

Blame, Rot, and Commodified Research: Responses to My Critics

James Stacey Taylor

The College of New Jersey

In his witty satire *Academic Gamesmanship*, Pierre van den Berghe notes that in academia it “is immaterial that most criticisms be adverse, as they most typically are; the important thing is that you be spoken and written about...”¹ van den Berghe made this observation in the context of poking fun at academic prestige systems. But, vanity aside, receiving criticism of one’s work is important—especially if the criticisms identify errors that need to be corrected or aspects of the work that need to be clarified. Given that I now realize that I need both to correct and to clarify my work in *Markets with Limits*, it gives me *great* pleasure to have the opportunity to respond to the excellent criticisms of, and comments on, my work from Jeffrey Carroll, Jeppe von Platz, and Chad Van Schoelandt.

Who is to blame for academic error?

In “Woozles: Who Is to Blame and What Can Be Done?” Jeffrey Carroll asks “[h]ow should we parse out fault or blame for the creation of a woozle?”² This question can be generalized: How should we assign blame for the exegetical errors and errors of fact that occur in published academic work? Carroll suggests that rather than blaming the authors of the flawed work we should instead blame the reviewers who recommended its acceptance.³ He suggests that the process of peer review should be considered to be analogous to the process involved in the sale of a house. A house seller is not responsible for determining if the house has flaws of which she is unaware. The onus for detecting any such flaws is on the buyer. If the buyer lacks the knowledge to inspect the house for themselves, they can and should hire a home inspector to

¹ Pierre van den Berghe, *Academic Gamesmanship: How to make a Ph.D. pay* (New York: Abelard-Shuman, 1970), 15.

² Jeffrey Carroll, “Woozles: Who Is to Blame and What Can Be Done?” *Reason Papers*, Vol 42, no. 2 (2022), 9.

³ *Ibid.*, 10.

evaluate the house for them. If they purchase a house that they subsequently discover has major flaws, then they should blame the home inspector, not the seller. Similarly, argues Carroll, the blame for the publication of error should not lie with the author of the flawed work (its seller, on this analogy) nor with the journal editor (its buyer), but with its reviewers (its inspectors). An exception to this would be if the seller was a “lemon-peddler” who acted deceptively and knowingly sold a faulty product.

Before moving to address Carroll’s arguments I should make it clear that I do *not* think that Brennan and Jaworski are “lemon-peddlers”.⁴ Instead, I believe that in writing *Markets Without Limits* carelessly “they were being rational and responding to professional incentives”.⁵ Even though their work is rife with error (including, but not limited to, conflicting accounts of their own thesis, fundamental misrepresentations of the views of those they criticize, extensive misquotations, and erroneous or absent citations) all of these errors can be attributed to negligent scholarship performed in the pursuit of rapid publication.⁶ In *Markets with Limits* I explain how what might appear to be examples of academic malpractice (e.g., plagiarism) could simply be the result of carelessness.⁷

Turning now to Carroll’s argument, there is an obvious disanalogy between home inspectors evaluating houses on behalf of clients and academic reviewers evaluating work on behalf of journal editors: While home inspectors have a market-based incentive to evaluate houses well for their clients, reviewers have no such extrinsic incentive to be conscientious. They are typically not paid to review, and they receive little or no professional recognition for this service. Moreover, reviewing will consume time that an academic would likely prefer to spend on furthering her own research or engaging in leisure activities (such as golf, spending time with French bulldogs, or sacking English villages). Thus, while a prospective house buyer has reason to trust that the inspector that she has hired will be conscientious in the

⁴ Ibid., 11.

⁵ Ibid., 11.

⁶ Taylor, *Markets with Limits: How the commodification of academia derails debate* (New York: Routledge, 2022), Chapters 1 – 4. I do not there provide an exhaustive account of Brennan and Jaworski’s errors—there are many others that I did not discuss!

⁷ See, for example, *ibid.*, 156 n.41.

discharge of his duties, an editor has little reason to expect the same from her reviewers.

