occupations may be performed without a license (e.g., lawn mowing). Others may be performed with or without certain credentials, the difference lying in what the professional may tell the public. (For instance, an accountant need not be a certified public accountant to carry on most accounting functions.) Let us assume that the state requires everyone who does any sort of plumbing for pay to have a valid license.

The second step is to determine whether the licensing statute explicitly bars recovery by someone who has performed work while unlicensed. Some do; many others contain no specific provision on the point. Statutes that do bar recovery must of course govern the courts when they are presented with the question.

If the statute is silent, courts must, in the third step of the analysis, distinguish between “regulatory” and “revenue” licenses. A **regulatory license**³ is intended to protect the public health, safety, and welfare. To obtain these licenses, the practitioner of the art must generally demonstrate his or her abilities by taking some sort of examination, like the bar exam for lawyers or the medical boards for doctors. A plumber’s or electrician’s licensing requirement might fall into this category. A revenue license generally requires no such examination and is imposed for the sake of raising revenue and to ensure that practitioners register their address so they can be found if a disgruntled client wants to serve them legal papers for a lawsuit. Some revenue licenses, in addition to requiring registration, require practitioners to demonstrate that they have insurance. A license to deliver milk, open to anyone who applies and pays the fee, would be an example of a revenue license. (In some states, plumbing licenses are for revenue purposes only.)

Generally speaking, failure to hold a regulatory license bars recovery, but the absence of a revenue or registration license does not—the person may obtain the license and then move to recover. See [Section 12.5.2 "Unlicensed Practitioner Cannot Collect Fee"](#) for an example of a situation in which the state statute demands practitioners be licensed.

3. A license to practice a trade or profession that requires no competency test to obtain but only a registration.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Gambling, interest rates, and Sunday contracts are among the types of contracts that have, variously, been subject to legislative illegality. Laws may require certain persons to have licenses in order to practice a trade or profession. Whether an unlicensed person is barred from recovering a fee for service depends on the language of the statute and the purpose of the requirement: if it is a mere revenue-raising or registration statute, recovery will often be allowed. If the practitioner is required to prove competency, no recovery is possible for an unlicensed person.

EXERCISES

1. List the typical kinds of contracts made illegal by statute.
2. Why are some practitioners completely prohibited from collecting a fee for service if they don't have a license, and others allowed to collect the fee after they get the license?
3. If no competency test is required, why do some statutes require the practitioner to be licensed?

12.3 Bargains Made Illegal by Common Law

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

1. Understand what contracts or bargains have been declared illegal by courts.

Overview

Public policy is expressed by courts as well as legislatures. In determining whether to enforce a contract where there is no legislative dictate, courts must ordinarily balance the interests at stake. To strike the proper balance, courts must weigh the parties' expectations, the forfeitures that would result from denial of enforcement, and the public interest favoring enforcement against these factors: the strength of the policy, whether denying enforcement will further the policy, the seriousness and deliberateness of the violation, and how direct the connection is between the misconduct and the contractual term to be enforced. Restatement (Second) of Contracts, Section 178.

Types of Bargains Made Illegal by Common Law Common-Law Restraint of Trade

One of the oldest public policies evolved by courts is the common-law prohibition against restraint of trade. From the early days of industrialism, the courts took a dim view of ostensible competitors who agreed among themselves to fix prices or not to sell in each other's territories. Since 1890, with the enactment of the Sherman Act, the law of restraint of trade has been absorbed by federal and state antitrust statutes. But the common-law prohibition still exists. Though today it is concerned almost exclusively with promises not to compete in sales of businesses and employment contracts, it can arise in other settings. For example, George's promise to Arthur never to sell the parcel of land that Arthur is selling to him is void because it unreasonably restrains trade in the land.

The general rule is one of reason: not every restraint of trade is unlawful; only unreasonable ones are. As the Restatement puts it, "Every promise that relates to business dealings or to a professional or other gainful occupation operates as a restraint in the sense that it restricts the promisor's future activity. Such a promise is not, however, unenforceable, unless the restraint that it imposes is unreasonably detrimental to the smooth operation of a freely competitive private

economy.” Restatement (Second) of Contracts, Section 186(a). An agreement that restrains trade will be construed as unreasonable unless it is ancillary to a legitimate business interest and is no greater than necessary to protect the legitimate interest. Restraint-of-trade cases usually arise in two settings: (1) the sale of a business and an attendant agreement not to compete with the purchasers and (2) an employee’s agreement not to compete with the employer should the employee leave for any reason.

Sale of a Business

A first common area where a restraint-of-trade issue may arise is with the sale of a business. Regina sells her lingerie store to Victoria and promises not to establish a competing store in town for one year. Since Victoria is purchasing Regina’s goodwill (the fact that customers are used to shopping at her store), as well as her building and inventory, there is clearly a property interest to be protected. And the geographical limitation (“in town”) is reasonable if that is where the store does business. But if Regina had agreed not to engage in any business in town, or to wait ten years before opening up a new store, or not to open up a new store anywhere within one hundred miles of town, she could avoid the noncompetition terms of the contract because the restraint in each case (nature, duration, and geographic area of restraint) would have been broader than necessary to protect Victoria’s interest. Whether the courts will uphold an agreement not to compete depends on all the circumstances of the particular case, as the Connecticut barber in [Section 12.5.3 "Unconscionability"](#) discovered.

