

Perspectives and the Limits of Markets

Chad Van Schoelandt

Tulane University

George Carlin quips: “Selling is legal, fucking is legal. So, why isn’t it legal to sell fucking? Why should it be illegal to sell something that’s legal to give away?”¹ While Carlin’s first question specifically regards the selling of sex, his second question regards the more general issue of whether and how the normative status of a transfer can flip based merely on whether a good is sold or given away. Turning from comedians to philosophers, some construe debates about the moral limits of markets across contentious goods and services, whether it be sex, surrogacy, votes, kidneys, friendship, or the like, as about mere selling making a moral difference.² James Stacey Taylor’s *Markets with Limits*, however, argues that almost no defense of limits endorses an asymmetry such that it is permissible to give away but not to sell a good.³ Instead of the clean asymmetry of permissible giving but impermissible sale, prominent views contend that a good should be neither sold nor given away (e.g., votes, slavery, or surrogate pregnancy)⁴ or can be given away or sold for some price, but not for the market price (e.g., Springsteen tickets)⁵ or that a good should be sold only within professional norms (e.g., legal services, sex therapy, or academic

¹ George Carlin, *Napalm & Silly Putty* (Hachette Books, 2002), 100.

² Taylor notes that it “might be natural to think that discussion of the appropriate limits of markets focuses on the question of whether there are certain goods or services that could be legitimately possessed and given away freely but which should not be bought and sold.” James Stacey Taylor, *Markets with Limits: How the Commodification of Academia Derails Debate* (New York: Routledge, 2022), 133.

³ Taylor argues that “‘the action’ in the current debates over the moral limits of markets is not to be found in discussions of whether there are certain goods and services that it would be permissible to distribute ‘for free’ but never for money.” Taylor, 118. Taylor notes that Thomas Aquinas and Francisco Suárez defend asymmetry regarding spiritual goods. Taylor, 29.

⁴ Taylor, *Markets with Limits*, 19 and 25.

⁵ Taylor, 14.

research).⁶ These views support limiting markets, but not drawing the line precisely at sale.

Moreover, Taylor rejects construing the commodification debates as about whether selling some good is intrinsically or necessarily wrong. On Taylor's reconstruction, the main theorists in the contemporary debate agree "that markets are subject to incidental limits—that at certain times and places certain goods or services should not be exchanged for money, while at other times or in other places such exchanges would be morally unproblematic."⁷ Such limits come from the fact that in a particular place and time markets in the good exploit people, produce bad consequences, conflict with important principles, or involve wide-ranging other problems.⁸ As such, many object not to a market itself but to how a market operates or the effects of a market in particular circumstances. Unsurprisingly, with complex considerations and circumstances, theorists disagree about the proper incidental limits. Since all sides agree that "time, place, and manner" are relevant to the morality of markets, the core disputes are "over which markets would be permissible in which circumstances."⁹ The current "dominant" position, according to Taylor, holds "that the focus of contemporary discussion of the moral limits of markets should be on *how* goods and services should be sold, not *which* goods and services should be sold."¹⁰ Given the richness and complexity of these debates, to focus on whether

⁶ Taylor, 21, 23, and 151.

⁷ Taylor, 22. Note that Taylor is addressing theorists who assume that markets are widely permissible. There are, of course, significant debates about whether markets should be entirely excluded. See, for instance, G. A. Cohen, "The Future of a Disillusion," *New Left Review*, no. 1/190 (December 1, 1991): 18; G. A. Cohen, *Why Not Socialism?* (Princeton University Press, 2009), 40; Virgil Henry Storr and Ginny Seung Choi, *Do Markets Corrupt Our Morals?* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019); Daniel Halliday and John Thrasher, *The Ethics of Capitalism: An Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020); Chad Van Schoelandt, "Markets, Community, and Pluralism," *Philosophical Quarterly* 64, no. 254 (2014): 144–51.

⁸ "The majority of the arguments in the current literature on the morality of markets focus (variously) on the claims that markets in certain goods and services would be exploitative, coercive, involve compromised consent, or would result in the misallocation of the goods and services whose market distribution is in question." Taylor, *Markets with Limits*, 127.

⁹ Taylor, 41.