This initial disanalogy between house inspectors and academic reviewers does not establish that reviewers, unlike house inspectors, have no obligation to review well. Persons can have obligations that they have no incentive to meet. (I could have no incentive to save small children from drowning in wading pools, but I nonetheless would still have an obligation to do so.) But noting that editors have little reason to expect their reviewers to review conscientiously will, when Carroll's argument is carried to its logical conclusion, support the charge that they (and *not* their reviewers) are partly to blame for the poor quality of the work they publish.⁸

Home inspectors owe duties to their clients because of the contractual relationships that they have with them. An inspector will inform a prospective client of the type of defects that might beset a house of the kind that she is considering buying and quote her a price to check it for them. If the client agrees to this arrangement, and the inspector accepts her agreement, the inspector will take on the obligation to inspect the house for her to determine if it has any of the flaws he identified as potentially present. (The inspector might also have a moral obligation to disclose other flaws that she discovers in the course of her evaluation, but she would not be obliged to seek them out.) The home inspector's obligation to her client is thus generated by an agreement to exchange certain services for a certain payment, with the scope of this obligation (i.e., what aspects of the house the inspector will evaluate) being determined beforehand. Both of these features of the inspector-client relationship are absent in the relationship between an academic reviewer and the editor for whom she is reviewing. This does not lead to the claim that a reviewer has no obligation to review a paper for an editor who does not pay her to do so: This obligation was generated by her agreement to review. But it should lead us to question the *scope* of that obligation.

Carroll holds that the relationship between an editor and a reviewer is relevantly similar to that between a house buyer and her home inspector such that we can infer the obligations involved in the former relationship from those involved in the latter. If this is correct,

⁸ Given the constraints that editors operate under it would be better to blame publishers. But this makes no difference to the form of the following argument.

then we can draw two inferences about the scope of a reviewer's obligation to the editor for whom she reviews from the scope of the obligations owed by a home inspector to her clients.

First, prior to entering into an agreement with a home inspector a prospective house buyer will signal to the home inspector with whom she might contract how thoroughly she expects their inspection to be by offering them more or less payment for their services. All things being equal a home inspector would be justified in thinking that a client who offered \$1000 for an inspection desired a more thorough inspection than one who offered merely \$100. Given this, if we accept Carroll's comparison, then we should infer that an editor's offer of \$0 to a reviewer would reasonably be understood by her as indicating that he did not desire her to perform a thorough review. (This inference also relates to the initial disanalogy between home inspectors and academic reviewers: That given the incentive structure faced by reviewers editors should not expect them to review well.) Second, we can infer from the content of the instructions that editors (typically) offer their reviewers (where these are to be understood as forming part of the "contract" between the editor and the reviewer) that as reviewers they are not obliged to detect exegetical or factual errors. Editors (at least in philosophy) rarely (if ever) ask reviewers to evaluate the exegetical or factual accuracy of the work they review. If the scope of an evaluator's obligation is primarily pre-determined according to the terms of the contract she agrees to (as it is in the home inspection case), then reviewers will not be obligated to evaluate the exegetical or factual accuracy of the work they review.

If we adopt Carroll's business-orientated approach, then, we should conclude that reviewers have no obligation either thoroughly to review the manuscripts that they referee or to check their exegetical or factual accuracy. They, thus, should not be blamed for any such defects in the academic work that they recommend for publication. So, who *should* be blamed? At this juncture the most natural candidate for this would be editors. It is their failure to contract with reviewers in such a way as to oblige them to detect such errors that makes it more likely that they would appear in print. But while this might be part of the answer, it is not the whole answer. On Carroll's approach editors are considered to be buyers. It is in this capacity that they are responsible for the errors in the work they "purchase" if they failed to ensure that it was thoroughly evaluated. But (as editors) they are not the end users of the work they "buy". Instead, to continue Carroll's analogy, they are

middlemen, repackaging the work that they “buy” for re-sale through, for example, journal subscriptions. Thus, if we hold that, as “buyers”, they are to blame for the production of erroneous academic work, then we should make the same claim about those who “buy” the repackaged (i.e., published) work that the editors “sell”. These latter buyers would be academics who engage with the work in question, citing it in their own research. (On this approach academic libraries would be viewed as purchasing agents for faculty.) These academics would, in turn, offer this work for “sale” to editors. On Carroll’s business-orientated analysis, then, it should not be reviewers but authors and editors who are to blame for the publication of work that contains exegetical and factual error.⁹