Employment Noncompete Agreements

A second common restraint-of-trade issue arises with regard to **noncompete agreements**⁴ in employment contracts. As a condition of employment by the research division of a market research firm, Bruce, a product analyst, is required to sign an agreement in which he promises, for a period of one year after leaving the company, not to “engage, directly or indirectly, in any business competing with the company and located within fifty miles of the company’s main offices.” The principal reason recited in the agreement for this covenant not to compete is that by virtue of the employment, Bruce will come to learn a variety of internal secrets, including client lists, trade or business secrets, reports, confidential business discussions, ongoing research, publications, computer programs, and related papers. Is this agreement a lawful restraint of trade?

4. One party agrees not to pursue a similar profession or trade in competition against another party.

Here both the property interest of the employer and the extent of the restraint are issues. Certainly an employer has an important competitive interest in seeing that company information not walk out the door with former employees. Nevertheless, a promise by an employee not to compete with his or her former employer is

scrutinized carefully by the courts, and an **injunction**⁵ (an order directing a person to stop doing what he or she should not do) will be issued cautiously, partly because the prospective employee is usually confronted with a **contract of adhesion**⁶ (take it or leave it) and is in a weak bargaining position compared to the employer, and partly because an injunction might cause the employee's unemployment. Many courts are not enthusiastic about employment noncompete agreements. The California Business and Professions Code provides that "every contract by which anyone is restrained from engaging in a lawful profession, trade, or business of any kind is to that extent void." California Business and Professions Code, Section 16600. As a result of the statute, and to promote entrepreneurial robustness, California courts typically interpret the statute broadly and refuse to enforce noncompete agreements. Other states are less stingy, and employers have attempted to avoid the strictures of no-enforcement state rulings by providing that their employment contracts will be interpreted according to the law of a state where noncompetes are favorably viewed.

If a covenant not to compete is ruled unlawful, the courts can pursue one of three courses by way of remedy. A court can refuse to enforce the entire covenant, freeing the employee to compete thenceforth. The court could delete from the agreement only that part that is unreasonable and enforce the remainder (the "blue pencil" rule). In some states, the courts have moved away from this rule and have actually taken to rewriting the objectionable clause themselves. Since the parties intended that there be some form of restriction on competition, a reasonable modification would achieve a more just result. *Raimondo v. Van Vlerah*, 325 N.E.2d 544 (Ohio 1975).

Unconscionable Contracts

Courts may refuse to enforce **unconscionable contracts**⁷, those that are very one-sided, unfair, the product of unequal bargaining power, or oppressive; a court may find the contract divisible and enforce only the parts that are not unconscionable.

The common-law rule is reflected in Section 208 of the Restatement: "If a contract or term thereof is unconscionable at the time the contract is made a court may refuse to enforce the contract, or may enforce the remainder of the contract without the unconscionable term, or may so limit the application of any unconscionable term as to avoid any unconscionable result."

And the Uniform Commercial Code (UCC) (again, of course, a statute, not common law) provides a similar rule in Section 2-302(1): "If the court as a matter of law finds the contract or any clause of the contract to have been unconscionable at the time it was made the court may refuse to enforce the contract, or it may enforce the

- 5. A judicial order directing a person to stop doing that which he or she should not do.
- 6. A contract presented to the offeree to take or leave without bargaining.
- 7. A contract so unfair as to be unenforceable.

remainder of the contract without the unconscionable clause, or it may so limit the application of any unconscionable clause as to avoid any unconscionable result.”

Unconscionable is not defined in the Restatement or the UCC, but cases have given gloss to the meaning, as in [Section 12.5.3 "Unconscionability"](#), *Williams v. Walker-Thomas Furniture Co.*, a well-known early interpretation of the section by the DC Court of Appeals.

Unconscionability may arise procedurally or substantively. A term is procedurally unconscionable if it is imposed upon the “weaker” party because of fine or inconspicuous print, unexpected placement in the contract, lack of opportunity to read the term, lack of education or sophistication that precludes understanding, or lack of equality of bargaining power. Substantive unconscionability arises where the affected terms are oppressive and harsh, where the term deprives a party of any real remedy for breach. Most often—but not always—courts find unconscionable contracts in the context of consumer transactions rather than commercial transactions. In the latter case, the assumption is that the parties tend to be sophisticated businesspeople able to look out for their own contract interests.

Exculpatory Clauses

The courts have long held that public policy disfavors attempts to contract out of tort liability. **Exculpatory clauses**⁸ that exempt one party from tort liability to the other for harm caused intentionally or recklessly are unenforceable without exception. A contract provision that exempts a party from tort liability for negligence is unenforceable under two general circumstances: (1) when it “exempts an employer from liability to an employee for injury in the course of his employment” or (2) when it exempts one charged with a duty of public service and who is receiving compensation from liability to one to whom the duty is owed. Restatement (Second) of Contracts, Section 195. Contract terms with offensive exculpatory clauses may be considered somewhat akin to unconscionability.