¹⁰ Taylor, 127.

there are any *necessary* limits strictly on selling would be boring and trivial.

In this paper, I will highlight and build on some of the complexity. In particular, I will show the relevance of recent work on perspectives for assessing several arguments Taylor discusses. That is, Taylor's *Markets with Limits* provides a taxonomy of arguments in the current commodification literature and I will discuss the role of perspectives in several of those forms of argument. From there, I will consider significant difficulties in changing perspectives and predicting the broader effects of such changes.

1. Perspectives

People understand the world through mental schemata or “bundles of expectations, judgments of salience, interpretive norms, and emotions for classes of situations.”¹¹ To illustrate, consider Cristina Bicchieri's example of a schema “of a good wife as someone who is obedient, honest, faithful, and a good mother....”¹² Some of those expectations may themselves be schemata, such as understanding a good mother as one who cares, disciplines, and nurses.¹³ In many cases, schemata include not only descriptive, but also normative, expectations, as when members of a society think a wife *ought to* or *must* be obedient. Other societies and even different members of a society may have alternative schemata, including potentially using egalitarian or gender-neutral schemata of a good spouse and a good parent.

Collections of schemata constitute “perspectives.” At their most basic, as Ryan Muldoon describes, “[p]erspectives are simply the filters we use to view the world.”¹⁴ More elaborately, a perspective is a ‘cognitive toolbox’ consisting of the ways one interprets, understands, and reasons about one's experiences.¹⁵ Theorists precisely model perspectives in different ways, but an essential aspect is categorization

¹¹ Ryan Muldoon, *Social Contract Theory for a Diverse World: Beyond Tolerance* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 50. See also Muldoon, 48.

¹² Cristina Bicchieri, *Norms in the Wild: How to Diagnose, Measure and Change Social Norms* (Oxford University Press, 2017), 134.

¹³ Bicchieri, 134.

¹⁴ Muldoon, *Social Contract Theory for a Diverse World*, 48.

¹⁵ Scott E. Page discusses “cognitive toolboxes”; Scott E. Page, *The Difference: How the Power of Diversity Creates Better Groups, Firms, Schools, and Societies* (Princeton University Press, 2007), 9.

or interpretation of otherwise overwhelmingly complex information that one encounters.¹⁶ Categorization treats only some features as relevant while ignoring others. Muldoon describes this function of perspectives thus: “we do not take in the world ‘as it is,’ but instead (consciously or unconsciously) choose to group certain features together, choose to ignore certain information while focusing on other information, and choose systems of representation and interpretation.”¹⁷ Another essential feature regards processing one’s information and forming expectations, such as what Scott Page calls “predictive models.” According to Page, predictive models describe “causal relationships between objects or events” and “serve as a shorthand to make sense of the world. When someone says Nebraskans are nice people or Ford trucks are durable, they map categories—Nebraskans and Ford trucks—onto the categories nice people and durable machines.”¹⁸ In meeting people, one’s perspective may filter out innumerable facts about them (e.g., the color of their socks), categorize them by certain features (e.g., they are Nebraskan), and implicitly assume other as yet unobserved features (e.g., they are nice). Of course, perspectives differ between people. Not everyone thinks of Nebraskans as nice and some perspectives don’t even categorize people as Nebraskan.

While each person has a unique perspective, constituent schemata are often shared or at least very similar across groups of people. Shared schemata “provide a framework for mutual understanding and interpretation of shared events.”¹⁹ Such a framework is important for coordinating people’s expectations as well as behaviors, including in complex social interactions for which our schemata are scripts directing the behavior of people in different roles.²⁰

¹⁶ “Formally speaking, interpretations create many-to-one mappings from the set of alternatives that form categories. Informally speaking, interpretations lump things together.” Page, 8. See also Gaus’s discussion of categorizations as a part of a perspective. Gerald Gaus, “The Complexity of a Diverse Moral Order,” *Georgetown Journal of Law & Public Policy* 16 (2018): 649–55.

¹⁷ Muldoon, *Social Contract Theory for a Diverse World*, 48.

¹⁸ Page, *The Difference*, 8. Cristina Bicchieri indicates that people use schemata “to interpret and understand our environment, as well as make inferences and explain and predict others’ behavior.” Cristina Bicchieri, *The Grammar of Society: The Nature and Dynamics of Social Norms* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 170.