One might respond to this argument by claiming that, independently of any contractual duties that she might have to the publisher, a reviewer *qua* academic (rather than *qua* reviewer) has a professional obligation to the academic community to be conscientious in her reviewing. Thus, an academically orientated approach to establishing that reviewers (and *not* authors) have the primary responsibility for ensuring that published work is accurate might succeed where Carroll’s business-orientated approach fails.

However, if we accept that reviewers have an academic (rather than contractual) duty to review well, then we should also accept that, *qua* academics, authors *also* have this obligation. But since the authors and not the reviewers will receive any extrinsic benefits associated with the publication of the papers reviewed, the primary obligation to ensure their accuracy would fall on the former rather than the latter. If two persons have the same professional obligations to perform a task with one benefitting from its performance and one incurring costs in performing it, then the former and not the latter should have more responsibility for its performance. To hold either that they have *equal* responsibility or that the latter has a *greater* responsibility to perform the task in question would be to endorse the transfer of resources from the latter to the former in a way that is not required by the obligation itself and that ignores the need to secure the reviewer’s consent to this.

⁹ One might object that this is unfair: That this community should no more be blamed for being willing to accept a shoddy product than a consumer of (e.g.) fast fashion should be blamed for preferring it to its more durable alternatives. This is a reasonable point. However, since this discussion is based on the working assumption that there is blame to be apportioned for shoddy academic work it is moot.

Thus, *qua* academics, authors have a *greater* responsibility than reviewers to ensure the accuracy of their work.

Accepting that reviewers have a professional obligation to review well (i.e., accepting an academically orientated approach to evaluating where the blame for error should lie, rather than a market-orientated approach) does not, therefore, absolve careless authors from being primarily blameworthy for the errors in their work.

Justifying practices and justifying actions

Pace Carroll, then, Brennan and Jaworski *should* be blamed for the exegetical and factual errors in their work. Similarly, perhaps I too should be blamed for the lack of clarity in *Markets with Limits* that von Platz has identified in his wonderfully-titled paper “The Fable of the Deans”.

von Platz provides a clear and helpful outline of my main argument for the claim that “academic research should be primarily governed by academic, and not market, norms”.¹⁰ As this argument is outlined by von Platz, its second premise (premise B) is: “Academic research conducted in accordance with academic norms advances understanding better than academic research conducted in accordance with market norms.”¹¹ von Platz notes that I support premise B (hereafter “B”) by means of an argument which has its second premise the claim that “Academic research conducted in accordance with academic norms would suffer from fewer shortcomings, while not doing worse at advancing understanding in other respects.”¹² He argues that this premise is ambiguous between two readings. On the first of these readings the premise is true, but the argument in which it appears is invalid. On the second of these readings the argument is valid, but the premise is likely false. Since neither of the readings of the second premise would render the argument for B sound, von Platz concludes that it should not be accepted. Thus, my main argument does not suffice to establish my conclusion.

I thank von Platz for his careful (and charitable) analysis of my argument, not least because it provides me with the opportunity to

¹⁰ Jeppe von Platz, “Fable of the Deans: The Use of Market Norms in Academia,” *Reason Papers*, Vol 42, no 2 (2022), 19; quoting *Markets with Limits*, 5. His reconstruction of the argument occurs on pp. 19-21.

¹¹ von Platz, “Fable of the Deans,” 19.

¹² *Ibid.*, 21.

clarify my views. To do so I will address in turn each of the two readings of the second premise of the argument for B.