Put shortly, exculpatory clauses are OK if they are reasonable. Put not so shortly, exculpatory clauses will generally be held valid if (1) the agreement does not involve a business generally thought suitable for public regulation (a twenty-kilometer bicycle race, for example, is probably not one thought generally suitable for public regulation, whereas a bus line is); (2) the party seeking exculpation is not performing a business of great importance to the public or of practical necessity for some members of the public; (3) the party does not purport to be performing the service to just anybody who comes along (unlike the bus line); (4) the parties are dealing at arms’ length, able to bargain about the contract; (5) the person or property of the purchaser is not placed under control of the seller, subject to his or

8. A term in a contract by which one party relieves itself in advance of liability.

his agent's carelessness; or (6) the clause is conspicuous and clear. *Henriouille v. Marin Ventures, Inc.*, 573 P.2d 465 (Calif. 1978).

Obstructing the Administration of Justice or Violating a Public Duty

It is well established under common law that contracts that would interfere with the administration of justice or that call upon a public official to violate a public duty are void and unenforceable. Examples of such contracts are numerous: to conceal or compound a crime, to pay for the testimony of a witness in court contingent on the court's ruling, to suppress evidence by paying a witness to leave the state, or to destroy documents. Thus, in an unedifying case in Arkansas, a gambler sued a circuit court judge to recover \$1,675 allegedly paid to the judge as protection money, and the Arkansas Supreme Court affirmed the dismissal of the suit, holding, "The law will not aid either party to the alleged illegal and void contract...but will leave them where it finds them, if they have been equally cognizant of the illegality." *Womack v. Maner*, 301 S.W.2d 438 (Ark. 1957). Also in this category are bribes, agreements to obstruct or delay justice (jury tampering, abuse of the legal process), and the like.

Family Relations

Another broad area in which public policy intrudes on private contractual arrangements is that of undertakings between couples, either prior to or during marriage. Marriage is quintessentially a relationship defined by law, and individuals have limited ability to change its scope through legally enforceable contracts. Moreover, marriage is an institution that public policy favors, and agreements that unreasonably restrain marriage are void. Thus a father's promise to pay his twenty-one-year-old daughter \$100,000 if she refrains from marrying for ten years would be unenforceable. However, a promise in a **postnuptial (after marriage) agreement**⁹ that if the husband predeceases the wife, he will provide his wife with a fixed income for as long as she remains unmarried is valid because the offer of support is related to the need. (Upon remarriage, the need would presumably be less pressing.) Property settlements before, during, or upon the breakup of a marriage are generally enforceable, since property is not considered to be an essential incident of marriage. But agreements in the form of property arrangements that tend to be detrimental to marriage are void—for example, a **prenuptial (premarital) contract**¹⁰ in which the wife-to-be agrees on demand of the husband-to-be to leave the marriage and renounce any claims upon the husband-to-be at any time in the future in return for which he will pay her \$100,000. Separation agreements are not considered detrimental to marriage as long as they are entered after or in contemplation of immediate separation; but a separation agreement must be "fair" under the circumstances, and judges may review them upon challenge. Similarly, child custody agreements are not left to the

9. A contract made by spouses after marriage in which they agree on property division.

10. A premartial contract by which spouses agree on property division.

whim of the parents but must be consistent with the best interest of the child, and the courts retain the power to examine this question.

The types of contracts or bargains that might be found illegal are innumerable, limited only by the ingenuity of those who seek to overreach.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Courts will not enforce contracts that are, broadly speaking, contrary to public policy. These include some noncompete agreements, exculpatory clauses, unconscionable bargains, contracts to obstruct the public process or justice, and contracts interfering with family relations.

EXERCISES

1. Why are employment noncompete agreements viewed less favorably than sale-of-business noncompete agreements?
2. Can a person by contract exculpate herself from liability for gross negligence? For ordinary negligence?
3. A parking lot agreement says the parking lot is “not responsible for loss of contents or damage to the vehicle.” Is that acceptable? Explain.
4. A valet parking lot agreement—where the car owner gives the keys to the attendant who parks the car—has the same language as that for the lot in Exercise 3. Is that acceptable? Explain.

12.4 Effect of Illegality and Exceptions

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Recognize that courts will not enforce illegal bargains.
2. Know that there are exceptions to that rule.

Effect of Illegality

The general rule is this: courts will not enforce illegal bargains. The parties are left where the court found them, and no relief is granted: it's a hands-off policy. The illegal agreement is void, and that a wrongdoer has benefited to the other's detriment does not matter.

For example, suppose a specialty contractor, statutorily required to have a license, constructs a waterslide for Plaintiff, when the contractor knew or should have known he was unlicensed. Plaintiff discovers the impropriety and refuses to pay the contractor \$80,000 remaining on the deal. The contractor will not get paid. *Pacific Custom Pools, Inc. v. Turner Construction*, 94 Cal. Rptr. 2d 756 (Calif. 2000). In another example, a man held himself out to be an architect in a jurisdiction requiring that architects pass a test to be licensed. He was paid \$80,000 to design a house costing \$900,000. The project was late and over budget, and the building violated relevant easement building-code rules. The unlicensed architect was not allowed to keep his fee. *Ransburg v. Haase*, 586 N.E. 2d 1295 (Ill. Ct. App. 1992).

