# REASON PAPERS

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Salsman, Richard. *Where Have All the Capitalists Gone?* —Eric Daniels
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## Editor's Note

The focus of this issue is a symposium on James Stacey Taylor's recent book: *Markets with Limits: How the Commodification of Academia Derails Debate*. This book is in large part a response to Jason Brennan and Peter Jaworski's 2016 book: *Markets without Limits*: *Moral Virtues and Commercial Interests.* Brennan and Jaworski's book is a clear philosophical defense of the claim that there are no inherent moral limits to markets, as they put it: "if you may do it for free, then you may do it for money" (10). The book made something of a splash: both for its arguments and the provocative marketing of the book through the use of selling dedication and acknowledgement sponsorships. It remains an important book that brings focus to how to respond to certain kinds of criticisms of markets and commercial activity.

When I heard that Taylor was coming out with a book criticizing Brennan and Jaworski, I was intrigued. I knew of Taylor's work defending organ markets, so I was curious what his criticisms of Brennan and Jaworski would be. There seemed to be a shared agreement on markets as being morally important for human life and so I was expecting a friendly and academic exchange of subtle differences of opinion on how best to make sense of the role and morality of markets. It quickly become apparent that the differences between these authors had many more dimensions to it than I was anticipating. This is not the appropriate forum to get into those aspects but, as the editor, I think it is important to note that Brennan and Jaworski were invited to participate in the symposium. They declined and their reasons are discussed, in general, elsewhere (the Facebook pages of each explain their reasons, in general, for not responding in any detail to Taylor's book).

The authors here do not take up the main issues of contention between Taylor and Brennan and Jaworski, but instead focus on implications of Taylor's arguments about market and academic norms. Jeffrey Carroll considers arguments about who has the responsibility for preventing errors from appearing (and spreading) in academic literature. He then suggests some ways of shifting incentives to help prevent such errors.

Jeppe von Platz takes aim at Taylor's argument for the supremacy of academic norms over market norms for governing the research of academics. Von Platz argues that despite Taylor's argument about research quality, market norms might still be better at producing better overall advances in human understanding.

Chad Van Schoelandt argues that schemata and perspectives play important roles in how we understand, evaluate, and make sense of arguments. He suggests that shifting or abandoning one's schema might be more relevant for making sense of the kinds of outcomes Taylor is trying to explain through the dynamic of academic and market norms.

And lastly, Taylor responds to these various criticisms and arguments in his contribution to the symposium.

The issue ends with a reviews by Eric Daniels of Richard Salsman's *Where Have All the Capitalists Gone* and a review by Kathleen Touchstone of Edward Younkin's *Exploring Atlas Shrugged: Ayn Rand's Magnum Opus.*

Before closing out this note, *Reason Papers* is looking to expand its editorial staff. We are looking for two or three Associate Editors to join a newly formed editorial board. The primary task of the Associate Editor will be to organize and edit symposiums for the journal. Please see our website for more information about what we are looking for and how to apply. (There is no compensation for this position.)

Shawn E. Klein

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# Symposium: James Stacey Taylor's *Markets with Limits: How the Commodification of Academia Derails Debate*

## Woozles: Who Is to Blame and What Can Be Done? Reflections on Taylor's Prescriptive Project

Jeffrey Carroll

Bowling Green State University

### 1. Confessions of a Could've Been Woozle-Propagator

R&B artist Usher began one of his most popular songs with the lyric: "these are my confessions."[1] I begin this paper with mine. When I was a graduate student, I started thinking about the limits of markets. My interest in the issue was in no small part due to the work of Jason Brennan and Peter Jaworski who published an article entitled "Markets without Symbolic Limits" and a book *Markets Without Limits*.[2] After reading them, I began reading some, but nowhere near all, of the work of the anti-commodification theorists (or at least those who I *thought* were anti-commodification theorists at the time) to whom Brennan and Jaworski were responding. Eventually, I wrote a paper on semiotic objections and the limits of markets. At the first journal I sent it to, the reviewer outlined a series of exegetical errors. The comments were decisive and helpful. Thankfully, this paper never made it to print, and I avoided getting egg on my face.

My first foray into the semiotic objections to markets literature could easily be in James Stacey Taylor's *Markets with Limits* as a case

[1] Usher. "Confessions Part II." *Confessions*, Arista, 2004.

[2] Jason Brennan and Peter Jaworski, "Markets without Symbolic Limits," *Ethics* 125, no. 4 (2015): 1053–77; Jason Brennan and Peter Jaworski, *Markets without Limits: Moral Virtues and Commercial Interests* (New York: Routledge, 2016).

study of what not to do.[3] I relied on the characterization of views provided by critics rather than check the author's actual work and failed to thoroughly vet the citations. In short, I (nearly) propagated a "woozle" which is the term Taylor gives to "a false claim that becomes widely accepted" as a result of scholarly negligence.[4] So let me begin with a *mea culpa*.

The majority of Taylor's book concerns the ethics of exegesis with a special focus on what he takes to be the exegetical errors made by Brennan and Jaworski. I call this Taylor's *corrective project*. The aim of which is to rerail the debate about the limits of markets that was derailed by a confused focus on semiotic objections. In Section 2, I briefly restate the core claims of the corrective project. However, this essay takes no considered stance on the exegetical "beef", as Mike Munger calls it, between Taylor, on the one hand, and Brennan and Jaworksi, on the other.[5] Rather, it straightforwardly proceeds from the *assumption* that Taylor is right about how to interpret the work of the scholars Brennan and Jaworski label anti-commodification theorists, such as Michael Sandel, Elizabeth Anderson, Debra Satz, and others.[6] The reason for doing so is not because I think Taylor is right (which, in fact, I do), but because it allows us to focus on and evaluate the upshot of his argument that is explored in the final third of the book.

The final third comprises what I take to be the second main project of the book which we can call the *prescriptive project*. The aim of which is to advocate for academic work to be governed by the norms of the academy rather than the norms of the market. I proceed to raise a

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[3] James Stacey Taylor, *Markets with Limits: How the Commodification of Academia Derails Debate* (New York: Routledge, 2022).
[4] Taylor, 146–48.
[5] Mike Munger, "Review of *Markets Without Limits: How the Commodification of Academia Derails Debate*," *Independent Review*, 27, 1 (2022).
[6] Michael J. Sandel, *What Money Can't Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012); Elizabeth S. Anderson, "Is Women's Labor a Commodity?," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 19, no. 1 (1990): 71–92; Elizabeth Anderson, *Value in Ethics and Economics* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995); Debra Satz, "The Moral Limits of Markets: The Case of Human Kidneys," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 108, no. 1pt3 (2008): 269–88; Debra Satz, *Why Some Things Should Not Be for Sale: The Moral Limits of Markets* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

series of questions for the prescriptive project. In Section 3, I consider the extent to which Brennan and Jaworski would be at fault for the undue attention on the Asymmetry Thesis and semiotic objections. My view is that they are less blameworthy than might be initially thought. In Section 4, I propose an alternative division of academic labor that (i) embraces the primacy of the academic norm of understanding, (ii) achieves additional normative aspirations, while (iii) abstains from condemning someone like Brennan for his expeditious (if occasionally erroneous) output. Supposing academic work should be primarily concerned with understanding, in Section 5, I advocate for a formatting change that would make it easier to suss out woozles before they reproduce. Finally, Section 6 offers a brief conclusion.

## 2. Taylor's Corrective Project

There are many ways of objecting to commodification and marketization. In *Markets without Limits*, Brennan and Jaworski identify seven.[7] The last of which they call *semiotic objections*. According to this type of objection, "buying and selling certain goods and services is wrong because of what market exchange communicates or because it violates the meaning of certain goods, services, and relationships."[8] This class of objections is particularly important because, according to Brennan and Jaworski, it is "the *most common* class of objections against commodifying certain goods and services."[9] If such an objection can be successfully made, then what Taylor labels the *Asymmetry Thesis* can be vindicated. The Asymmetry Thesis holds that "there are certain goods or services that persons can legitimately both possess (occupy, perform, etc.) and give away but which it would necessarily be wrongful for them to buy or sell."[10] So, what the Asymmetry Thesis amounts to is the rejection of Brennan and Jaworski's *Markets without Limits* thesis that holds that "if it's permissible to do something for free, then it's permissible to do it for money."[11]

The two core contentions of Taylor's corrective project are that (i) no one actually endorses the Asymmetry Thesis and (ii) (almost) no

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[7] Brennan and Jaworski, *Markets without Limits*, 19–22, 46–47.
[8] Brennan and Jaworski, "Markets without Symbolic Limits," 1053.
[9] Brennan and Jaworski, *Markets without Limits*, 49.
[10] Taylor, *Markets With Limits*, 11.
[11] Jason Brennan and Peter M. Jaworski, "If You Can Reply for Money, You Can Reply for Free," *The Journal of Value Inquiry* 51, no. 4 (2017): 655.

one makes a semiotic objection to commodification.[12] No one actually endorses the Asymmetry Thesis, according to Taylor, because it is a deeply implausible view. To endorse it, one must believe in "a magical view" in which "the mere performance of a particular set of actions alone will (independently of anything apart from their performance) generate wrongness where none was before."[13] And Taylor proceeds to show that none of those labeled anti-commodification theorists believe in such magical transformations.

Second, according to Taylor, (almost) no one makes a semiotic objection to commodification. Semiotic objections take one of two general forms. An *essentialist* semiotic objection involves embracing a view of meaning called semiotic essentialism in which "certain actions or utterances necessarily communicate particular meanings, and which meanings they communicate can be known *a priori*."[14] However, semiotic essentialism has been widely rejected in philosophy. Though it is possible that those charged with making a semiotic objection could, in fact, embrace semiotic essentialism, Taylor persuasively shows that none actually do. By contrast, a *contingent* semiotic objection "holds that a particular transaction would be wrongful because of what it would communicate in the particular cultural milieu in which it took place."[15] This is the type of semiotic objection on which Brennan and Jaworski are focused. While more plausible than essentialist semiotic objections, contingent semiotic objections are less distinctive. The difference, says Taylor, between Brennan and Jaworski and the contingent semiotic objector is reduced to a debate "about where the contingent limits of markets should lie."[16] The upshot is that the action in the debate over the scope of markets and commodification is neither about the veracity of the Asymmetry Thesis, nor about semiotic objections.