¹⁹ Muldoon, *Social Contract Theory for a Diverse World*, 48.

²⁰ “Scripts are essentially prescriptive sequences of actions of varying levels

2. Arguments for Limiting Markets

Taylor provides a taxonomy of contemporary arguments for limiting markets in various contentious goods or services. Primary debates regard what limits are appropriate on markets' scope, operation, or broader cultural influence, but not altogether eliminating markets. Taylor surveys and categorized the diversity of arguments for limiting markets or market norms, along with nuances of market-limiting views. I won't exhaustively review Taylor's catalogue, but will highlight several argument types and recast them in terms of perspective and schemata for further consideration.

Most relevant in considering perspectives and schemata are expressivist arguments. According to Taylor, an expressivist argument "appeals to the expressive functions of acts or practices, either to identify them as a particular type of act or practice, or to justify or condemn them, where the expressive function of an act or practice could either be what it is taken to express or its effects on what other acts or practices are taken to express."²¹ These arguments need only regard what an act or practice expresses in some society or circumstance without making claims about essential or necessary meaning. In fact, Taylor focuses on arguments granting that meaning is contingent since views committed to essentialist meaning are implausible and extremely rare in philosophy.²²

Expression can play different roles in expressivist arguments. For instance, one may be concerned about the effects of a market on the expressive meaning of non-market acts. In describing an argument from Barry Maguire and Brookes Brown, Taylor writes: "The sale of acknowledgements in an academic text, book blurbs, or marketing campaigns in which persons are paid to recommend products to friends would, if they became widely used, undermine the efficacy of

of specificity that people automatically engage in (and are expected to engage in) while in particular situations." Bicchieri, *Norms in the Wild*, 132. See also Bicchieri, *The Grammar of Society*, 93–94; Ryan Muldoon, "Perspectives, Norms, and Agency," *Social Philosophy and Policy* 34, no. 1 (2017): 267.

²¹ Taylor, 94.

²² Taylor, 39–40.

acknowledgments, blurbs, and personal recommendations.”²³ Taylor elaborates: “The ability to express effectively that we care about others and to communicate our sincerely held views to them are important to us, both instrumentally and intrinsically. If to preserve this expressive ability requires the imposition of restrictions on the scope of markets, then we have reason to impose them.” Note that this argument does not claim there is any objectionable expression in the buying or selling of acknowledgments per se. It is not that selling acknowledgments expresses disrespect or the like. Instead, the argument holds that such sales introduce noise that reduces the signal value for those wishing to express sincere gratitude through acknowledgements.

There is a similar dynamic in ‘contamination of meaning’ arguments holding that a market in the good will cause people to think of the good in monetary terms instead of in alternative non-monetary terms. In the case of allowing markets in for blood, the argument holds that such a market would change “the meaning of the donation from one that was previously ‘priceless’ to one that was the equivalent of a monetary donation.”²⁴ As with the case of acknowledgments, the argument is not claiming that there is anything intrinsically wrong in the expressions from buying or selling blood. The objection is not that selling blood expresses disrespect, but instead that such transactions may cause changes in the social meaning of blood donation including of the donations that happen without payment.

Similar considerations apply even to goods that are descriptively impossible to buy or sell, such as goods whose nature requires that they be given for non-monetary reasons (e.g., love, Nobel Prizes), requires a particular relationship between distributor and receiver (e.g., feuds), or constituted by distribution-governing rules (e.g., a chess opponent’s rook).²⁵ While one cannot buy ontologically non-commodity goods, one can buy similar commodities such as love-like behaviors or a physical Nobel Prize medal. Significant aspects of

²³ Taylor, 98.

²⁴ Taylor, 28. For Taylor’s own views about compensation for plasma, see James Stacey Taylor, *Bloody Bioethics: Why Prohibiting Plasma Compensation Harms Patients and Wrongs Donors* (New York: Routledge, 2022).