Exceptions

As always in the law, there are exceptions. Of relevance here are situations where a court might permit one party to recover: party withdrawing before performance, party protected by statute, party not equally at fault, excusable ignorance, and partial illegality.

Party Withdrawing before Performance

Samantha and Carlene agree to bet on a soccer game and deliver their money to the stakeholder. Subsequently, but before the payout, Carlene decides she wants out; she can get her money from the stakeholder. Ralph hires Jacob for \$5,000 to arrange a bribe of a juror. Ralph has a change of heart; he can get his money from Jacob.

Party Protected by Statute

An airline pilot, forbidden by federal law from working overtime, nevertheless does so; she would be entitled to payment for the overtime worked. Securities laws forbid the sale or purchase of unregistered offerings—such a contract is illegal; the statute allows the purchaser rescission (return of the money paid). An attorney (apparently unwittingly) charged his client beyond what the statute allowed for procuring for the client a government pension; the pensioner could get the excess from the attorney.

Party Not Equally at Fault

One party induces another to make an illegal contract by undue influence, fraud, or duress; the victim can recover the consideration conveyed to the miscreant if possible.

Excusable Ignorance

A woman agrees to marry a man not knowing that he is already married; bigamy is illegal, the marriage is void, and she may sue him for damages. A laborer is hired to move sealed crates, which contain marijuana; it is illegal to ship, sell, or use marijuana, but the laborer is allowed payment for his services.

Partial Illegality

A six-page employment contract contains two paragraphs of an illegal noncompete agreement. The illegal part is thrown out, but the legal parts are enforceable.

KEY TAKEAWAY

There are a number of exceptions to the general rule that courts give no relief to either party to an illegal contract. The rule may be relaxed in cases where justice would be better served than by following the stricture of hands off.

EXERCISES

1. When, in general, will a court allow a party relief from an illegal contract (or bargain)?
2. A and B engage in a game of high-stakes poker under circumstances making the game illegal in the jurisdiction. A owes B \$5,000 when A loses. When A does not pay, B sues. Does B get the money? What if A had paid B the \$5,000 and then sued to get it back?

12.5 Cases

Extension of Statutory Illegality Based on Public Policy

Bovard v. American Horse Enterprises

247 Cal. Rptr. 340 (Calif. 1988)

[Bovard sued Ralph and American Horse Enterprises (a corporation) to recover on promissory notes that were signed when Ralph purchased the corporation, ostensibly a jewelry-making business. The trial court dismissed Bovard's complaint.]

Puglia, J.

The court found that the corporation predominantly produced paraphernalia used to smoke marijuana [roach clips and bongs] and was not engaged significantly in jewelry production, and that Bovard had recovered the corporate machinery through self-help [i.e., he had repossessed it]. The parties do not challenge these findings. The court acknowledged that the manufacture of drug paraphernalia was not itself illegal in 1978 when Bovard and Ralph contracted for the sale of American Horse Enterprises, Inc. However, the court concluded a public policy against the manufacture of drug paraphernalia was implicit in the statute making the possession, use and transfer of marijuana unlawful. The trial court held the consideration for the contract was contrary to the policy of express law, and the contract was therefore illegal and void. Finally, the court found the parties were in *pari delicto* [equally at fault] and thus with respect to their contractual dispute should be left as the court found them.

The trial court concluded the consideration for the contract was contrary to the policy of the law as expressed in the statute prohibiting the possession, use and transfer of marijuana. Whether a contract is contrary to public policy is a question of law to be determined from the circumstances of the particular case. Here, the critical facts are not in dispute. Whenever a court becomes aware that a contract is illegal, it has a duty to refrain from entertaining an action to enforce the contract. Furthermore the court will not permit the parties to maintain an action to settle or compromise a claim based on an illegal contract....

[There are several] factors to consider in analyzing whether a contract violates public policy: “Before labeling a contract as being contrary to public policy, courts must carefully inquire into the nature of the conduct, the extent of public harm which may be involved, and the moral quality of the conduct of the parties in light of the prevailing standards of the community [Citations]”

These factors are more comprehensively set out in the Restatement Second of Contracts section 178:

(1) A promise or other term of an agreement is unenforceable on grounds of public policy if legislation provides that it is unenforceable or the interest in its enforcement is clearly outweighed in the circumstances by a public policy against the enforcement of such terms.

(2) In weighing the interest in the enforcement of a term, account is taken of

(a) the parties’ justified expectations,

(b) any forfeiture that would result if enforcement were denied, and

(c) any special public interest in the enforcement of the particular term.

(3) In weighing a public policy against enforcement of a term, account is taken of

(a) the strength of that policy as manifested by legislation or judicial decisions,

(b) the likelihood that a refusal to enforce the term will further that policy,

(c) the seriousness of any misconduct involved and the extent to which it was deliberate, and

(d) the directness of the connection between that misconduct and the term.