**3. Assigning Fault**

How should we parse out fault or blame for the creation of a woozle? A not unreasonable view would be that the bulk or entirety of

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[12] The "almost" refers to Jacob Sparks's work which, according to Taylor, actually does make a semiotic objection. See Sparks "Can't Buy Me Love," *Journal of Philosophical Research* 42 (2017): 341–52 and "You Give Love A Bad Name," *Business Ethics Journal Review* 7, no. 2 (2019): 7–13.
[13] Taylor, *Markets With Limits*, 11.
[14] Taylor, 36.
[15] Taylor, 40–41.
[16] Taylor, 41.

the fault falls on the author or authors that misinterpreted a text or generated a false claim. On this view, Brennan and Jaworski would be entirely or almost entirely blameworthy for derailing the debate over the limits of markets.

I think this is mistaken. I suspect I find Brennan and Jaworski much less culpable than Taylor.[17] To argue for this, consider the following case. Suppose I am selling my house. When I decide to sell, I am responsible for honestly disclosing any issues with the house that I know of. Yet, if there are issues unknown to me, the burden is not on me to go find them out before listing the property. Once the property is listed, prospective *buyers* can and should inspect it before making an offer. But often buyers lack the requisite knowledge to adequately inspect the property themselves. Fortunately, there are specialists that homebuyers pay to do precisely this. The home inspection specialists thoroughly vet the property and provide the potential buyer with a report on the state of the property. Said buyer can read through the report and decide if the property is what they want. We cannot forget that even if the buyer reads the report, the report *may* be less than perfectly accurate as home inspection specialists are fallible. In some cases, they may miss a problem with the house. If the problem missed is minor like a leaky showerhead, then the error can probably be disregarded. However, if the problem overlooked is serious, like an issue with the foundation, then ignoring the error may not be an option. Supposing the inspector was properly licensed, the recourse for the buyer would be to take action against, perhaps suing, the negligent or incompetent inspector.

The upshot of this case is that the onus is ultimately on the buyer. This is not unlike, I submit, where the onus belongs in the evaluation of academic work. The buyer is the journal editor(s), the inspection specialist is the reviewer(s), and the seller is the writer(s) of the article or book. The writer has a product they are "selling" to the editor. Ultimately it is up to the editor whether to "buy" the product. Often, the editor will rely on reviewers to help determine whether the product is worth buying. If the editor buys a defective product, it is hard for me to see how it is the fault of the seller. This is not to say that the buyer (editor) is at fault either. The grievance may be against the reviewer for negligence or incompetence.

[17] This is not to say that Taylor believes that Brennan and Jaworski are entirely or almost entirely at fault for the woozle. But the sense I get is that, on his view, more of the burden falls on them than on mine.

One may respond that the house selling case is relevantly different. A more apt analogy would be to a car salesman knowingly selling a "lemon" to an unaware buyer. The car salesman is malicious and selling the faulty car intentionally. The transaction is premised on deceit. While the buyer is at liberty to have a mechanic inspect the car, the salesman is expected to only be selling vehicles that exceed a certain quality and safety threshold. Any that don't simply shouldn't be on the lot for sale (they could be sold in, say, a salvage auction). Perhaps the buyer even took the lemon to be inspected by a mechanic, but the mechanic happened to be in cahoots with the seller.

To make the parallel explicit, the idea would be that Brennan and Jaworski were selling a lemon. They were, on this view, intentionally misinterpreting the views of Sandel, Anderson, Satz and others because it was financially and professionally beneficial for them to do so. Editors did not inspect the work sufficiently because it was not beneficial for them to put in the time and effort do so. When reviewers were sought, they were (somehow) in cahoots with Brennan and Jaworski and offered a soft revise-and-resubmit. This enabled them to "sell" their product which they knew to be defective.

I am in no position to know Brennan and Jaworski's intentions, but I find the Brennan and Jaworski *qua* lemon-peddlers story unlikely, in no small part due to the demanding standards of *Ethics*. It would be helpful to hear more from Taylor about whether he is, in fact, charging Brennan and Jaworski with being lemon-peddlers. There are places, such as the discussion of bonuses, in which he gets quite close to such an accusation.[18] But my suspicion is that he is not. In a sense, they were being rational and responding to professional incentives. The problem is just that the professional incentives can sometimes engender the production of "scholarshit" that is lazily, confusedly, and, at its worst, incompetently produced. But I don't think that Taylor's claim is that Brennan and Jaworski willfully and purposefully produced deceitful and misleading work. The claim is that they were bad, not wicked, scholars.[19] And, if they were bad, not wicked, scholars, then I fail to see why the bulk of (perhaps any of?) the blame would fall on them. It should fall on the reviewers that failed to flag the relevant problems (like the blame

[18] Taylor, *Markets With Limits*, 142.
[19] 'Bad' here refers to being bad at academic scholarship, not morally bad. One may be bad, in this sense, by propagating incorrect views. And one can certainly be a bad scholar by being lackadaisical in researching and articulating the views of those with whom they disagree.

falls on the home inspector for failing to flag the problem with foundation). Or, if the reviewers did flag said problems, fault can be assigned to the editor(s) that overlooked them.

If fault belongs on the reviewers, then attention should be directed towards how to reform the review process such that it does not keep happening. Taylor thinks we need to incentivize more thorough evaluation of academic work, such as by offering monetary incentivizes to reviewers that successfully hunt and catch woozles.[20] I am on Taylor's side in thinking that it is important to reflect on the incentives of academic practice and consider ways of modifying the incentivizes to better realize the aims (like understanding) of academic norms. In this spirit, I offer a more systemic reconceptualization of how academic labor could be divided in the next section.

## 4. An Alternative Division of Academic Labor

Regardless of where fault for woozle-creation should be assigned, there may be a better, even if unlikely, way of dividing the academic labor altogether. Not all academics need to be in the business of generating new ideas. Indeed, given that some academics check out from the research dimension after securing tenure, the following proposal would be a means of retaining or reintroducing those interested in research but not motivated or interested in writing papers or books. In this respect, the proposal aims to be more accommodating of the various dispositions and preferences of those in the academy. Finally, of note, as I lay out the proposal, I will do so via *ideal types*. Of course, real scholars rarely fit neatly into such types. But I opt for this approach for ease and clarity of exposition. There is no problem as far as I can tell with having scholars occupy more than one role; indeed, it may be both necessary and value-enhancing.

Consider two possible roles one could have in the production of ideas: *Innovators* and *Regulators*. An innovator is in the business of producing new ideas. Innovators probe the conceptual space and seek to expand knowledge by saying something that has not been said. The overarching objective of innovators is *creation*. By contrast, a regulator is responsible for vetting ideas for rigor, clarity, consistency, originality, and whatever other methodological desiderata are appropriate. The overarching objective of regulators is *refinement*.

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[20] Taylor, 186–88.

There are two general ways of being an innovator. The first is as a *high-volume* innovator. A high-volume innovator is focused primarily on the quantity of research produced. The goal is for a high output. By contrast, a *high-percentage* innovator focuses on making sure that any research they do produce is of great importance. Whereas a high-volume innovator is interested in publishing as much as they possibly can (even if it means that not all of it is sufficiently refined or novel to end up in top-journals), a high-percentage innovator is interested in publishing "must read" work that appears in the highest prestige journals and those places with the largest readership (even if it means that they fail to publish as widely as some of their peers).

The difference here is like the difference between Kobe Bryant and Shaquille O'Neal on shot selection. While both were great basketball players, they had radically different approaches to scoring. For Kobe, the strategy was to put up as many shots as possible. Obviously, there will be many misses. Indeed, Kobe missed the most shots in NBA history. But there will also be more makes. The objective in basketball is not to have the best make-to-miss ratio, but to score the most points. And the way to score the most points is to take the most shots. By contrast, Shaq only took shots within a close range and with a high probability of going in. There is only one non-active player with a higher field goal percentage than Shaq.[21] Taking higher probability shots means more shots are likely to go in. And, if more shots go in, then there is a greater likelihood of scoring more points than your opponent who, suppose, takes lower probability shots.

So, a research-active academic could attempt to be like Kobe and produce as much as possible to increase the probability that they have an extensive publication record, or they could attempt to be like Shaq and only take high-quality "shots" by devoting their time to perfecting pieces with the aim of getting them into the very top-journals.[22] When deciding which model to emulate, one should be cognizant of the different advantages each offers. Being like Shaq makes one more likely to get a job at high-prestige research institution. But it also makes one more likely to strike out on publishing entirely and end up without a job altogether. Being like Kobe increases the likelihood of securing a position, though that position may not be a high-status one.

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[21] There are eight active players with higher field goal percentages than Shaq.

[22] Again, one can aspire, without fault, for a variety of approaches in between these two extremes.

Not only are there two general ways of being an innovator, there are two general ways of being a regulator. The first way is as an *evaluator*. Evaluators are responsible for assessing the merits of the argument itself. Is the argument valid or invalid, sound or unsound, cogent or not cogent, strong or weak? Is the argument sufficiently original? Is it interesting? The second way is as a *tracker*. Trackers would not be involved in the assessment of the argument itself. Rather, trackers would be responsible for making sure the citations were correct and faithful. Are the citations to articles that actually exist? Do the cited to authors actually believe the view that has been attributed to them? Is there some other exegetical problem with the piece?