²⁵ Taylor, *Markets with Limits*, 120–22. Besides Taylor’s examples, Ayn Rand (via the character Francisco d’Anconia) suggests that money will not buy admiration or respect (at least not for the coward or the incompetent). Ayn Rand, *Atlas Shrugged* (New York: Signet, 1996), pt. II, chap. II.

the debates regard whether such commodities would crowd out the valuable non-commodities.²⁶ In such a case, there may be nothing innately wrong in selling the good, though the existent of the good (contingently, in some circumstances) prevents another good from existing.

One can understand these arguments in terms of schemata. Roughly, the arguments claim that it is good if people have certain possible schemata, such as understanding acknowledgments as expressing sincere gratitude and blood donation as a priceless gift of life, for such schemata help them flourish and do things they want to do. Alternative, less valuable, commodity-based schemata, however, can crowd out those non-market schemata. Were that to happen, people seeing an acknowledgment in a book may think ‘paid endorsement’ and feel indifference, rather than think ‘sincere gratitude’ and feel appreciative, while authors may struggle to find ways to express gratitude to those who helped them. Or, people seeing someone donated blood may associate it with the going price and self-interested pursuit of income rather than the priceless gift of life. Since schema operate with the general case, this view would apply even to an uncompensated donation if the society held the commodity-based schema.

Considering schemata also provides a way to understand Taylor’s discussions of Debra Satz’s argument that prostitution presents, and reinforces perceptions of, women as inferior and of Elizabeth Anderson’s argument against prostitution according to which commodified sex provides a model of sexual relations that men transfer to their personal sphere and undermine views of sex appropriate to freely gifted sex.²⁷ One may recast these arguments as regarding the schemata that people may develop for women and sex, including developing schemata with hierarchy and normative expectations that sex is for male pleasure or instead with equal standing and normative expectations that sex is for the pleasure of all participants. Schemata are not idle, but instead affect behavior, so people reasonably worry that propagation of certain schemata may contribute to, among other problems, “harm to women, and the violation of women’s rights.”²⁸ Insofar as people experience the world through cognitive filters and extrapolate empirical

²⁶ Taylor, *Markets with Limits*, 122–24.

²⁷ Taylor, *Markets with Limits*, 81 and 70.

²⁸ Taylor, 82. Though see Gerald Gaus, “On the Difficult Virtue of Minding One’s Own Business: Towards the Political Rehabilitation of Ebenezer Scrooge,” *The Philosopher*, no. 5 (1997): 24–28.

and normative expectations from limited data in making their choices individually and coordinating behavior socially, what schemata people apply to women and sex is greatly important.

Taylor addresses arguments about friendship with important parallels, though it in this case it is not the friendship being bought and sold. Taylor reconstructs Michael Sandel's argument that giving cash gifts evidences an understanding of friendship directed toward preference satisfaction in contrast to an allegedly superior understanding of friendship directed toward mutual appreciation that is expressed through thoughtful particular gifts.²⁹ This argument does not claim that giving of cash gifts itself is wrong, but instead takes whether people give cash as indicative of their understanding of friendship given other facts about their culture and practices. So, the argument revolves around the claim that there are competing schemata for friendship making different features (preference satisfaction or mutual appreciation) salient.

Lastly, I would be remiss to not discuss Taylor's arguments, representing his own views, about commodification of academic research.³⁰ Taylor does not claim there is anything essentially wrong about, for instance, selling academic books or academics pursuing profit. Instead, Taylor argues that academics operating under market norms instead of academic norms, in the early twenty-first century United States with people and other institutions as they are, produces bad consequences. Within current incentives and practices, commodification leads to bad results while academic norms directed at interpersonally increasing understanding "will help scholarship to prevail over scholarship."³¹

It is worth clarifying the bad results at issue. We should not be concerned about the minor typographical errors that make their way into

²⁹ Taylor, *Markets with Limits*, 55.

³⁰ The norms and incentives in other aspects of academia may also warrant criticism. Brennan and Magness even argue that "professors and administrators waste students' money and time in order to line their own pockets, everyone engages in self-righteous moral grandstanding to disguise their selfish cronyism, professors pump out unemployable graduate students into oversaturated academic job markets for self-serving reasons," and other moral problems within the 'ivory tower.' Jason Brennan and Phillip Magness, *Cracks in the Ivory Tower: The Moral Mess of Higher Education* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 3.