The first reading of the second premise (hereafter just “the premise”) of the reconstruction of my argument for B focuses on the respective quality of individual academic works produced in accord with academic norms and those produced in accord with market norms. On this reading “academic research conducted in accord with market norms will be more prone to error than that conducted in accord with the norms of the academy”.¹³ von Platz agrees that this claim is likely true. However, he notes that it cannot be inferred from this that “academic research should not be primarily driven by the norms of the market.”¹⁴ (Since this is so B is not supported by my argument for it when premise 2 is read in this way.) To show this von Platz invites us to consider two stacks of academic work, one consisting of work produced in accord with academic norms, and one consisting of work produced in accord with market norms. (The latter stack would contain work produced by persons Carroll terms high-volume innovators.)¹⁵ Even if we grant that each piece of work in the stack produced in accord with academic norms would be superior to its counterpart in the stack produced in accord with market norms, there will be fewer pieces of work in the former stack than the latter. We can, he observes, thus make no claims about the comparative value of the stacks.¹⁶ More generally, von Platz notes that we should not assume that the aim of a practice should also be the aim of those engaged in that practice. It is possible that the aim of a practice would be best served if those engaged in it were pursuing an aim that differed from that of the practice as a whole.¹⁷ It is thus possible that we could accept that the aim of the practice of academic work was to enhance understanding but deny that this should also be the aim of each academic researcher. It might, for example, be the case that the stack of academic work produced by researchers working in accord with market norms was superior with respect to the enhancement of understanding than the stack produced in accord with academic norms: The greater

¹³ Taylor, *Markets with Limits*, 160. Quoted by von Platz, “Fable of the Deans,” 24-25.

¹⁴ Taylor, *Markets with Limits*, 160. Quoted by von Platz, “Fable of the Deans,” 25.

¹⁵ Carroll, “Woozles: Who Is to Blame and What Can Be Done?” 13.

¹⁶ von Platz, “Fable of the Deans,” 25.

¹⁷ See also Philip Kitcher, *Science, Truth, and Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 113. I thank Neil Levy for reminding me of the relevance of Kitcher’s work to my own.

quantity of work in the former stack more than offsets its comparatively lower quality.

I agree with von Platz that the justifying aim of a practice might be best served by those who participate in that practice pursuing quite different aims of their own. I provide an example of this in *Markets with Limits*. In Alternative America, academic research is consumed by the general public who are willing to pay well for accurate research that furthers their understanding of the subjects in which they are interested.¹⁸ Driven by their lust for lucre, the academics of Alternative America strive to meet this need by producing books and articles for sale to the general public. Given the desires of their potential customers, they strive to produce the best-quality work possible and refuse to cut corners to maximize their output. They do so as consumer watchdog groups monitor the quality of the academic work available for public sale and rate the academics who produce it accordingly. Just as in Actual America (a phrase I use here as shorthand for the current social milieu in which Western academic research is conducted) the justifying aim of the practice of academic research in Alternative America is to enhance understanding. However, this is not the aim of the academics in Alternative America. Their aim is simply to maximize their financial gain. Given the high demand for high-quality work, the willingness on the part of consumers to pay well for it, and the presence of consumer watchdog groups to verify its quality, in this setting the existence of academics willing to direct their work in accord with the norms of the market would be welcomed (rather than condemned) by someone who held that the practice of academic work is justified by its ability to enhance understanding.

I developed this example in *Markets with Limits* to show that valuing the practice of academic research for its ability to enhance understanding does not necessarily commit one to opposing academics conducting their research in accord with market norms. Instead, the norms that a person who valued the practice of academic research for its ability to enhance understanding would believe should govern the actions of academic researchers would depend on the social conditions in which this research was performed. I thus agree with von Platz that we cannot infer what a practitioner's aim should be from identifying the justifying aim of the practice in which she participates.

¹⁸ Taylor, *Markets with Limits*, 160 – 161.