There are different potential models for the evaluation of academic work with different costs and benefits. One option would be to have editors explicitly assign one evaluator and one tracker to each article that makes it past the desk. Evaluators would review articles as most reviewers currently do. But evaluators need not be deeply emerged in the literature. They just need to be able to evaluate the argumentative merits of the work.[23] This expands the pool of potential reviewers. This is, in part, made possible by having a tracker also review the submission. Trackers do need to know the relevant literature quite intimately in order to be able to do part of their job. While almost any reviewer is capable of checking the citations and seeing whether they match up (journals can – and often do – have a non-academic perform this type of task), the ability to know whether the view being attributed to another scholar does require familiarity with the literature. As Taylor notes, this is not the most enjoyable form of academic work and it may require financially compensating trackers. Perhaps trackers get paid a small flat rate to track and receive a modest additional reward for each woozle found. Or, maybe it is more like a bounty hunter model in which the work begins purely voluntarily, but then if the woozle is caught, there is a larger, more lucrative reward on the back-end.[24] However, the compensation scale is structured, there is reason to think that this will increase the size of the reviewer pool which not only would improve wait-times at journals, but allow more people (including those who may feel

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[23] If an article is written in such a way that it requires deep familiarity with a literature and the evaluator decides it is too "in the weeds" to comprehend, so much the worse for the article. A rewrite after the rejection may be necessary and desirable.

[24] Taylor, *Markets With Limits*, 186–88.

disenfranchised or alienated from the mainstream research process) to be involved with the assessment and production of academic research.

On Taylor's point about incentivizing better reviewing practices, I submit an additional, non-monetary proposal. Currently, some journals annually recognize scholars who have done a certain amount of referee work. This is a fine thing to do, but it says nothing about the *quality* of these referees. If we are interested in incentivizing better reviewing, then journals should give out awards for, say, the Most Valuable Evaluator (MVE) and the Most Valuable Tracker (MVT) each year. One may receive the MVE, say, for identifying a logical mistake in the argument of a prominent scholar, while one may receive the MVT for spotting a long perpetuated woozle. Winners of an MVE or MVT could include it on their CVs and perhaps a norm could develop in which hiring committees come to recognize such awards as being a sign of status.

What is gained by dividing academic labor in this way? First, it contains ways of improving the review process for academic work. It does so by giving explicit roles to reviewers, thereby, enabling them to have a more exact understanding of their responsibilities and to fulfill those responsibilities more completely. It also considers ways of employing both monetary and social incentivizes to motivate better performance from reviewers. On the innovation side, it makes clear there are different ways of being an innovator. One may innovate in as expeditious a fashion as possible to contribute as much as possible to the collective understanding (even if it means sometimes making errors that are antithetical to it). Or one may innovate in a more deliberate manner that results in more careful contributions to understanding, but prevents the innovator from having the time to offer such careful contributions in as many areas as they might like.

Of course, most academics are some mix of innovator and regulator. They both produce work and review it. But this does create potential problems like *quid-pro-quo* reviewing in which an author A somehow signals in the text their identity to the reviewer B who advocates for the publication of the article at least partially on that basis in anticipation of A reciprocating with a favorable review when they receive B's paper to review. In all likelihood, the fact that academics are some mix is not only not a problem, but good, on net, since it allows for those that can do both well to, in fact, do both well. But this does not mean that it is not worth considering ways of circumventing this problem.

An interesting and radical proposal would mandate that a scholar could only be either an innovator or a regulator. One is allowed to be in either the idea creation business, or the idea refinement business, but not both (for fear of conflicts of interest). It would not be unlike the NFL in which there are distinct players for offense and defense.[25] Job ads could even start specifying whether the position was for an innovator or regulator. Of course, the looming objection is that departments will all want innovators. But this is not obviously the case. It is not absurd to think that top departments will want the top regulators, especially since they will be the ones guarding the gates at the top journals. Moreover, there may be reason to think that regulators will be more careful (better?) teachers, given that they spend their research hours refining the work of their peers. Much more would need to be said to flesh out this (likely unrealistic) proposal, but, at minimum, it is an interesting one, perhaps worthy of further consideration. And, perhaps more importantly, it has the potential to help improve the norms of the academy that Taylor worries are being corrupted.

### 5. Making Citation Checking Easy

Finally, I'd like to flag one "serious" issue with Taylor's book. The book is unique in that it includes "Easter Eggs" – hidden academic jokes – in the citations that investigative and meticulous readers are to find. This approach has worked wonders for Marvel movies.[26] And, in general, I am a fan of it as a way to entice readers to pay attention to the citations.

However, if the ultimate aim is to get readers to pay attention to the citations, and, if the most practicable way of achieving this aim is through the inclusion of Easter Eggs, then we should reduce unnecessary obstacles for those gumshoes interested in finding them. To be clear, this is not to say that we should reduce all obstacles to finding them, say, by having Taylor include an appendix of his jokes. Doing that would eliminate the incentivize for readers to pay attention to the rest of the citations which was the very point of including the Easter Eggs in the

[25] Of course, players *can* play both ways. It is just that almost none do. To make the analogy more exact, we could imagine the NFL mandating that a player must be registered as either an offensive or defensive player and that players may only play on the side in which they are registered.
[26] Here's hoping that Taylor's book receives a comparable audience as well as equally devoted fans who will make YouTube videos "breaking down" all the hidden Easter Eggs.

first place. So, what we want is to make finding the Easter Eggs as easy as possible while still keeping them embedded in the rest of the citations.

The type of unnecessary obstacle that could deter readers from searching for the Easter Eggs in the citations is by *formatting* the citations as chapter endnotes rather than footnotes.[27] Having to hold the book open in two places to go back and forth between the text and the citations is a nuisance. I suspect that this may deter some readers from attending to the citations as closely as they might if they were on the bottom of each page. While there may be good reasons for having the citations all in one location like at the end of the chapter, this does make citation-checking more difficult for those motivated to comply with Taylor's call to do so at the outset of the book.

Taylor is not to blame for this. But, in the spirit of how to reform academic work, I advocate this modification. An across-the-board move to footnotes would, I conjecture, improve the frequency at which citations are checked and the rate at which woozles get detected by reducing the costs for readers to do the investigative work.

## 6. Conclusion

Taylor concludes that the success of an academic should be "judged by how well her work has contributed to the understanding of the issues that she addresses."[28] By that standard, *Markets with Limits* should be judged a roaring success. Though I have not argued for it here, his corrective project helps us understand how scholars have actually objected to markets and commodification by making it clear that they have *not* done so on semiotic grounds and do *not* embrace the Asymmetry Thesis. My focus, instead, has been on pressing on parts of his prescriptive project. While I can imagine potentially preferable alternatives to his prescriptive project, the point is well taken that we need to carefully inspect what kind of norms should govern a given domain. Most domains have multiple sets of norms operating at once. In

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[27] If the goal is to make them actual Easter Eggs, then they should not all be placed at the end of the chapter, but throughout the pages of the text. Placing them at the end of the chapter (or worse, at the end of the book) makes them less like Easter Eggs and more like the Post-Credit Scenes in Marvel movies. People do, in fact, stick around for the Post-Credit Scenes. But they do so for a different reason. The Post-Credit scenes do not get more people to pay attention to the actual movie which is what Easter Eggs do and which is the purpose in the citation's context.

[28] Taylor, *Markets With Limits*, 174.

the academic domain, the norms of the academy are regularly operating at the same time as the norms of the market. I don't see that as a bad thing. I don't think Taylor would disagree with this, but we may differ in the details about the appropriate level of responsive to each kind of norm.

In sum, *Markets with Limits* is a must-read for anyone interested in debates about the scope of markets and commodification. But, even for those not interested in the limits of markets or semiotic objections, I would highly recommend the book. This is because Taylor helped make me aware of how lazy a reader I can be and often am. When we read, especially for professional purposes, it is important to read carefully and to check the references. This book might not cure my laziness. But it has made me keenly aware of it and I will strive to do better. It is rare that a philosophy book prompts a shift in behavior. But this is precisely what *Markets with Limits* has done for me.

# Fable of the Deans: The Use of Market Norms in Academia

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## 1. Taylor's argument

In part III of *Markets with Limits*, James Stacey Taylor argues that "academic research should be primarily governed by academic, and not market, norms."[1] Taylor's argument gets its sting from the claim that academic research currently is governed mostly by market norms, a situation that might explain some of the problems in current academic research diagnosed and discussed in the earlier parts of his book. But Taylor's main claim in part III is not about how academic research is done, but about how it should be done, *viz.*, that it should be governed primarily by academic norms. Taylor does not define the primacy academic norms should enjoy, but I take him to mean that academic norms (and attendant motives) should be the primary driver of what researchers do and how they do it.

Here is an overview of how I understand Taylor's argument for this conclusion:

A. The aim of academic research is and should be to advance understanding.
B. Academic research conducted in accordance with academic norms advances understanding better than academic research conducted in accordance with market norms.
C. Therefore, academic research should be primarily governed by academic norms.

If we assume that market norms and academic norms are exclusive options and are the only options worth considering (two questionable assumptions that I revisit below), then C follows from premises A and B.

[1] James Stacey Taylor, *Markets with Limits: How the Commodification of Academia Derails Debate* (New York: Routledge, 2022), 5.

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The first premise can be interpreted in light of Hart's notion of a "general justifying aim."[2] The general justifying aim of an institution or practice is the aim for which it is exists and in light of which it should be designed. In this vein, we can read Taylor as arguing that the reason we have a system of academic research – and incur the significant costs of maintaining such a system – is to advance our understanding. Our practices of academic research should, accordingly, be designed so as to best achieve this aim. In this essay I accept premise A, thus interpreted.

The second premise involves the concept of norms and relies on the distinction between academic and market norms. Practices and institutions are governed by systems of norms (some codified, some uncodified), and we have some control over these systems. The question is what norms we should seek to create and maintain – premise B answers this question.