³¹ Taylor, *Markets with Limits*, 151.

almost any publication without changing meaning or impeding understanding, such as a repeated comma, a missing ‘the,’ or mistakenly writing ‘quality’ instead of ‘equality’ in a quote.³² Instead, Taylor emphasizes that some academics are sloppy in their exegesis and in working with sources, misrepresent opponents’ views, and even derail debates.³³ Such shoddy scholarship can take many particular forms, such as misleading quotes or claims without any citation at all. Less, but still, objectionable is an author remaining vague, appealing to what “is ‘widely held’ or ‘common in the literature’”³⁴ or what “[p]ersons concerned with [something] assert”³⁵ without attributing the views to anyone at all. Authors also sometimes make claims based on unreliable sources.³⁶

Though Taylor focuses on institutional incentives and norms, considering schemata illuminates additional aspects of the issue. In particular, one can recast Taylor’s arguments in terms of competing schemata of good scholarship, with a commodity schema casting good scholarship as prestigiously published, making striking claims, and instrumentally valuable for professional advancement.³⁷ Taylor’s discussion supports an alternative, academic schema casting good scholarship as promoting understanding through careful and charitable exegesis. These schemata have mutually compatible criteria but treat different features as relevant and generate different expectations and action tendencies. Someone applying the commodity schema of good scholarship as having a high citation count may categorize articles based on journal ranking or strive to increase citations to their own work even in ways that do not enhance understanding.³⁸ In contrast, someone

³² Taylor, 84, 108, 117n98.

³³ Taylor, 3, 170.

³⁴ Taylor, 144.

³⁵ Taylor, 163.

³⁶ I heard this on the grapevine. See also Taylor, 79; Nicolas Berdyaev, *The Divine and the Human*, trans. R. M. French, Geoffrey Bles (London, 1949), 7n1.

³⁷ Though Taylor presents this in terms of commodification and emphasizes financial aspects, an alternative hypothesis is that the phenomena he identifies is a case of people coming to pursue what is measured (e.g., citation count) rather than less legible or quantifiable considerations (e.g., understanding) as fundamental. This would be value capture rather than perverse incentives, following a distinction from C. Thi Nguyen, *Games: Agency As Art* (Oxford University Press, 2020), 202.

³⁸ For example: Chad Van Schoelandt, “Justification, Coercion, and the Place

applying the academic schema of good scholarship might not even notice an article's venue and strive to increase their understanding of relevant sources. Taylor's proposed reforms, such as paying bounties to reviewers for finding errors, could increase the salience of certain features, shift expectations around academic publications, and, if ultimately successful, push the prevalent schemata toward the academic version.

Note also that schemata are closely linked to norms, including because certain schemata will facilitate or hinder the adoption or maintenance of certain norms.³⁹ As Muldoon argues, norms and perspectives (constituted by schemata) can form mutually-reinforcing relationships: "Each is validated by the other: perspectives are reinforced because norms allow individuals to reliably act on the categories made most salient by the perspectives, thus making them seem more natural. Norms are reinforced because perspectives narrow our conception of the possible."⁴⁰ Norms depend on and affect people's filters. For instance, it is harder to maintain norms about the quality of exegesis if people ignore the exegetical quality because they are focused on the strikingness of claims, but easier to maintain those norms if people find exegetical quality highly salient for distinguishing scholarship from scholarshit.

3. Ideal Schemata

Philosophers may be tempted to think that these merely contingent perspectives do not justify limiting markets. Such a philosopher might hold that given the great benefits of markets (e.g., efficiency) and the contingency of meaning, arguments of the above sort give us reason to change our schemata for various acts, events, or practices, or perhaps to change the effects of those schemata rather than

of Public Reason," *Philosophical Studies* 172, no. 4 (2015): 1031–50; Gerald Gaus and Chad Van Schoelandt, "Consensus on What? Convergence for What?: Four Models of Political Liberalism," *Ethics* 128, no. 1 (2017): 145–72; Chad Van Schoelandt, "Once More to the Limits of Evil," *The Journal of Ethics* 24, no. 4 (2020): 375–400; Chad Van Schoelandt, "Functionalist Justice and Coordination," *Social Theory and Practice* 46, no. 2 (2020): 417–40.