This leads me to acknowledge two shortcomings in *Markets with Limits*. First, von Platz's criticism of the first reading of the second premise of my argument for B makes it apparent that I was not as clear as I should have been. I do not endorse inferring from the fact that the justifying aim of the practice of academic research is the enhancement of understanding that those who participate in this practice should also have this as their aim. Second, his criticism here also makes it apparent that I must provide further argument to justify moving from the observation that the justifying aim of the practice of academic research is the enhancement of understanding to the claim that (given the social conditions that currently hold in the context in which this discussion is taking place, i.e., Actual America, rather than Alternative America) the actions of its practitioners should aim at this. The need to provide this argument is especially pressing since von Platz has provided reason to doubt that this move is justified.

As I outlined above von Platz argued that there is no reason to believe that a stack of academic work produced in accord with academic norms would (in Actual America) be more likely to enhance understanding than a stack of work produced in accord with market norms, for the comparatively higher quality of the work in the academic stack might be more than offset by the greater quantity of work in the market stack. This is a plausible argument—*provided* that one assumes that the value of each work in each stack will either be positive (i.e., it will enhance understanding of its subject) or neutral (i.e., it will not enhance understanding of its subject, but it will not impede this, either). But the value of some academic work will be negative as it *impedes* understanding of its subject. (It might, for example, misrepresent the views of those whose work it addresses, offer plausible yet fallacious arguments, or present factually incorrect information.) If the errors in such work are not caught by subsequent authors, then they might be propagated. This, in turn, will compromise the quality of those subsequent authors' work. This subsequent work might thus also have an overall negative value, especially if it too contributes to the propagation of error.

This is not merely a theoretical possibility. I outlined in *Markets with Limits* how Brennan and Jaworski's work has derailed recent debate over the moral limits of markets.¹⁹ Nancy McLean's *Democracy in Chains* has similarly derailed discussion of James Buchanan's work and

¹⁹ See *Markets with Limits*, Chapters 1 – 4, 8.

intellectual legacy.²⁰ Hallie Lieberman and Eric Schatzberg have discussed in detail how Rachel Maines' *The Technology of Orgasm* has derailed understanding of the role of vibrators during the Victorian era.²¹ Other examples abound.²²

I argued in *Markets with Limits* that both the initiation and propagation of error is more likely to occur when academic research is guided by market, rather than academic, norms—a view with which von Platz seems to agree.²³ Applying these observations to von Platz's metaphor of stacks of work, the market stack is more likely to have within it work of not merely low but *negative* value. If this work becomes influential, then it will adversely affect the value of the papers that will be added to the stack above the contaminating work. This might result in their also having negative value. These papers will, in turn, similarly contaminate those that come after them—and so on. Thus, while the market stack is likely to be higher than the academic stack it is also more likely to consist of work that has not merely *less* value than its counterpart in the academic stack but *negative* value. If this is a prevalent problem (and I argued in *Markets with Limits* there is reason

²⁰ Nancy MacLean, *Democracy in Chains: The Deep History of the Radical Right's Stealth Plan for America* (Viking, 2017). Among the many contentious claims that MacLean makes about Buchanan's work is that he provided Pinochet's government with "detailed advice on how to bind democracy, delivered over the course of five formal lectures to top representatives of a governing elite that melded the military and the corporate world" (158) and in doing so helped to "design a constitution for a dictatorship" (161). However, as Andrew Farrant has demonstrated, MacLean's account of Buchanan's work in Chile is rife with error. ("What Should (Knightian) Economists Do? James M. Buchanan's 1980 Visit to Chile," *Southern Economic Journal* 85, 3 [2019]: 691–714, esp. 698 – 708.) But despite this her claims are repeated in the academic literature. See, for example, Max J. Skidmore, "Policy Insights from Party History," *Poverty & Public Policy* 10, 1 (2018), 118; Jason Blakely, "How Economics Becomes Ideology: The Uses and Abuses of Rational Choice Theory," in Peter Róna and László Zsolnai (eds.), *Agency and Causal Explanation in Economics* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2020), 48, and andré douglas pond cummings, "The Farcical Samaritan's Dilemma," *Journal of Civil Rights & Economic Development* 35, 2 (2022), 234.