A norm "identifies what type of behavior […] would be appropriate to perform in a particular situation."[3] The type of behavior here in question is not simply act-types, but involves their motives and social context. Taylor adopts a generic understanding of a norm as a "guideline for appropriate behavior."[4] However, the distinction between market norms and academic norms is drawn in terms of the reasons motivating the prescribed behavior. Taylor follows Anderson in understanding market norms as "impersonal, egoistic, exclusive, want-regarding, and oriented to "exit" rather than "voice"."[5] Academic norms, by contrast, are governed by the "good internal to academic work […] understanding."[6] The distinction isn't entirely clear, and I'm unsure that Anderson's definition of market norms is adequate. That said, the part of Taylor's argument that I will be discussing does not draw argumentative force from this definition, but from the distinction between academic activities that are motivated by desires for extrinsic rewards such as money, fame, or comfortable employment conditions (market-like motivations) and academic activities that are motivated by the desire to advance understanding. The former sort of activities are,

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[2] H.L.A. Hart, *Punishment and Responsibility: Essays in the Philosophy of Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 4.
[3] Taylor, *Markets with Limits*, 149.
[4] Taylor, *Markets with Limits*, 150.
[5] Taylor *Markets with Limits* 149 and 150; quoting E. Anderson, *Value in Ethics and Economics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 145.
[6] Taylor, *Markets with Limits*, 150.

for the purposes of this paper, governed by market norms; the latter are governed by academic norms.

As I understand it, Taylor's argument for premise B has a negative and a positive part that together imply the comparison. The negative part is an argument that shows how some shortcomings of current academic research can be explained (at least in part) by how academic research is governed (at least in part) by market norms. The positive part is an argument aiming to show that academic research conducted in accordance with academic norms suffers from fewer of those shortcomings, without incurring other shortcomings sufficient to outweigh the comparative advantage. Together, these two parts imply that academic research that is conducted in accordance with academic norms would do better at advancing understanding than academic research conducted in accordance with market norms. So, the argument for premise B is as follows:

1. Academic research conducted in accordance with market norms tends to suffer various shortcomings: these include inaccurate references, misattribution of claims, and propagation of errors.
2. Academic research conducted in accordance with academic norms would suffer from fewer shortcomings, while not doing worse at advancing understanding in other respects.
3. Therefore, academic research conducted in accordance with academic norms advances understanding better than academic research conducted in accordance with market norms (= B).

Taylor's argument for premise 1 is delivered (with relish) by his discussion of the various shortcomings found in the current debate about the moral limits of markets. If, for the sake of the argument here, we grant premises A and 1, we are left with the validity of inferences in both arguments and the truth of premise 2 as the yet questionable elements of Taylor's argument.

I argue that premise 2 is ambiguous. On one reading, it is likely true, but the argument to 3 is invalid. On the other reading, premises 1 and 2 imply 3 (the argument is valid), but premise 2 is unsupported by Taylor's arguments and is likely false.

I first (section 2) introduce a distinction between the aims of a practice, the norms of the practice, and moves made in that practice. I then (section 3) argue that premise 2 is likely true when we compare *instances* of academic research conducted in accordance with market

norms and academic norms, but that such a reading renders the inference to 3 invalid, since this conclusion is about academia as a practice, not instances in that practice. Next (section 4), I argue that the needed reading of premise 2, which says is that the academic practice would better advance understanding if those engaging in it were governed by academic norms, is unsupported by Taylor's argument and is likely false.

**2. Practices, norms, and moves**

We can distinguish between the aims of practices, the rules or norms of a practice, and the moves made within a practice. Let's assume that moves made within a practice are justified when they comply with the norms for that practice. How should we then think about the relation between the aims of the practice and the justification and content of the rules of the practice? I am granting Taylor's position that the aim of the practice(s) of academic research is to advance understanding. But what does that entail with respect to the norms of this practice?

That a practice is justified by reference to some aim does not imply that the rules of that practice or the deliberations of the agents engaging in that practice must make explicit reference to or have that same aim. In particular, that a practice has some aim does not entail that the agents engaging in that practice must make their choices with that aim in mind, or that the rules that structure their activities should make them incorporate that aim into their preference order (even less, that they must give that aim high priority).

As Rawls wrote in the opening sentence of "Two Concepts of Rules", there is a "distinction between justifying a practice and justifying a particular action falling under it."[7] To illustrate the point, Rawls sketches how we might justify our practices of punishment by reference to their utility, but justify particular instances of punishment by reference to the retribution appropriate to the crime committed.[8] Thus understood, the rules of our practices of punishment are justified by, *but do not make explicit reference to*, the utilitarian aim; nor need the utilitarian aim figure into the preferences or decision procedures for any of the roles inhabited by the members of that practice (judges, lawyers, etc.). The same distinction appears in Hart's discussion of punishment

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[7] J. Rawls, "Two Concepts of Rules" in *John Rawls: Collected Papers*, S. Freeman ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 20.

[8] Rawls, "Two Concepts of Rules", 21-4.

referenced above with the concept of a 'general justifying aim'. Hart begins that discussion with a distinction between the definition of punishment, the justification of practices of punishment, and the distribution of punishment.[9] While our answers to the relevant questions – What is punishment? What justifies practices of punishment? Who should be punished and how? – are conceptually linked, they are distinct questions, and we can consistently defend a utilitarian justification of practices of punishment, while adopting a retributivist answer to questions of distribution. In this manner, Rawls and Hart share the idea that we can justify our practices of punishment by their consequences, while rejecting that consequentialist considerations should appear in the rules of those practices, or should govern the choices of those who inhabit the various roles of those practices. The rules and decision procedures of the practice can be retributivist, even if the aim of the practice is utilitarian.

The distinction is not particular to discussions of punishment, but also shows up at crucial junctures in debates about the choice of economic system. Thus, defenders of using market norms to structure economic behavior often justify their position by reference to the desirable consequences of those norms governing that behavior, rather than by the value of such behavior in itself. From Adam Smith through Friedrich Hayek, the most influential argument for governing economic behavior by market norms is that this unleashes the "creative powers of a free civilization" – the spontaneous order process by which individuals pursuing their own gain act in a manner (as if guided by an invisible hand) that is beneficial to others. [10] The general justifying aim of our economic practices, on such an account, is to create social utility, but the rules of the practice (free market capitalism) make no reference to that aim, and the moves in that practice aim at *individual* utility, *not* at social utility.

By now it should be clear where this is going: while we can grant Taylor's claim that the general justifying aim of our academic practices is to advance understanding, it might well be that the best way to advance this aim is to have the behavior of those engaging in these practices (academics) structured by market norms so that their activities aim at extrinsic rewards (money, fame, comfortable working

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[9] Hart, *Punishment and Responsibility*, Chapter 1.

[10] F.A.v. Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty* (Chicago Il.: Chicago University Press, 1960), 22.

conditions), rather than at the aim of the practice as such (the intrinsic aim of advancing understanding).

A correlate of this possibility is that we need to distinguish between the value of individual acts or instances of academic research and the value of the practice of academic research as it is structured by any given set of norms. Even if instances of research by any given researcher have higher expected (social) utility if she aims to advance understanding than if she aims to secure extrinsic rewards, it might also be true that the practice of academic research advances understanding better when it is structured by market norms rather than academic norms.

### 3. First reading of premise 2: true premise, invalid inference

Taylor's argument for premise 2 is that academic research that is motivated by the desire to advance understanding will be less prone to various types of mistakes and, therefore, of higher quality in terms of advancing understanding:

> This painstaking *academic* approach to academic work will likely result in fewer publications than the adoption of a more market-oriented approach. But it will also likely increase the quality of the work produced. Work produced by academics who direct their action in accord with academic norms is more likely to be exegetically accurate than the work of more market-oriented academics. This, in turn, will make it more likely that their criticisms of others' work will be sounder than those of their more market-oriented counterparts. They will thus be more likely than them to produce work that contributes to – rather than derails – the debates they engage in.[11]

In short, academic research that is motivated by the desire to advance understanding will better advance understanding than academic research that is motivated by desire for extrinsic rewards such as money, comfortable working conditions, or prestige. Or, in terms of norms, that "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. Since this is so, academic research should not be primarily driven by the norms of the market."[12]

[11] Taylor, *Markets with Limits*, 151.
[12] Taylor, *Markets with Limits*, 160.

However, this inference is a fallacy. Even if we agree that instances of academic research conducted in accord with market norms are more prone to error and, therefore (and other things equal) better advance understanding, *it does not follow* that academic research should not be governed by market norms.

It may be that any piece of academic research produced with the aim to advance understanding will do so better than a piece by the same researcher aiming to secure money, pleasure, and prestige. It also may be that if we were to run pairwise comparisons of pieces of research produced by some member of the academic profession, where one stack contains pieces of research that aim to advance understanding and the other stack has pieces of research that aim for extrinsic rewards, we'd find that the pieces in the former pile are of higher quality – in the relevant sense of better advancing our understanding.

I don't mean that any piece in the stack with academically motivated research is better than any piece in the extrinsically motivated stack. Rather, the best piece in the academically motivated stack is better than the best piece in the extrinsically motivated stack, and the worst in the extrinsically motivated stack is worse than the worst in the intrinsically motivated stack, and there's an even distribution in quality of members of each stack between lowest and highest. Alternatively, we might compare counterparts: each piece is compared as intrinsically motivated and extrinsically motivated, in which case each piece that is intrinsically motivated would be better than its extrinsically motivated counterpart. However, no matter how we compare them, a generalization to the comparative value of the stacks (rather than instances in the stacks) has to consider that *there'll be more pieces in the extrinsically motivated stack*. So, neither method of comparison supports a general judgment about the aggregate value of the stacks.