³⁹ Muldoon, "Perspectives, Norms, and Agency," 262.

⁴⁰ Muldoon, 268.

to limit markets.⁴¹ Along these lines, philosophers are adept at concocting possible worlds, including worlds in which things have different meanings and consequences. Consider Taylor’s ‘Alternative America’ in which people accepting “the preference-satisfaction conception of friendship” purchase gifts for their friends because suspecting the friends have false consciousness and would thus not use a cash gift to satisfy their true or real preferences while people accepting “the appreciation-based conception” give cash to close friends to express intimacy and appreciation of their peculiar traits,⁴² the society facilitates a market in votes while requiring “those who purchase votes publicly to identify which political party they will cast them for” to inform the public “which parties are genuinely concerned with securing their approval,”⁴³ the government annually provides each constituent “a sum of fiat money that she can use to buy political influence,”⁴⁴ a person atones to their angered partner by informing “them that they will only have sex with prostitutes for the next week to express that they are currently unworthy of loving sex,”⁴⁵ and (most outlandish) “published academic research is the most desirable form of entertainment and accordingly commands high prices” with consumer who have “strong desires for exegetical accuracy...”⁴⁶

Considering such possibilities, a philosopher may say that the anti-market arguments have no bite since they could just as well show that we should change the meanings of the act or practice and preserve or establish limitless markets. Put another way, in the above arguments there was nothing fundamentally wrong with market exchange, but instead a fundamental concern with forming or maintaining certain

⁴¹ Brennan and Jaworski suggest such a position in writing: “We ought to revise our interpretive schemas whenever the costs of holding that schema are significant, without counter-weighted benefits.” Jason Brennan and Peter M. Jaworski, *Markets without Limits: Moral Virtues and Commercial Interests* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 83. Though much of Taylor’s *Markets with Limits* analyses Brennan and Jaworski’s *Markets without Limits*, I am not assessing that dispute. Moreover, while I say Brennan and Jaworski suggest the view I address in the main text, I am not sure whether it is their view — much depends on how they mean “benefits” and on any implicit or unstated qualifications for feasibility.

⁴² Taylor, *Markets with Limits*, 53–54.

⁴³ Taylor, 108–9.

⁴⁴ Taylor, 132.

⁴⁵ Taylor, 109.

⁴⁶ Taylor, 161.

schemata and excluding other schemata. The hypothetical position I am suggesting rejects market limits and endorses focusing on schemata, as by arguing that we should reject the irrational prejudices and harmful social stigmatization against prostitution.⁴⁷ Moreover, for arguments regarding a market-based schema crowding out an alternative schema, a philosopher may propose either the allegedly superior schema should crowd out the inferior schema or people should maintain both schemata without any crowding out at all. That is, the problem is not markets but instead people abandoning the allegedly superior schemata of academic scholarship, appreciative friendship, loving sex for mutual pleasure, priceless blood donations, or the like, so (the philosopher declares) people ought to keep those schemata.

4. Schemata Dynamics

Unfortunately, it is easier to imagine possible schemata than to shape schemata to one's will. In fact, as Bicchieri notes, "Schemata are notoriously resistant to change...."⁴⁸ Moreover, even when people do change prevalent schemata, the changes may be different than they intended. Considering some of the underlying dynamics will illuminate key considerations for assessing arguments for market limits.

An immediate constraint is that schemata act as filters and interpretive lenses. As Muldoon notes, such filter and lenses are necessary because "we would not be able to process every bit of

⁴⁷ Martha Nussbaum argues that many beliefs about prostitution are irrational and prejudicial. Martha C. Nussbaum, "'Whether From Reason Or Prejudice': Taking Money For Bodily Services," *The Journal of Legal Studies* 27, no. S2 (1998): 696. Ole Martin Moen argues that prohibition and stigmatization, rather than prostitution itself, are harmful. Ole Martin Moen, "Is Prostitution Harmful?," *Journal of Medical Ethics* 40, no. 2 (February 1, 2014): 74–75. More modestly, Jessica Flanigan notes that people studying the effects of sex work regulations and prohibitions "struggle to distinguish the negative effects of law enforcement from the negative effects of participating in the industry more generally" and that it is "difficult to know the extent that the negative aspects of the sex industry can be explained by broader social forces, economic inequality, patriarchy, or stigma associated with sex work." Jessica Flanigan, "In Defense of Decriminalization," in *Debating Sex Work*, by Jessica Flanigan and Lori Watson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 172. See also Chad Van Schoelandt, "Sexual Ethics," in *The Routledge Companion to Libertarianism*, ed. Matt Zwolinski and Benjamin Ferguson (New York: Routledge, 2022), 266–67.