²¹ Hallie Lieberman and Eric Schatzberg, "A Failure of Academic Quality Control: The Technology of Orgasm." *Journal of Positive Sexuality* 4, 2 (2018): 24-47.

²² See Taylor, *Markets with Limits*, Chapters 1 – 4, 8.

²³ von Platz, "Fable of the Deans," 25.

to believe that it would be if academic work in Actual America is guided by market norms) then the *taller* the market stack the *less* value it might have.

Noting that work guided by market norms is more likely to be infected by the academic equivalent of dry rot moving upwards through its stack than work guided by academic norms is not a definitive rebuttal of von Platz's criticism. This could only be provided by empirical evidence that the aims of academic research (i.e., the enhancement of understanding) would (in Actual America) be better served by researchers adhering to academic, rather than market, norms. But it does provide reason to think that the height of a stack is less important than the quality of the work within it. This, in turn, provides reason to think that the move from the observation that the aim of the practice of academic research is the enhancement of understanding to the claim that (in Actual America) the actions of its practitioners should aim at this is justified. With this additional argument in place, then, not only is the second premise of my argument for B likely to be true, but the argument in which it appears is valid.

But this approach to rendering this argument valid is not without its own problems. This approach transforms the *first* reading of the second premise of my argument for B ("Academic research conducted in accordance with academic norms advances understanding better than academic research conducted in accordance with market norms") into the *second* reading. von Platz accepts that on this reading of this premise ("that academic output in general or in the aggregate would advance understanding better when conducted in accordance with academic norms than when conducted in accordance with market norms") the argument is valid. However, he believes that the premise is likely false.²⁴

von Platz's first criticism of the second reading of this premise is that I am missing an argument for the claim that "academic output in general or in the aggregate would advance understanding better when conducted in accordance with academic norms than when conducted in accordance with market norms".²⁵ This omission has been remedied above, with my response to his stack argument. But von Platz offers three further reasons why we should reject this claim. First, if adherence to academic norms requires academics to minimize their errors, then this would lead to a suboptimal allocation of their time: "the increase in [the]

²⁴ Ibid., 21.

²⁵ Ibid., 27.

quality [of their work] will be insufficient to outweigh the decrease in quantity”.²⁶ Second, even academics who secured intrinsic rewards from their research would be likely to spend more time on it (and so produce more) “in a system that ties extrinsic rewards to academic output”.²⁷ Finally, if we tie extrinsic rewards to academic output we would expect there to be “more competition for academic jobs which... will lead to more qualified researchers”.²⁸

On the first point von Platz and I agree. I noted in *Markets with Limits* that “[e]ven a complete adherence to academic norms would... not result in the elimination of... [exegetical] errors... in an academic work—and nor should it... The optimal number of such errors in an academic text is unlikely to be zero, for identifying and correcting them will come at the cost of time that could be spent on furthering understanding through other research activities”.²⁹ But although I noted this in *Markets with Limits* I neither elaborated upon this point nor made it clear that this was my view.

I also agree with von Platz that tying extrinsic reward to academic work would be likely to motivate researchers who were primarily motivated by advancing understanding to spend more time on their research, thus likely enhancing understanding of its subject to a greater degree than were such rewards to be absent. But tying extrinsic reward to academic work is not necessarily to commodify it, provided that academics continue to guide their research by the norms of the academy rather than by the norms of the market.³⁰

Given this, if my arguments above in support of the view that the best way to achieve the justifying aim of academic research in Actual America is for academics to guide their research by academic norms are sound, then only rewards that would encourage academics to do this should be offered. These rewards should thus recognize genuine academic achievement rather than mere academic success. And there’s

²⁶ Ibid., 29.

²⁷ Ibid., 31.

²⁸ Ibid., 31.