*Therefore*, granting that a comparison of instances of research would favor research conducted to advance understanding does not show (or even suggest) that academic research in general would better further understanding, if it was generally motivated to advance understanding rather than extrinsic rewards. (This would be true *even if* every member of the intrinsically motivated stack was better than every member of the extrinsically motivated stack, which seems unlikely.) The question is about the aggregate – what norms of academic research would create the system of academic research that best furthers understanding – and the imagined pairwise comparisons do not answer that question. It may be that academia advances human understanding best if academics are

governed by extrinsic desires and not by the desire to advance understanding. Accordingly, the following syllogism is a fallacy, for the conclusion is about the practice while the premises are about the activities conducted within the practice:

i. Instances of academic research conducted in accordance with market norms suffer from a number of shortcomings.
ii. Instances of academic research by the same researcher conducted in accordance with academic norms would suffer fewer shortcomings, while not doing worse at advancing understanding in other respects.
iii. Therefore, academic research conducted in accordance with academic norms advances understanding better than academic research conducted in accordance with market norms (= premise B).

The fallacy is also on display in the section titled "Defending the primacy of academic norms". There, Taylor argues that the view that academic research should be governed by market norms is "self-defeating."[13] It is self-defeating because it asserts at the same time that "the aim of academic research is the production of academic publications" and that "The primary purpose of these publications is […] to secure professional advancement […] for their authors."[14] Taylor continues:

> [T]he primary purpose of academic research *cannot* be to function as a sorting mechanism to allocate the extrinsic rewards of academic research. The primary reason for an activity performed cannot be to determine who should receive the rewards of performing it. Offering this as a reason for its performance would not answer the question of why the activity was judged valuable in the first place. […] If the proper aim of academic research is to enhance understanding, then it should be directed by norms that would make this more likely to be achieved.[15]

The argument runs together the aim of the practice and the aims of those engaging in the practice. It is perfectly consistent to maintain that the aim of the practice is to advance understanding, while the aim

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[13] Taylor, *Markets with Limits*, 172.
[14] Taylor, *Markets with Limits*, 172.
[15] Taylor, *Markets with Limits*, 172.

of the individuals engaging in the practice are the extrinsic rewards of research activities, and, therefore, that the motives for engaging in the activities of the practice are those rewards, without the aim of the practice being to distribute rewards. The position is analogous to the Hayekian justification of free markets: the aim of the practice is social utility, which is best served by the norms of the free market, wherein each pursue the extrinsic rewards of economic activity, while the whole is designed to maximize social utility, *not* to distribute the rewards. This defense of market norms is not self-defeating. Analogously, we can reject Taylor's quick inference from the aim of academic research being to advance human understanding to the conclusion that academic norms, rather than market norms, would increase the degree to which academia achieves this aim.

In sum, if we understand premise 2 to say that individual pieces of research by a researcher are likely to better advance understanding if their production is governed by academic norms than if their production is governed by market norms, then this premise is likely true: but it does not imply the conclusion that our practices of academic research would advance understanding better, if conducted in accordance with academic rather than market norms. To warrant that inference, and hence to establish premise B, Taylor has to show that academic output in general or in the aggregate would better advance human understanding when conducted in accordance with academic norms.

**4. Second reading of premise 2: valid inference, unsupported and likely false premise**

Taylor needs to show 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. He doesn't, and there are reasons to believe that it wouldn't.

First, then, is the problem of a missing argument. As described in the previous section, Taylor argues that instances of academic research produced by any given researcher would be better if she aims to advance understanding than if she aims for external rewards. But Taylor offers no argument that allows him to generalize from this claim to the needed conclusion about the value of aggregate output, either for that individual researcher, or for the practices of academia in general.

Second, there are reasons to believe that aggregate output might better advance human understanding, if it is to some substantial degree conducted in accordance with market norms. Conceptually, there are several ways this might happen: The degree to which research advances understanding is a function of both the quantity and the quality of research output. These, in turn, are functions of the number of researchers, the time they allocate to research, and the time they spend on any given piece of research. Since, as Taylor recognizes, academically-oriented research takes more time than market-oriented research,[16] the variables of quality and quantity are inversely correlated – and there is no *a priori* way to establish that research governed primarily by academic norms (maximizing for quality) does better on net than academic research governed equally by academic and market norms or academic research governed primarily by market norms (maximizing for quantity). In addition, holding the community of researchers constant, they might allocate less of their time to research if the practice is governed primarily by academic norms. Finally, the community of researchers might not be constant. There might be more researchers if research is conducted substantially in accordance with market norms, and the quality of researchers might be higher if the academic community is governed substantially by market norms.[17]

In short, there might be more researchers producing more and better research, if academic research is governed substantially by market rather than primarily by academic norms. These are, of course, mere possibilities, and whether and when they would be realized depends on multiple empirical factors. That said, there are reasons to think that some of these conceptual possibilities are realized.

First, let us look at the simple case where we hold the community of researchers and the time they allocate to research

[16] E.g. Taylor, *Markets with Limits*, 182.

[17] In comments on a draft of this essay, Shawn Klein suggested that an epistemic asymmetry might also count in favor of market norms: researchers might have limited knowledge of how to best advance understanding in general, but know well how to maximize their individual interests, given their abilities and local situation. Taylor might respond, first, that he is not recommending that researchers aim to advance understanding in general, but only in the specific domain that is their area of specialty, and, second, that the care with citations and so forth that he recommends generally prevents *mis*understanding.

constant. Here, the issue is one of optimizing the allocation of a fixed amount of time. This question cannot be approached as an exclusive choice (either academic or market norms; either quality or quantity), but as one of finding the right balance of concerns for quality and quantity. That is, the question is one of balancing the quality of the pieces in the stack of research with the quantity of pieces (the height of the stack). Taylor argues that research should be governed primarily by academic norms, which means that he favors a point on the continuum towards the quality end of the scale (very short stack, very high quality). But there are reasons to expect that this would be a suboptimal choice – that is, that a higher stack of lower quality would do better at maximizing the relevant value (advancing understanding).

Taylor describes how he read all of Marcuse's work in three languages in order to investigate the claim that Marcuse originated the humorous distinction between scholarship and scholarshit.[18] The result is that it is unlikely that the distinction originates in Marcuse's writings.[19] Applying the same degree of diligence to all one's academic attributions of claims, references, and so forth would mean that (holding time constant) researchers would produce much less output than if they permit themselves to commit some minor mistakes. The rigorously checked output would, of course, be of higher quality. However, it seems clear that, after an initial investment sufficient to make the argument and avoid gross misattributions of claims (straw-manning) and such, there's a declining marginal return of increased understanding from the increase in time allocated to any one piece of research (the last fruits picked are very hard to reach!), and the opportunity costs of time allocated to any one piece of research remain constant. So, there'll be a point lower than the point favored by Taylor beyond which the increase in quality will be insufficient to outweigh the decrease in quantity.

The optimum allocation of time for diligent checking of references is tricky to compute, but Taylor seems to adopt a maximizing requirement – we should aim for as few errors in references or mistaken attributions of claims as possible – which means that following his prescription is suboptimal, for it focuses entirely on just one of the two variables of the cost-benefit analysis that determines the optimum point.[20] That is, it requires us to maximize benefits without a view to the

[18] Taylor, *Markets with Limits*, 144, 148, 153 n24, and 157-8 n64.
[19] Taylor, *Markets with Limits*, 157-8 n64.
[20] At one point, Taylor recognizes the diminishing marginal returns: "Once an

(opportunity) costs, and so is likely to miss the optimum point. Thus, Taylor summarizes his argument:

> To the degree that an academic researcher conducts her work in accord with academic norms, it is likely to have fewer exegetical errors than that produced in accord with market norms – including fewer misrepresentations of others' views. Since such misrepresentations will impede (or even derail) productive debate, avoiding them is a consummation devoutly to be wish'd. Thus, given that the internal aim of the practice of academic research is to further understanding, academics should primarily (if not exclusively) direct their research in accord with academic, rather than market, norms.[21]

However, it wouldn't be "a consummation devoutly to be wish'd," if the costs outweigh the benefits. Taylor does not show that they wouldn't, and it seems likely that they would, insofar as maximizing for one variable (quality) and neglecting another (quantity) is likely to lead to a suboptimal allocation.

Second, incentives don't just matter for how persons use their time in the activities of a given practice, but also for the time they allocate to that practice. So, the expected rewards of doing research matter to how much time a researcher will allocate to research. Advancing understanding is one sort of reward: we all care about that, but not exclusively. We can have the reward of advancing understanding and also seek to be rewarded by extrinsic goods. The combined motivation is stronger than either by itself. So, we spend more time on research if we are motivated *also* by external rewards – meaning that

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academic who has produced work in accordance with these norms believes she can no longer improve on it – *or that any attempt to do so will merely result in diminishing marginal returns* – then she should submit it for publication." (*Markets with Limits*, 173, my emphasis) The emphasized portion seems to recognize that a maximizing-quality-stance is mistaken, but it's hard to make sense of, insofar as there'll be diminishing marginal returns at any given point of time invested. Moreover, from the context it appears that the returns here are measured entirely in terms of *quality*, and so the quoted passage does nothing to counter the problem that Taylor's argument overlooks the costs in terms of alternative research projects foregone for the sake of continual improvement of this one publication.

[21] Taylor, *Markets with Limits*, 174.

any given researcher would allocate more time to research in a system that ties extrinsic rewards to academic output.

Third, incentives also attract people to a profession. Again, academics generally care about advancing understanding, but we also have other desires – including for material gain, recognition, and comfortable working conditions. If academia did not tie external rewards to research output, then it is likely that some good researchers would seek employment elsewhere. Thus, if there are extrinsic rewards tied to academic research, then the position of academic researcher is more competitive to alternative careers, so, we can expect more competition for academic jobs which, in turn, will lead to more qualified researchers.

In sum, it is likely that academic research in the aggregate will advance human understanding better if it is governed to some significant extent by market norms and not, as Taylor argues, when it is governed primarily by academic norms.