⁴⁸ Bicchieri, *Norms in the Wild*, 135.

information that we take in as if it were unique and worthy of our attention. We simply don't have the cognitive resources to do so."⁴⁹ Schemata direct people's attention to some information, generate interpretations and inferences, and exclude large swaths of other information. In this way, one's perspective influences the choices, evidence, and experiences that maintain or change one's perspective.⁵⁰ More particularly, schemata tend to generate their own confirmation.⁵¹ These self-reinforcing tendencies are increased and taking conscious control over schemata is hampered by the fact that schemata often operate largely unconsciously. People generally lack clear awareness of what categories they use, what elicits them, how they acquired them, or how they mediate their experience.⁵²

Despite psychological resistance, schemata can change. For instance, Bicchieri describes the Saleema campaign against female genital cutting in Sudan with media "campaigns linked traditional values of honor and purity to the idea that uncut girls are complete and pure."⁵³ This campaign changed perspectives from the sort that encouraged cutting, but it was a complex and difficult process. It is not that someone recognized that the social meanings of cutting were contingent, declared "let it mean otherwise," and then it was otherwise. The fact that meaning is contingent does not imply that it is easy or necessarily feasible to change. While the Saleema campaign's success shows that it was possible in those circumstances, it also shows that it took substantial effort and resources to accomplish. Campaigns to change schemata are not always so successful.

Resistance to schemata change is a double-edge sword for arguments about limiting markets. It is difficult to change objectionable schemata once established. This is especially so if the social circumstances remain such that people keep encountering situations they

⁴⁹ Muldoon, "Perspectives, Norms, and Agency," 265. See also, Muldoon, *Social Contract Theory for a Diverse World*, 48.

⁵⁰ Bicchieri, *The Grammar of Society*, 93n33; Muldoon, "Perspectives, Norms, and Agency," 262.

⁵¹ Bicchieri, *The Grammar of Society*, 93; Bicchieri, *Norms in the Wild*, 135.

⁵² Bicchieri, *The Grammar of Society*, 97; Muldoon, "Perspectives, Norms, and Agency," 265.

⁵³ Bicchieri, *Norms in the Wild*, 139. See also examples from Bogotá discussed throughout Carlo Tognato, ed., *Cultural Agents Reloaded: The Legacy of Antanas Mockus* (The Cultural Agents Initiative at Harvard University, 2018).

can, perhaps unconsciously, take to confirm the established schema or in which acting on the established schema remains effective, including effectively coordinating expectations and action with other people using that schema. Contrary to what an idealizing philosopher may hope, it may be tremendously difficult to change prevalent schemata to match those from an alternative society (whether imagined or real). Those calling for limiting markets may argue that limitations are warranted, though contingently, considering the schemata that are prevalent and stable in a society. People rejecting such limits and endorsing changing the schemata face a burden of discerning whether, how, and at what cost anyone can change the schemata.⁵⁴

The other edge of the resistance to change, however, mitigates concerns about possible crowding out of established good schemata. Schemata of appreciative friendship, loving sex, acknowledgments of sincere gratitude, or the like will tend to resist being crowded out by new commodity-based schemata. People with such schemata will tend to make choices consistent with, focus on information congruent with, ignore apparent discrepancies with, recall instances of, and interpret situations according to those schemata. Even if the commodity becomes too common to ignore, some psychological tendencies support creating distinct concepts and subcategories rather than crowding out established schemata.⁵⁵ It is also possible for the schemata to change without complete displacement. Schemata are complicated and can include many different interconnected aspects allowing for revision without dissolution. Perhaps considerable selling of blood would cause people to revise their schema to no longer see it as selfless yet still see it as compassionate and expressing value beyond that captured by its market price (as many people see careers like firefighter or pediatrician).