Applying the Restatement test to the present circumstances, we conclude the interest in enforcing this contract is very tenuous. Neither party was reasonably justified in expecting the government would not eventually act to geld American Horse Enterprises, a business harnessed to the production of paraphernalia used to facilitate the use of an illegal drug. Moreover, although avoidance of the contract

imposed a forfeiture on Bovard, he did recover the corporate machinery, the only assets of the business which could be used for lawful purposes, i.e., to manufacture jewelry. Thus, the forfeiture was significantly mitigated if not negligible. Finally, there is no special public interest in the enforcement of this contract, only the general interest in preventing a party to a contract from avoiding a debt.

On the other hand, the Restatement factors favoring a public policy against enforcement of this contract are very strong. As we have explained, the public policy against manufacturing paraphernalia to facilitate the use of marijuana is strongly implied in the statutory prohibition against the possession, use, etc., of marijuana, a prohibition which dates back at least to 1929....Obviously, refusal to enforce the instant contract will further that public policy not only in the present circumstances but by serving notice on manufacturers of drug paraphernalia that they may not resort to the judicial system to protect or advance their business interests. Moreover, it is immaterial that the business conducted by American Horse Enterprises was not expressly prohibited by law when Bovard and Ralph made their agreement since both parties knew that the corporation's products would be used primarily for purposes which were expressly illegal. We conclude the trial court correctly declared the contract contrary to the policy of express law and therefore illegal and void.

CASE QUESTIONS

1. Why did the court think it was significant that Bovard had repossessed the jewelry-making equipment?
2. What did Bovard want in this case?
3. If it was not illegal to make bongs and roach clips, why did the court determine that this contract should not be enforced?

Unlicensed Practitioner Cannot Collect Fee

Venturi & Company v. Pacific Malibu Development Corp.

172 Cal.App.4th 1417 (Calif. Ct. App. 2009)

Rubin, J.

In June 2003, plaintiff Venturi & Company LLC and defendant Pacific Malibu Development Corp. entered into a contract involving development of a high-end resort on undeveloped property on the Bahamian island of Little Exuma. Under the

contract, plaintiff agreed to serve as a financial advisor and find financing for the Little Exuma project....[P]laintiff was entitled to some payment under the contract even if plaintiff did not secure financing for the project [called a success fee].

After signing the contract, plaintiff contacted more than 60 potential sources of financing for the project....[I]n the end, defendants did not receive financing from any source that plaintiff had identified.

Defendants terminated the contract in January 2005. Two months earlier, however, defendants had signed a [financing agreement] with the Talisker Group. Plaintiff was not involved in defendants' negotiations with the Talisker Group....Nevertheless, plaintiff claimed the contract's provision for a success fee entitled plaintiff to compensation following the [agreement]. When defendants refused to pay plaintiff's fee, plaintiff sued defendants for the fee and for the reasonable value of plaintiff's services.

Defendants moved for summary judgment. They argued plaintiff had provided the services of a real estate broker by soliciting financing for the Little Exuma project yet did not have a broker's license. Thus, defendants asserted...the Business and Professions Code barred plaintiff from receiving any compensation as an unlicensed broker....Plaintiff opposed summary judgment. It argued that one of its managing principals, Jane Venturi, had a real estate sales license and was employed by a real estate broker (whom plaintiff did not identify) when defendants had signed their term sheet with the Talisker Group, the document that triggered plaintiff's right to a fee.

The court entered summary judgment for defendants. The court found plaintiff had acted as a real estate broker when working on the Little Exuma project. The court pointed, however, to plaintiff's lack of evidence that Jane Venturi's unnamed broker had employed or authorized her to work on the project....[Summary judgment was issued in favor of defendants, denying plaintiff any recovery.] This appeal followed.

The court correctly ruled plaintiff could not receive compensation for providing real estate broker services to defendants because plaintiff was not a licensed broker. (Section 11136 [broker's license required to collect compensation for broker services].) But decisions such as *Lindenstadt* [Citation] establish that the court erred in denying plaintiff compensation to the extent plaintiff's services were not those of a real estate broker. In *Lindenstadt*, the parties entered into 25 to 30 written agreements in which the plaintiff promised to help the defendant find businesses for possible acquisition. After the plaintiff found a number of such businesses, the defendant refused to compensate the plaintiff. The defendant cited the plaintiff's performance of broker's services without a license as justifying its refusal to pay.

On appeal, the appellate court rejected the defendant's sweeping contention that the plaintiff's unlicensed services for *some* business opportunities meant the plaintiff could not receive compensation for *any* business opportunity. Rather, the appellate court directed the trial court to examine individually each business opportunity to determine whether the plaintiff acted as an unlicensed broker for that transaction or instead provided only services for which it did not need a broker's license.

Likewise here, the contract called for plaintiff to provide a range of services, some apparently requiring a broker's license, others seemingly not. Moreover, and more to the point, plaintiff denied having been involved in arranging, let alone negotiating, defendants' placement of Securities with the Talisker Group for which plaintiff claimed a "success fee" under the contract's provision awarding it a fee even if it had no role in procuring the financing. Thus, triable issues existed involving the extent to which plaintiff provided either unlicensed broker services or, alternatively, non-broker services for which it did not need a license. (Accord: [Citation] [severability allowed partial enforcement of personal manager employment contract when license required for some, but not all, services rendered under the contract].)