**5. An objection**

Taylor might object that I am overstating his position. That is, he might object that he is not arguing that research should be governed entirely by academic norms, but merely that it *should not* be governed primarily by market norms. Here is a passage that states his conclusion in those terms:

> It is possible that understanding would be best furthered were academic research to be conducted in accord with some mix of market and academic norms. […] However, it is likely that if market norms were to dominate the production of academic research, its overall quality would suffer […] Academic research should thus be guided primarily (but not exclusively) by the norms of the academy. […] The norms of the market should not be allowed to dominate in the academic realm.[22]

This passage offers two variants of the conclusion. One that says that academic research should be guided primarily by academic norms, the other that academic research should not be dominated by the norms of the market. These are consistent, but differ in strength and interest. The former is a stronger (it implies the latter and not *vice versa*) and more interesting conclusion – and is also the one that Taylor states

[22] Taylor, *Markets with Limits*, 161.

repeatedly in other parts of the book (as in the passages quoted above). The critique of Taylor's argument that I raised in the previous section addresses the former and does not refute the latter (weaker and less interesting) conclusion – indeed, it supports the latter, insofar as my argument suggests that neither academic nor market norms should dominate, since understanding is best furthered by a combination of both sorts of norms.

Since Taylor repeatedly states his thesis / conclusion as the stronger claim – that academic research should be governed primarily by academic norms – and since this claim is more interesting, I do not believe that he could retreat to the weaker claim without changing his position and losing much of what makes his argument interesting.

**6. Conclusion**

Taylor argues that academic research should be governed primarily by academic norms (and not by market norms). He defends this conclusion by identifying the aim of academic research as advancing human understanding, and then arguing that academic research governed by academic norms better advances human understanding than research governed by market norms. He argues that instances of research conducted in accord with academic norms will tend to have more accurate references, fewer mistaken attributions of claims and arguments, and be less prone to reproduce errors than research conducted in accord with market norms. Alas, this argument does not suffice to establish Taylor's conclusion, since the conclusion is not about instances of research, but that academic research in general or in the aggregate would do better at advancing human understanding when conducted in accord with academic norms. Taylor offers no argument for the general claim, and it seems likely that it is false.[23]

[23] I am grateful to James Stacey Taylor for being continuously thought-provoking, to Shawn Klein for organizing this symposium, and to Shawn and Lauren McGillicuddy for helpful comments on drafts of this essay.

# Perspectives and the Limits of Markets

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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.

Reason Papers 42, no. 2 (Summer 2022): 33-48. Copyright © 2022

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

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[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. I/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

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[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]

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[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

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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 but similar commodities such as love-like behaviors or a physical Nobel Prize medal. Significant aspects of

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[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 scholarshit."[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

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[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

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[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

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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 Jaworksi 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 Jaworki'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

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[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

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[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 choses 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

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[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

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[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.

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[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.

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

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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.

Reason Papers 42, no. 2 (Summer 2022): 49-64. Copyright © 2022

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

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[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

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[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

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[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

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[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

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[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:

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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.

## Book Reviews

### Salsman, Richard. *Where Have All the Capitalists Gone?* Great Barrington, MA: American Institute for Economic Research, 2021

Recent times have not been kind to capitalism and defenders of free markets. In the span of a mere twenty years, three successive crises—the 9/11 attacks and subsequent "war on terror," the Great Recession, and the Coronavirus pandemic—have led to explosive growth not just in government spending and debt, but also in pervasive new regulations that have created a new security state and public health leviathan while simultaneously extending the tendrils of state control across the financial sector. This is to say nothing of the government-mandated transformation of health care and medicine in recent years. By any objective measure, the size and scope of government control in the economy is larger and more pervasive than when President Bill Clinton declared that "the era of big government is over."

Richard Salsman's provocative new collection *Where Have All the Capitalists Gone?* aims squarely at challenging these developments. Currently an assistant professor of political economy at Duke University's Philosophy, Politics, and Economics Program, Salsman has a breadth of non-academic experience that places him in a unique position to offer his analysis. He worked for over two decades at major New York commercial banks and as an economic analyst in the investment banking world and has also run his own economic forecasting firm. With a doctorate in Political Economy, an MA in Economics, and a Chartered Financial Analyst certification under his belt, Salsman knows better than most where we might find the ever-elusive capitalists these days.

The book is comprised of over sixty wide-ranging essays published in various media over the past two decades. Salsman has done more than just group these into ten thematic parts, which certainly aids the interested reader. In addition to the clearly economic sections (Money and Banking, the Primacy of Production, the Fiscal State and Its Burden, and the Business Cycle), he includes the philosophical and ethical (Meaning and Morals, Justice and Inequality, and Varieties of Anti-Capitalism) and the political (Crises, Real and Exaggerated; Globalization and Its Foes; and Freedom and Governance) to make the broader case that capitalism, properly understood, has a wider ambit than merely free markets. By selecting and grouping his essays into these themes, he suggests a unique answer to the question posed by the title of his

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book. If capitalists have gone missing in current debates, Salsman contends, the failure to embrace capitalism more broadly is surely a root cause.

At the outset, Salsman boldly claims that capitalism is "sustainable because practical, practical because moral, moral because egoistic, egoistic because rational, and rational because natural—i.e., consonant with human nature. No argument for capitalism lacking these crucial elements can withstand scrutiny or win the day" (p. xiv). A true capitalist, Salsman argues, is not merely the conventional idea of someone who invests capital resources for profit (just as a socialist is not merely the manager of a social enterprise), but also is a principled advocate for an encompassing social system. Without this crucial integration of philosophy, politics, and economics, he continues, one cannot expect there to be any consistent capitalist intellectuals.

Both those who know Salsman's previous work and perceptive new readers will quickly ascertain that he considers Ayn Rand, creator of a philosophical system of thought she calls Objectivism, to be the paragon exponent of the philosophic case for capitalism. By resting her case on the institution of individual rights as well as the morality of egoism, Salsman explains, Rand rooted her defense of capitalism in human reason and its objective requirements for a full, flourishing life. Beyond this, though, Salsman notes that Alexander Hamilton is his main influence in political thought and Jean-Baptiste Say in economics (p. xv).

Before taking up a discussion of highlights and some unique contributions of select chapters, it is worth taking a moment to note how Salsman's methodological breadth contributes in a meaningful way to his central answer of the collection. Though deeply influenced by the Objectivist approach and arguments, I think the best description for his work would be *principled heterodoxy*—that is, a dedicated search for truth regardless of source or authority. Rand wrote approvingly of Ludwig von Mises and some of the Austrian school economists, and thus many of her followers have continued in that tradition. Salsman admirably breaks free of these constraints, embracing the thinkers and ideas that he sees best fitting the case for capitalism. In the end, the broader Objectivist framework controls the discussion, but for Salsman it is because it uniquely binds the insights of many thinkers without the need for total agreement.

Thus, in surveying the book, many doctrinaire proponents of particular schools of economic, political, or philosophical thought will find much that does not fit easily into one mold or template. In Section III on "The Primary of Production," for example, Salsman reveals a reverence for the supply-side economists of the late 1970s and early 1980s. Describing them as the true inheritors of Say's Law, he contends that they provide crucial insight into the use of fiscal and tax policy to generate economic productivity (e.g., pp. 145-53). Yet Salsman is clear to list both the truths *and* "untruths" of the supply-side school (see pp. 153-56 for the latter). Likewise, though he harshly criticizes

Friedrich Hayek for his embrace of welfare-state policies like antitrust and state-provided social insurance (pp. 39 and 419), he also briefly acknowledges the contributions of Austrians like Carl Menger and Eugen Bohm-Bawek (p. 7 n. 14). Salsman also leans on the insights of Public Choice theorists like James Buchanan (pp. 457-58). In the end, the variety of topics addressed in this collection stands alongside the variety of influences as testaments to Salsman's argument that true defenders of capitalism must embrace a multifaceted approach, touching not just economics, but philosophy and politics as well.

Ranging in form from brief opinion pieces to lengthier journal articles, the best parts of the collection feature exploratory and insightful arguments about how we understand the broad approach Salsman defends. In the opening selection, "The Mind-Based Etymology of Capitalism," the reader is treated to a discussion of how "capitalism" was originally a term of derision and contempt from its opponents, but being rooted in the Latin "caput" (head) contains an unintended affinity for the case that capitalism uniquely unleashes the power of human reason and thoughtful innovation. As Salsman aptly notes, capitalism "is the system that respects the mind, frees the mind, is based on the mind, and is driven by the mind" (p. 13).

In the fourth chapter of the opening "Meaning and Morals" section of the volume, Salsman features his most convincing case for viewing capitalism as a systematic and all-encompassing philosophic, political, and economic system. Noting the recent turn in scholarship across disciplines to characterize or condition "capitalism" with some constraining adjective—whether common-good, stakeholder, crony, conscious, late, neo-liberal, responsible, surveillance, or some dozen other modifiers—he contends that a proper understanding of the social system requires understanding its pure, unadulterated form as well as the conditions that permit it to exist. Just as human beings can best survive and flourish when social and economic conditions are suited to their essential nature and characteristics, so too he argues capitalism can only function optimally in a certain habitat. Capitalism "requires a certain *intellectual* habitat, in which *reason* (enlightenment) and *egoism* reign" (p. 27, italics in original). By protecting individual rights through the rule of law in a constitutional government, Salsman summarizes, capitalism can embrace the rational, life-affirming characteristics of mankind by unleashing innovation through the free choice of economic actors.

Crucial to understanding the integrated case that Salsman makes is his conception of "tripartite governance" (pp. 54-62). He notes that the broad use of the term "governance" is too often restricted to political regimes and public officials who promulgate the laws and regulations in a society. Within his embracing analysis of the supports for capitalism, Salsman lays out a schema of personal governance, private governance, and public governance. The theory of self-government, thus, means most importantly the moral choices and actions of each autonomous individual to order and control his life. As a recognition of the profound importance of individualism, Salsman notes that "[t]here's

considerable virtue in taking responsibility for your own thinking, choosing, and acting" (p. 55). Indeed, this forms the basis of civil society as individually self-controlling actors can undertake joint ventures and form associations to accomplish great things. But all such groups and organizations also work best, Salsman notes, when they adopt internal rules of order and behavior that controls and governs their actions.