²⁹ Taylor, *Markets with Limits*, 181, n. 80. As Van Schoelandt notes, I, too, made typographical and quotation errors in *Markets with Limits*; see “Perspectives and the Limits of Markets,” *Reason Papers*, Vol. 42, no. 2 (2022), 41, n.32.

³⁰ See Elizabeth Anderson, *Value in Ethics and Economics* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), 156.

the rub—for it is not clear how the former is to be identified. In Actual America publications in prestigious academic journals or from prestigious academic publishers better track academic success rather than academic achievement. The same point can be made concerning the number of citations that an author receives to their work. As David Archard notes, an academic can increase her citation count by producing “low-grade” work that defends “outrageous conclusions” to provoke “attempted rebuttals and outraged replies”.³¹ The use of extrinsic rewards to encourage the production of academic research that would enhance understanding of its subject would thus need to be linked to a method of identifying academic achievement that is at least partially (if not wholly) independent of publication rate, publication venue, and citation counts. The use of extrinsic rewards would also need to be structured so that it avoids introducing (or reinforcing) perverse incentives to produce so-called “scholarshit” rather than scholarship. They should not, for example, be structured so that they encourage the continuous and rapid production of publications—such as by rewarding faculty with “a large summer research bonus” each year that they publish in “top venues” or by linking annual pay raises to publications.³² Indeed, to ensure that such rewards appeal primarily to persons with an intrinsic interest in their subject they should perhaps focus on rewarding achievement with enhanced opportunities to excel further, such as offering course releases to free up time to conduct more research.

This last point brings me to von Platz’s third reason for tying extrinsic rewards to academic output: That by doing so we would expect to attract better researchers. There is reason to be skeptical of this claim.

Offering incentives for a good can change the nature of the good that is provided.³³ This change might be positive: In Alternative America

³¹ David Archard, “Book Review: *Markets with Limits*,” *Journal of Applied Philosophy*. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/japp.12591> As Fanny Tarrant asked in David Lodge’s novella *Home Truths*, “Which writers are you thinking of?” to which the response was given “The same ones that you’re thinking of.” *Home Truths* (New York: Penguin, 1999), 44.

³² These incentives are offered by Georgetown University’s McDonough School of Business. “Brennan reasonably estimates that partaking in this conversation [e.g., co-authoring *Markets Without Limits*] will pay him an additional secure \$45,000 in 2016, and \$300,000 over the next 30 years of his career”. Jason Brennan and Peter M. Jaworski, *Markets Without Limits: Moral Virtues and Commercial Interests* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 226.

³³ Michael Munger observes that offering incentives for the production of

offering payment for accurate academic work that enhances understanding results in an increase in the quality of the academic work produced compared with that produced in Actual America. But it could also be negative. If in our current social milieu academia successfully moves to compete on financial grounds with other (currently better-paid) careers it is likely that persons who desire to enter academia will (in general) be more interested in the financial benefits offered by an academic career than those who (in general) currently desire to enter academia. Assuming no other changes to the incentives, they would thus be more likely than their less lucrephilic predecessors to take short-cuts in their academic work (e.g., by failing to check references, or failing carefully to read the work of those they criticize). They would do this either to increase their chances of securing further extrinsic benefits that are offered to them as a reward for publication, or (if no further rewards are on offer) to satisfy their institutions' publication requirements with the minimum of effort. As I argued in *Markets with Limits* there is currently little extrinsic incentive for academics to take the time to identify and correct the errors that would arise from the taking of such short-cuts.³⁴ Holding all other things equal, altering the academic population by increasing the extrinsic rewards offered by the profession is thus likely to have an adverse rather than a positive effect on the aggregate value of the research produced. The stack of publications that would be produced in such a system might be taller than the current stack, but it would be more susceptible to rising rot.