[T]he contract here...envisioned plaintiff directing its efforts toward many potential sources of financing. As to some of those sources, plaintiff may have crossed the line into performing broker services. But for other sources, plaintiff may have provided only financial and marketing advice for which it did not need a broker's license. (See, e.g. [Citation] [statute barring unlicensed contractor from receiving fees for some services did not prohibit recovery for work not within scope of licensing statute].) And finally, as to the Talisker Group, plaintiff may have provided even less assistance than financial and marketing advice, given that plaintiff denied involvement with the group. Whether plaintiff crossed the line into providing broker services is thus a triable issue of fact that we cannot resolve on summary judgment.

...Plaintiff...did not have a broker's license, and therefore was not entitled to compensation for broker's services. Plaintiff contends it was properly licensed because one of its managers, Jane Venturi, obtained a real estate sales license in February 2004. Thus, she, and plaintiff claims by extension itself, were licensed when defendants purportedly breached the contract by refusing to pay plaintiff months later for the Talisker Group placement. Jane Venturi's sales license was not, however, sufficient; only a licensed broker may provide broker services. A sales license does not permit its holder to represent another unless the salesperson acts under a broker's authority.

The judgment for defendants is vacated, and the trial court is directed to enter a new order denying defendants' motion for summary judgment....

CASE QUESTIONS

1. Why did the plaintiff think it should be entitled to full recovery under the contract, including for services rendered as a real estate broker? Why did the court deny that?
2. Even if the plaintiff were not a real estate broker, why would that mean it could not recover for real estate services provided to the defendant?
3. The appeals court remanded the case; what did it suggest the plaintiff should recover on retrial?

Unconscionability

Williams v. Walker-Thomas Furniture Co.

350 F.2d 445 (D.C. Ct. App. 1965)

Wright, J.

Appellee, Walker-Thomas Furniture Company, operates a retail furniture store in the District of Columbia. During the period from 1957 to 1962 each appellant in these cases purchased a number of household items from Walker-Thomas, for which payment was to be made in installments. The terms of each purchase were contained in a printed form contract which set forth the value of the purchased item and purported to lease the item to appellant for a stipulated monthly rent payment. The contract then provided, in substance, that title would remain in Walker-Thomas until the total of all the monthly payments made equaled the stated value of the item, at which time appellants could take title. In the event of a default in the payment of any monthly installment, Walker-Thomas could repossess the item.

The contract further provided that 'the amount of each periodical installment payment to be made by (purchaser) to the Company under this present lease shall be inclusive of and not in addition to the amount of each installment payment to be made by (purchaser) under such prior leases, bills or accounts; and all payments now and hereafter made by (purchaser) shall be credited pro rata on all outstanding leases, bills and accounts due the Company by (purchaser) at the time each such payment is made.' The effect of this rather obscure provision was to keep a balance

due on every item purchased until the balance due on all items, whenever purchased, was liquidated. As a result, the debt incurred at the time of purchase of each item was secured by the right to repossess all the items previously purchased by the same purchaser, and each new item purchased automatically became subject to a security interest arising out of the previous dealings.

On May 12, 1962, appellant Thorne purchased an item described as a daveno, three tables, and two lamps, having total stated value of \$391.11 [about \$2,800 in 2011 dollars]. Shortly thereafter, he defaulted on his monthly payments and appellee sought to replevy [repossess] all the items purchased since the first transaction in 1958. Similarly, on April 17, 1962, appellant Williams bought a stereo set of stated value of \$514.95 [about \$3,600 in 2011 dollars]. She too defaulted shortly thereafter, and appellee sought to replevy all the items purchased since December, 1957. The Court of General Sessions granted judgment for appellee. The District of Columbia Court of Appeals affirmed, and we granted appellants' motion for leave to appeal to this court.

Appellants' principal contention, rejected by both the trial and the appellate courts below, is that these contracts, or at least some of them, are unconscionable and, hence, not enforceable. [In its opinion the lower court said:]

The record reveals that prior to the last purchase appellant had reduced the balance in her account to \$164. The last purchase, a stereo set, raised the balance due to \$678. Significantly, at the time of this and the preceding purchases, appellee was aware of appellant's financial position. The reverse side of the stereo contract listed the name of appellant's social worker and her \$218 monthly stipend from the government. Nevertheless, with full knowledge that appellant had to feed, clothe and support both herself and seven children on this amount, appellee sold her a \$514 stereo set.

We cannot condemn too strongly appellee's conduct. It raises serious questions of sharp practice and irresponsible business dealings. A review of the legislation in the District of Columbia affecting retail sales and the pertinent decisions of the highest court in this jurisdiction disclose, however, no ground upon which this court can declare the contracts in question contrary to public policy. We note that were the Maryland Retail Installment Sales Act...or its equivalent, in force in the District of Columbia, we could grant appellant appropriate relief. We think Congress should consider corrective legislation to protect the public from such exploitive contracts as were utilized in the case at bar.

We do not agree that the court lacked the power to refuse enforcement to contracts found to be unconscionable. In other jurisdictions, it has been held as a matter of

common law that unconscionable contracts are not enforceable. While no decision of this court so holding has been found, the notion that an unconscionable bargain should not be given full enforcement is by no means novel....