Last, but perhaps most importantly as a distinguishing element in Salsman's argument, public governance is crucial for the other forms to succeed. Yet it is this arrangement that can also "distort and squelch" the accomplishments of individual and private governance (p. 56). "A genuine, rights-preserving political constitution," he notes, "constitutes governance of the governors" (p. 57). The preconditions of human flourishing, called "constitutional republicanism" in his account, is "a system in which the power of public governance is *objectively* delineated and circumscribed by the principle of *rights*" (p. 57, italics in original).

Assembling a diverse array of formerly free-standing essays is not without its perils and occasionally reveals some rougher edges in Salsman's approach. The collection is at once over-inclusive and leaves the reader wanting something more. The core argument, which is quite powerful, is occasionally diluted through pieces that are more time-bound and contextual and feature more as applications of core concepts than original developments. Pieces on specific times or policies—for example, the "Golden Decade," the Japanese stimulus, the Venezuelan crises, Covid policy, and others—though interesting, could easily be cut without diminishing the volume's value to readers. Such a capacious volume with broad themes would benefit from a more selective display of Salsman's thought. Despite the multitude of topics, there is something missing as well. Collections like this can always benefit from the inclusion of an over-arching essay where the author reflects on and synthesizes the themes contained within and sheds a light on what he has learned over the years. That could have provided either an opportunity to guide the reader into the essays and orient him to what it is to come or to package together the insights as a culminating chapter.

Despite these minor flaws, Salsman successfully applies his main themes to the wide variety of topics addressed by the essays. What emerges, perhaps in an order that is not so spontaneous, is a serious consideration of how the mystery of the missing defenders of capitalism can be solved, namely, through a renewed effort to *integrate* and *unify* the best and most consistent arguments for the system of human liberty.

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Younkins, Edward W., *Exploring* Atlas Shrugged*: Ayn Rand's Magnum Opus*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2021.

*Exploring* Atlas Shrugged*: Ayn Rand's Magnum Opus* (2021) brings together under one cover a collection of articles that Edward W. Younkins has written about *Atlas Shrugged*. This book represents a continuation of his unique quest both to inform the general reader of the wealth of literature that deals with business and to enlighten university faculty about the relevance and power of that literature to instruct business students in ways that traditional methods cannot.[1]

In the preface to a different work of his, *Exploring Capitalist Fiction*, Younkins relates that he was inspired to write that book based on feedback from a graduate student in his "Business through Literature" course. In order to write that book, he had to choose from among eighty books that he had used in his course over the years.[2] Although there is considerable literature dealing with various aspects of business, no work of fiction on business is more philosophically and literarily integrated, as momentous in scope, nor as influential as Ayn Rand's masterwork, *Atlas Shrugged*. As Younkins mentions in *Exploring Atlas Shrugged*, Rand's magnum opus is now a part of the curriculum of dozens of courses taught at colleges and universities across America (pp. 22, 118, and 143). Hence, there was a need for the singular focus of *Exploring Atlas Shrugged*, and no one is more singularly equipped to author that book than Edward Younkins.

This volume leads with an "Introduction" that contextualizes the importance of *Atlas Shrugged* and provides a detailed overview of each chapter. Chapter 1 gives a synopsis of the novel. Chapter 2 examines *Atlas Shrugged* as both philosophy and literature. In Chapter 3, Younkins looks at it as a treatise on economics before turning in Chapter 4 to consider it as a story about business. Chapter 5 discusses it as a novel about and a blueprint for social change. In the "Appendix," Younkins provides an overview of the philosophy of Objectivism.

Younkins tells the reader that *Atlas Shrugged* "takes place in a slightly modified United States" (p. 4). In one sense, it draws from a number of periods in U.S. history from the late 1800s to the 1970s; in

[1] Younkins's other works in this endeavor include *Exploring Capitalist Fiction: Business through Literature and Film* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014), a pioneering work in which he authored twenty-five essays on novels, plays, and films that deal with business; and *Capitalism and Commerce in Imaginative Literature* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2016), a compilation of twenty-eight essays for which he was editor and contributor.

[2] Younkins, *Exploring Capitalist Fiction*, pp. xiii-xiv.

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yet another sense, it is timeless. Its story is one of revolution. Its theme is given as the role of the mind in existence, particularly as it relates to production (p. 30). It is also a defense of capitalism and an indictment of government intervention. In a larger sense, *Atlas Shrugged* is a dramatic portrayal of Objectivism, the philosophy of its author, Ayn Rand (p. 27).

The main plot of the novel is that men of mind go on strike, which results in hastening the economy's inevitable collapse that is destined to occur due to increasing government intervention in the economy— intervention that stifles production and freedom in general (p. 30). Businessmen are portrayed as adhering to conflicting world views. These views are reflected in two categories of businessmen: producers and looters. Looting businessmen lobby for favors from government at the expense of others (p. 29). Looters use the morality of altruism as a club against producers. Altruism is a morality of perpetual sacrifice of oneself to others. Looters impose upon productive businessmen an unearned guilt for their virtues—their principal virtue being productiveness (p. 30).

The plot is built around the novel's characters. *Atlas Shrugged* portrays the businessman as capable of being heroic (p. 27). Two business leaders, Dagny Taggart and Hank Rearden, are key protagonists throughout the novel. Dagny is Vice-President and Chief Operating Officer of Taggart Transcontinental and Rearden is a steel magnate and inventor of a new metal. Both characters are trying to keep their businesses afloat as men of mind disappear. A subplot is the search by Rearden and Dagny for the identity and whereabouts of the inventor of an abandoned motor. Another is Dagny's quest to find an unknown "destroyer" who she is convinced is robbing the country of its captains of industry (p. 33). Abstract principles are made concrete. Virtues are embodied in the characters and revealed through their actions. *Atlas Shrugged* demonstrates that philosophy is important and comprehensible (p. 28).

Chapter 2 surveys the contributions of a number of scholars as they pertain to "*Atlas Shrugged* as Philosophy and Literature." Younkins explains that, according to Leonard Peikoff, one of the defining features of *Atlas Shrugged* is integration, and Chris Sciabarra points out that the novel is an "organic whole" (p. 55). Younkins concludes, similarly, that Rand is a "practitioner of synthesis and unity." *Atlas Shrugged* "concretizes abstractions and draws abstractions from a number of concretes." It "dramatizes grand themes and presents an entire and integrated view of how people should live their lives" (p. 75).

*Atlas Shrugged*'s philosophical structure is broadly represented by the titles of its three parts: "Non-contradiction," "Either-Or," and "A is A." Younkins notes that, according to Douglas Rasmussen, these are not simply laws of thought, but are also metaphysical, reflecting the basic nature of reality and of being (pp. 57-58). As the novel progresses, it becomes increasingly conceptually abstract and complex. Younkins summarizes Greg Salmieri explanation that Part One of the novel

presents a concrete example of the mind's role in physical production via the building of the John Galt railroad line, Dagny's remarkable achievement made possible by Rearden's newly invented metal. Part Two is more abstract than Part One, portraying the conflicting moral codes, with one premised on life and the other on death. Part Three includes a three-hour speech that presents, from a moral and a metaphysical perspective, these two opposing views on existence (p. 58). The speech is comprised of three parts: the morality of life (which is the ethical code of the creators), the morality of death (which is the code of the destroyers), and the necessity of choosing the former (p. 72).

*Atlas Shrugged* is not only philosophically integrated, but literarily integrated as well. Most of the important events are presented dramatically, with the less significant ones being narrated. Younkins notes Andrew Bernstein's observations of how Rand employs well literary devices such as symbolism and irony. For instance, she uses the dollar sign to symbolize, among other things, a free economy (p. 61). Irony permeates the novel, as evidenced by Dagny's *perception* of the strike as a sign of surrender by the men of mind to the looters versus the *reality* of the strike as a springboard for a cultural, philosophical, social, political, and economic renaissance (p. 62). In addition, Rand's novel invokes a number of Greek mythical figures and inverts their meaning. For example, instead of having her modern-day Prometheus hero relegated to daily suffering by having his regenerated liver being eaten by vultures, she has him unbind his chains and withdraw his fire until men "withdraw their vultures" (p. 63). In effect, Rand reverses the fate of doomed mythical heroes, endowing her literary counterparts with free will, rationality, and positive outcomes.

Younkins points out that Rand also juxtaposes opposites in *Atlas Shrugged*. This is done via dual characterizations. For instance, there are two steel magnates, Rearden and Orren Boyle. They are characters with opposing philosophical premises. The contrasting scenes involving them reflect those differences and the practical differences the ideas make (p. 64). Rand's approach to virtue, like Aristotle's, focuses on traits that define what is good and on what will foster a good life (p. 68). Her heroes are purposeful; they strive for betterment, to create products and to make profits (p. 66). The villains, in contrast, endeavor to reverse cause and effect (p. 67).

Productivity is at the heart of an ethical life. Production is primary. It precedes consumption and is the means by which other products are acquired. Although the focus of *Atlas Shrugged* is on the virtues of the heroic businessmen, the men of mind are not limited to those in the "business" sphere, but they are found in all fields of creative endeavor. Similarly, productivity is not limited to the output of businesses (in the narrow sense). Ideas are fundamental to creative acts, whether originated by artists, artisans, businessmen, etc. Ideas and material production are inseparable, just as are the mind and the body. Younkins draws our attention to Sciabarra's claim that Rand rejects Cartesian dualism as antithetical to the reality of human *being*. Man is

an integrated whole and his attributes are only separable for analytical purposes (p. 74).