Moving the Conversation Forward

In David Lodge's novella *Home Truths* Sam Sharp, a commercially successful screenwriter, is angered when a prominent journalist, Fanny Tarrant, publishes a highly unflattering profile of him in a national newspaper. Seeking vengeance, Sam persuades a novelist friend, Adrian Ludlow, to grant an interview to Tarrant from which he can draw to write a satirical profile of her. Tarrant agrees to meet Ludlow, and during their interview observes that, despite his continuous production of commercially successful scripts, Sharp was lazy. Shocked, Ludlow challenges Tarrant's assessment of his friend, to which she responds:

academic work could change the nature of what is produced; "Book Review: *Markets with Limits*," *The Independent Review* 27, 1 (2022).

³⁴ Taylor, *Markets with Limits*, 141 – 145.

Yes. By keeping the scripts spilling out of his computer, like cars rolling off a production line, he never gives himself time to assess the quality of what he's writing. If he gets a bad review he can shrug it off because he's already working on the next project. The people he works for are not going to give him objective criticism. They're only interested in costs and deadlines and viewing figures. That's where I come in—to question the nature of his "success". [As a result of my criticism] [h]is next screenplay will be a little bit better than it otherwise might have been...³⁵

As von Platz would note, Tarrant's view that it would be better were Sharp to write fewer high-quality scripts than more low-quality scripts might not be justified. If the justifying aim of scriptwriting is audience entertainment, then in aggregate it might be better for Sharp to write more scripts of poor quality rather than fewer scripts of high quality. However, she is correct that the nature of "success" could be contested by the participants in certain practices—such as academic research. One might, for example, assess an academic researcher's professional success by the volume of her publications and the prestige of her institutional affiliation. Or one might assess it by the degree to which has advanced understanding in her field. One's understanding of what constitutes academic success will depend on one's acceptance of a schema that identifies a successful academic as someone who possesses certain properties (e.g., they are employed by a prestigious institution) or who performs certain actions (e.g., they publish work that advances understanding). As Van Schoelandt notes in "Perspectives and the Limits of Markets" different schemata can compete with each other.³⁶ Recognizing this, he suggests that many of the debates over the moral limits of markets could be recast as debates over which competing schemata should be adopted. In particular, he suggests that the debate over what would constitute good scholarship (or academic success, as is my focus here) should be understood as a debate over which of two competing schemata should be adopted: The commodity schema or the academic schema.

Van Schoelandt's suggestion that we understand the debate over the appropriate way to assess academic success (and hence the

³⁵ Lodge, *Home Truths*, 60 - 61.

³⁶ Van Schoelandt, "Perspectives on the Limits of Markets," 39.

appropriate way for academics to conduct research) as a debate over which would be the best schema to adopt for this is extremely helpful. In particular, understanding this debate as being one over schemata will facilitate any attempts that we might make to alter those schemata by which academics understand their profession so that they fit with our preferred conception. Understanding that changing persons' schemata is one way to secure practical changes (e.g., towards a wider acceptance of academic norms and a rejection of the norms of the market as being appropriate to guide academic research) will encourage us to determine how the schemata that persons accept can be changed. And, as Van Schoelandt observes, this will also facilitate our recognition of when schemata might be so resistant to change that we would not be justified in attempting to affect this. Just as the dispute between von Platz and I as to which norms would be best suited to enable academic research to serve its justifying aim of enhancing understanding requires empirical investigation to settle, so too should we empirically investigate the degree to which our schemata concerning academic success are malleable.

Conclusion

In the Conclusion of *Markets with Limits* I noted that I considered it to be a contribution both to the various conversations over where the moral limits of markets should lie, and to the conversation over which norms guide (and which norms should guide) academic research. I am thus delighted to have had this opportunity to continue this conversation in *Reason Papers*.³⁷

³⁷ I thank Shawn Klein and Carrie-Ann Biondi for arranging this invigorating Symposium issue of *Reason Papers*. I also thank Shawn Klein for his very helpful comments on an earlier version of this paper. And, of course, I am very grateful to Jeffrey Carroll, Jeppe von Platz, and Chad Van Schoelandt for their wonderfully constructive and generous criticisms of my work.