Since we have never adopted or rejected such a rule, the question here presented is actually one of first impression....[W]e hold that where the element of unconscionability is present at the time a contract is made, the contract should not be enforced.

Unconscionability has generally been recognized to include an absence of meaningful choice on the part of one of the parties together with contract terms which are unreasonably favorable to the other party. Whether a meaningful choice is present in a particular case can only be determined by consideration of all the circumstances surrounding the transaction. In many cases the meaningfulness of the choice is negated by a gross inequality of bargaining power. The manner in which the contract was entered is also relevant to this consideration. Did each party to the contract, considering his obvious education or lack of it, have a reasonable opportunity to understand the terms of the contract, or were the important terms hidden in a maze of fine print and minimized by deceptive sales practices? Ordinarily, one who signs an agreement without full knowledge of its terms might be held to assume the risk that he has entered a one-sided bargain. But when a party of little bargaining power, and hence little real choice, signs a commercially unreasonable contract with little or no knowledge of its terms, it is hardly likely that his consent, or even an objective manifestation of his consent, was ever given to all the terms. In such a case the usual rule that the terms of the agreement are not to be questioned should be abandoned and the court should consider whether the terms of the contract are so unfair that enforcement should be withheld....

In determining reasonableness or fairness, the primary concern must be with the terms of the contract considered in light of the circumstances existing when the contract was made. The test is not simple, nor can it be mechanically applied. The terms are to be considered 'in the light of the general commercial background and the commercial needs of the particular trade or case.' Corbin suggests the test as being whether the terms are 'so extreme as to appear unconscionable according to the mores and business practices of the time and place.' We think this formulation correctly states the test to be applied in those cases where no meaningful choice was exercised upon entering the contract. So ordered.

Danaher, J. (dissenting):

[The lower] court...made no finding that there had actually been sharp practice. Rather the appellant seems to have known precisely where she stood.

There are many aspects of public policy here involved. What is a luxury to some may seem an outright necessity to others. Is public oversight to be required of the expenditures of relief funds? A washing machine, e.g., in the hands of a relief client might become a fruitful source of income. Many relief clients may well need credit, and certain business establishments will take long chances on the sale of items, expecting their pricing policies will afford a degree of protection commensurate with the risk. Perhaps a remedy when necessary will be found within the provisions of the D.C. “Loan Shark” law, [Citation].

I mention such matters only to emphasize the desirability of a cautious approach to any such problem, particularly since the law for so long has allowed parties such great latitude in making their own contracts. I dare say there must annually be thousands upon thousands of installment credit transactions in this jurisdiction, and one can only speculate as to the effect the decision in these cases will have.

CASE QUESTIONS

1. Did the court here say that cross-collateral contracts are necessarily unconscionable?
2. Why is it relevant that the plaintiff had seven children and was on welfare?
3. Why did the defendant have a cross-collateral clause in the contract? What would happen if no such clauses were allowed?
4. What are the elements of unconscionability that the court articulates?

12.6 Summary and Exercises

Summary

In general, illegal contracts are unenforceable. The courts must grapple with two types of illegalities: (1) statutory violations and (2) violations of public policy not expressly declared unlawful by statute. The former include gambling contracts, contracts with unlicensed professionals, and Sunday contracts.

Contracts that violate public policy include many types of covenants not to compete. No general rule for determining their legality can be given, except to say that the more rigid their restrictions against working or competing, the less likely they will withstand judicial scrutiny. Other types of agreements that may violate public policy and hence are unenforceable include provisions that waive tort liability and contracts that interfere with family relationships.

The exceptions to the rule that illegal agreements will not be enforced and that courts leave the parties where they are generally involve situations where the hands-off approach would lead to an unfair result: where the parties are not equally at fault, where one is excusably ignorant or withdraws before performance, or where one is protected by a statute. A court may sometimes divide a contract, enforcing the legal part and not the illegal part.

EXERCISES

1. Henrioulle was an unemployed widower with two children who received public assistance from the Marin County (California) Department of Social Services. There was a shortage of housing for low-income residents in Marin County. He entered into a lease agreement on a printed form by which the landlord disclaimed any liability for any injury sustained by the tenants anywhere on the property. Henrioulle fractured his wrist when he tripped on a rock on the common stairs in the apartment building. The landlord had been having a hard time keeping the area clean. Is the disclaimer valid? Explain.
2. Albert Bennett, an amateur cyclist, entered a bicycle race sponsored by the United States Cycling Federation. He signed a release exculpating the federation for liability: "I further understand that serious accidents occasionally occur during bicycle racing and that participants in bicycle racing occasionally sustain mortal or serious personal injuries, and/or property damage, as a consequence thereof. Knowing the risks of bicycle racing, nevertheless I hereby agree to assume those risks and to release and hold harmless all the persons or entities mentioned above who (through negligence or carelessness) might otherwise be liable to me (or my heirs or assigns) for damages."

During the race, Bennett was hit by an automobile that had been allowed on the otherwise blocked-off street by agents of the defendant. Bennett sued; the trial court dismissed the case on summary judgment. Bennett appealed. What was the decision on appeal?