It is worth noting that people have many complex schemata depending on clusters of traits. A person with a schema of a Ford truck as durable might not associate durability with all trucks or all Ford products. The same person who associates Ford trucks with durability may associate Ford Pintos with fiery explosions. People have many context-dependent schemata of fair distribution, such as need-based in

⁵⁴ Sometimes, people may have the option of accepting limits as justified for now while working toward social and ultimately schemata changes in the (perhaps very distant) future. I thank Shawn Klein for highlighting this possibility.

⁵⁵ Bicchieri, *Norms in the Wild*, 138.

emergency room triage but merit-based college admissions.⁵⁶ Similarly, many people maintain diverse friendship or sex schemata for diverse circumstances. People may have a BFF, chosen family, fair-weather friend, comrade, frenemy, or friend with benefits, as well as lovemaking, hooking-up, Tantric sex, or hate-sex. Even so, human cognitive limits necessitate economizing on categories. People can only maintain a limited number of schemata, so at times a new schema may crowd out rather than residing beside prior schemata.

The upshot here is that whether schemata multiply, crowd out, or reshape depends on the circumstances and complex processes of the case and will often be unpredictable. Though we easily imagine alternative schemata for the better or worse, schemata have complex dynamics. As such, theorists should neither assume a priori that commodification poses no risk thanks to the contingency of social meaning nor assume a priori that commodification will inevitably undermine other meanings. Moreover, where it is possible to change schemata, one must consider the further complex issues of the costs and best available alternates, often under great uncertainty, within particular circumstances.

5. What is to be Done?

I argued that further assessing many forms of commodification arguments requires considering the complex dynamics of mental schemata within a social context. I will conclude by briefly suggesting two aspects for further consideration of these schemata-dependent commodification arguments. First, given the limited power of considering merely conceivable worlds, theorists would do best by considering the world as it is and as it can be within our “neighborhood” and the “adjacent possible.”⁵⁷ That is, focusing on social worlds similar to our own and that we can discern how to bring about. To riff on

⁵⁶ Bicchieri, *The Grammar of Society*, 76–77.

⁵⁷ On this idea of a neighborhood, see Gerald Gaus, *The Tyranny of the Ideal: Justice in a Diverse Society* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), sec. II.3; John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*, ed. Erin Kelly (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001), 70. On this idea of the adjacent possible, see Gerald Gaus, *The Open Society and Its Complexities* (Oxford University Press, 2021), 113–17; Stuart A. Kauffman, *A World Beyond Physics: The Emergence and Evolution of Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 106–6, 129.

Taylor's cases, theorists should focus more on Adjacent America rather than Alternative America.

Second, theorists can gain traction by focusing on smaller, more local, scales and particularly the different associations and communities to which people belong. Considering actual and possible social meanings and norms at the scale of the United States with its hundreds of millions of residents spread across thousands of miles with extremely diverse backgrounds and cultures raises considerable difficulties. The difficulties increase further at larger scales, such as all liberal democracies in the global marketplace. The social meanings and possibilities of their changing for better or worse, and even what changes would be better or worse, vary greatly across different people and contexts.⁵⁸ Focusing on smaller scales facilitates better engagement with key nuances.

Focusing on the smaller scale does not necessarily mean smaller geographic region. Taylor's discussion of academic publishing norms in the United States provides an excellent example here.⁵⁹ Though geographically spread, the academic community is a fraction of the total population operating in tight networks with broadly shared norms and practices. Taylor and others can thus get traction in assessing the existing institutions, norms, and schemata, including details of the financial incentives within disciplines, universities, or even specific units within a university.⁶⁰ Theorists can also get traction in considering, as Taylor does, possible reforms in the neighborhood with reasonable chances of success. When facing social complexity, one must join epistemic humility with moderation of proposals.

⁵⁸ For discussion of the different conceptions of citizenship between rural and urban areas, see Ryan Muldoon, "'Reasoning qua Citizen' and the Dangers of Idealization in Public Reason," *Public Affairs Quarterly* 36, no. 1 (2022): 1–18.

⁵⁹ Taylor, *Markets with Limits*, pt. III.

⁶⁰ Taylor, 142.