3. Ramses owned an industrial supply business. He contracted to sell the business to Tut. Clause VI of their Agreement of Sale provided as follows: "In further consideration for the purchase, Ramses agrees that he shall not compete, either directly or indirectly, in the same business as is conducted by the corporation in its established territory."

Two months after the sale, Ramses opened a competing business across the street from the business now owned by Tut, who brought suit, asking the court to close Ramses's business on the basis of Clause VI. What should the court decide? Why?

4. After taking a business law class at State U, Elke entered into a contract to sell her business law book to a classmate, Matthew, for \$45. As part of the same contract, she agreed to prepare a will for Matthew's mother for an additional \$110. Elke prepared the will and sent the book to Matthew, but he refused to pay her. Is she entitled to any payment? Explain.
5. Elmo, a door-to-door salesman, entered into a contract to sell the Wilson family \$320 worth of household products on credit. The Wilsons later learned that Elmo had failed to purchase a city license to make door-to-door sales and refused to pay him. May Elmo collect from the Wilsons? Why?
6. Gardner purchased from Singer a sewing machine (\$700) and three vacuums (about \$250 each), one after the other, on Singer's "1 to 36 month plan." Gardner defaulted after paying a total of \$400 on account, and Singer sued to repossess all the purchases. Gardner defended by claiming the purchase plan was unconscionable and pointed to the *Williams* case ([Section 12.5.3 "Unconscionability"](#)) as controlling law (that cross-collateral contracts are unconscionable). The trial court ruled for Gardner; Singer appealed. What was the result on appeal?
7. Blubaugh leased a large farm combine from John Deere Leasing by signing an agreement printed on very lightweight paper. The back side of the form was "written in such fine, light print as to be nearly illegible....The court was required to use a magnifying glass." And the wording was "unreasonably complex," but it contained terms much in John Deere's favor. When Blubaugh defaulted, John Deere repossessed the combine, sold it for more than he had paid, and sued him for additional sums in accordance with the default clauses on the back side of the lease. Blubaugh defended by asserting the clauses were unconscionable. Is this a case of procedural, substantive, or no unconscionability? Decide.
8. Sara Hohe, a fifteen-year-old junior at Mission Bay High School in San Diego, was injured during a campus hypnotism show sponsored by the PTSA as a fund-raiser for the senior class. Hypnotism shows had been held annually since 1980, and Sara had seen the previous year's show. She was selected at random from a group of many volunteers. Her participation in the "Magic of the Mind Show" was conditioned on signing two release forms. Hohe's father signed a form entitled "Mission Bay High School PTSA Presents Dr. Karl Santo." Hohe and her father both signed a form titled "Karl Santo Hypnotist," releasing Santo and the school district from all liability. During the course of the show, while apparently hypnotized, Hohe slid from her chair and also fell to the floor about six times and was injured. She, through her father, then sued the school district. The Hohes claimed the release was contrary to public

policy; the trial court dismissed the suit on summary judgment. Was the release contrary to public policy? Decide.

9. In 1963 the Southern Railway Company was disturbed by an order issued by the Interstate Commerce Commission, a federal agency, which would adversely affect the firm's profit by some \$13 million [about \$90 million in 2011 dollars]. Southern hired a lawyer, Robert Troutman, who was a friend of President John F. Kennedy, to lobby the president that the latter might convince the attorney general, Robert Kennedy, to back Southern's position in a lawsuit against the ICC. It worked; Southern won. Southern then refused to pay Troutman's bill in the amount of \$200,000 [about \$14 million in 2011 dollars] and moved for summary judgment dismissing Troutman's claim, asserting—among other things—that contracts whereby one person is hired to use his influence with a public official are illegal bargains. Should summary judgment issue? Decide.
10. Buyer, representing himself to be experienced in timber negotiations, contracted to buy the timber on Seller's land. The first \$11,500 would go to Buyer, the next \$2,000 would go to Seller, and the rest would be divided fifty-fifty after costs of removal of the timber. Buyer said the timber would be worth \$18,000–\$20,000. When Seller discovered the timber was in fact worth more than \$50,000, he sued, claiming the contract was unconscionable. How should the court rule?

SELF-TEST QUESTIONS

1. Gambling contracts are
 - a. always unenforceable
 - b. enforceable if written
 - c. in effect enforceable in certain situations involving the sale of securities
 - d. always enforceable when made with insurance companies

2. In State X, plumbers must purchase a license but do not have to pass an examination. This is an example of
 - a. a regulatory license
 - b. a revenue license
 - c. both a and b
 - d. neither a nor b

3. A contract to pay a lobbyist to influence a public official is generally illegal.
 - a. true
 - b. false

4. Exculpatory clauses are sometimes enforceable when they relieve someone from liability for
 - a. an intentional act
 - b. recklessness
 - c. negligence
 - d. all of the above

5. An employee's promise not to compete with the employer after leaving the company
 - a. is never enforceable because it restrains trade
 - b. is always enforceable if in writing
 - c. is always enforceable
 - d. is enforceable if related to the employer's property interests

SELF-TEST ANSWERS

1. c
2. b
3. b
4. c
5. d