In Chapter 3, "Economics in *Atlas Shrugged*," Younkins states that the novel "presents a thorough defense of a totally unregulated market system" (p. 81). *Atlas* could be considered a literary dissertation on economics. The overarching theme in the book is that the mind is the source of wealth creation. Producers create, discover, and innovate. The person who brings forth a new idea to the world is a "permanent benefactor" of mankind (p. 82). Regardless of how much money he makes in return, it under-represents his contribution. Typically, physical goods cannot be shared (or their ability to be shared is limited). In contrast, there is no limit to the number of people who can share an idea.

Through its heroes, *Atlas Shrugged* depicts the characteristics required of an entrepreneur in a free market. Those include the ability to economize, plan, forecast, take risks, experiment; manage material, machines, and men; and the tenacity to persist in the face of obstacles and setbacks (p. 83). Producers engage others as traders. The trader principle is the principle of justice, which is the voluntary exchange of value for value. Once again, as seen with productivity, Rand does not limit this principle to the business sphere. The trader principle is one that applies to all forms of social interaction (among adults), whether that involves friendship or romantic love (p. 84). Money is an instrument of exchange, but it is not the cause of wealth. It is the effect brought about by those who produce. Money should be or should be tied to an objective criterion of value, such as gold (p. 88). Money is the reward for productive work. Productive work is a virtue. An honest person's consumption does not exceed his production (p. 87).

A mixed economy is one in which there is a mixture of private markets and government intervention. It can lead to "crony capitalism" in which the "pyramid of ability" is replaced by the "aristocracy of political pull" (p. 90). A number of government regulations, which Younkins delineates in this chapter, are introduced in *Atlas Shrugged*, and their deleterious effects on the economy and on freedom are dramatized (pp. 90-93). Regulations are not limited to those imposed by government. The actions of private pacts—such as those of the National Alliance of Railroads—depict how certain interventionist policies caused by voluntary associations can result in the erosion of production and of freedom (p. 90). The rapidly degrading mixed economy portrayed in *Atlas Shrugged* is contrasted with a voluntary society of strikers in which self-interest, individual rights, and the trader principle rule and happiness and flourishing prevail (pp. 93-94).

Chapter 4, "Business in *Atlas Shrugged*," details ways in which Rand's magnum opus is a novel about business. It dramatizes the theme that wealth is a product of the human mind. Of course, products are created when resources are combined in such a way that the value of the product exceeds (or expected to exceed) the value of the resources used in creating it. Natural material (such as oil) becomes a resource once a productive use is discovered for it. Prior to that, it has no value (or may

have a negative value). Non-renewable resources are finite; however, the potential of the human mind is not. The reward for wealth-creation is profit. *Atlas Shrugged* shows that energy is the nexus of productive activity, whether in oil fields, coal mines, railroads, steal production, etc. Government intervention into the energy industry leads to blackouts, shortages, and so on (p. 101).

Unlike "crony capitalists," who lobby the government for special privileges such as receipt of subsidies or stifling the production of competitors, authentic businessmen practice virtues (e.g., integrity, independence, justice, productivity) that foster success (pp. 103-4). The only "social responsibility" that producers have is to respect others' rights and earn profits. There is no "special morality" for businessmen to "give back" in order to earn moral absolution (p. 105). This notion of "giving back" reflects the altruist creed.

Younkins argues that *Atlas Shrugged* is a powerful resource for educating students about business. Fiction can be more realistic than facts and more palatable than theory. Literature is replete with novels, films, and plays that cast businessmen in an unfavorable light. *Atlas Shrugged* is an antidote to such negative characterizations, offering the opportunity for students to envision business situations that they may eventually encounter and to learn how to rationally, ethically respond to them. In effect, their personal ethical codes may be developed and/or transformed by reading and discussing the novel. Younkins discusses how he has incorporated *Atlas Shrugged* into a course he teaches, noting how others have also done so (pp. 118 n. 8 and 122).

In Chapter 5, "*Atlas Shrugged* and Social Change," Younkins points out that the novel has sold in excess of eight million copies. In a 1991 survey conducted by the Library of Congress and the Book of the Month Club, *Atlas Shrugged* ranked second after the *Bible* in terms of its influence on people's lives (p. 126). Younkins states, "Ideas are the most powerful forces in the world and the motive power of human progress" (p. 130). *Atlas Shrugged* is a novel of ideas and has the potential to inspire change. In the novel, businessmen are agents for social change by withdrawing their minds and products in hopes of ushering in a post-collapse renaissance (p. 136). According to Younkins, *Atlas Shrugged* can also be a vehicle for change in the real world by serving as a source of education and being life-altering at the individual level (p. 138). It can also lead to social change, if its message is understood by a sufficient number of people.

Younkins notes how Sciabarra explains that in *Atlas Shrugged*, Rand integrates three analytical levels: personal, cultural, and structural (p. 131). Similarly, a free-market revolution must address all three levels to be successful (p. 132). The customary position of libertarians of simply opposing state intervention is inadequate. A broader frame of reference is required. Top-down political change in the economic sphere is not sufficient nor is it feasible unless personal, cultural, and social prerequisites are met. Although *Atlas Shrugged* has been personally

transformative for a great number of people, real change in the broader context has not been forthcoming, according to Yaron Brook (p. 133).

In his "Introduction," Younkins mentions that many have viewed *Atlas Shrugged* as a "blueprint for the future" (p. 23). Yet in Chapter 5, Younkins also remarks that he finds the ending of the novel puzzling in that it is inadequate insofar as being an instrument for effectuating the ideal of capitalism. It is unrealistic to think that a three-hour speech can win over enough people to effect change. Younkins indicates that it is far from likely that change can occur in one momentous sweep. Real change requires a good deal of time and energy. An incremental approach is more realistic and required (pp. 139-40). Younkins, however, credits *Atlas Shrugged* as being influential in the Tea Party Movement. It has also served as a foundation for the Ayn Rand Institute and The Atlas Society (p. 142). He provides a list of the kinds of governmental changes that need to be undertaken to move toward a freer economy, such as abolishing the income tax and the central banking system (p. 139)—but of course, it is the "how" that is tricky.

The "Appendix" succinctly captures the essence of Rand's philosophy of Objectivism. Younkins focuses particular attention on those philosophical concepts that are related to *Atlas Shrugged*. He points out that philosophy follows a hierarchy: metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics. These precede politics and economics (p. 148).

Since the publication of *Atlas Shrugged*, many have acknowledged how "prophetic" the novel has been. I would venture to say that there are many parallels between the state of affairs described in the novel and the current situation in the U.S. as well as in other countries, especially since the Covid-19 pandemic was declared in 2020. In the U.S., businesses have been unequally affected. Some (typically larger) chains were allowed to remain open and flourished, while to varying degrees, other smaller businesses were required to shutter, forcing many smaller, marginal establishments permanently out of business.

As for the men of mind going on strike, this may be an effective method of hastening an economic collapse in many cases. However, Younkins's comments on the shortcomings of *Atlas Shrugged* as a blueprint for change has challenged my thinking about this type of strike as a mechanism to rectify rights violations. I realize that a strike of the men of mind is not a "one size fits all" strategy for all violations of rights. For instance, in the current environment, it is usually the men of mind who are being censored.[3] They are being "forced to strike" in that they are being constrained from engaging in public discourse. There have

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[3] Arjun Walia, "Stanford Medical Prof: Scientists Are Being Censored For Sharing 'Alternative' Info About COVID," *LewRockwell.com* (February 9, 2021), accessed online at: https://www.lewrockwell.com/2021/02/no_author/stanford-medical-prof-scientists-are-being-censored-for-sharing-alternative-info-about-covid/.

been a number of responses—most notably, legal challenges—to the limits imposed on freedom. More recently, Canadian truckers have gone on strike against mandates, and truckers in other countries have been inspired by their lead to do so as well. The convoys have been met with government resistance in Canada as well as France.[4]

By virtue of Rand's theme—the importance of man's mind in wealth-creation—she focuses on captains of industry. What, though, about the everyman who depends on those of greater intellect to take action? In real life, the "extraordinary ordinary man" cannot simply sit by as his freedoms are stripped from him. He, too, must act (with a non-initiation-of-force caveat). Such a person cannot wait for those of superior intellect to do the heavy lifting on his behalf. Just like the Canadian truckers, he must also be engaged.

For instructors using this book in a course, I would encourage them to have students start with the "Appendix," particularly for those who are unfamiliar with *Atlas Shrugged* and/or Objectivism. (I have a personal preference for abstractions, so I may be biased in this regard.). For instance, it might be helpful initially to turn to the "Appendix" for a few fundamental definitions, such as metaphysics and epistemology (p. 148), concept (p. 152), value (p. 157), trader (p. 161), and individual rights (p. 162). Prior to Chapter 1, "Synopsis of *Atlas Shrugged*," discussion of the axiomatic concepts of existence, consciousness, and identity (p. 149) would be helpful, since they form the bases for objectivity and are related to the progression of the novel's story. A person new to Objectivism may not have encountered the notion of "context" and how it differs from "relativism." For instance, Objectivism acknowledges that the application of moral principles is contextual. That moral principles can be absolute, yet contextual is an important contribution of Objectivism (p. 160), which may be foreign to some students who either have been schooled in the idea that moral principles are absolute regardless of context and/or have been taught that they are relative and groundless.

Younkins's overview of Objectivism offers a number of insights. For instance, in his discussion of the is-ought gap (p. 154), he notes that "the key to understanding ethics is found in the concept of value—it is . . . located in epistemology" (p. 157). This is a unique approach to ethics and, along with Rand's theory of concepts, revolutionary.

*Exploring Atlas Shrugged: Ayn Rand's Magnum Opus* is a significant contribution and highly recommended for instructors, students, and the general reader. Younkins's volume can serve as an instructor's resource for those teaching *Atlas Shrugged*, as a companion text for students in those courses, or as a stand-alone book for readers

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[4] Patricia Knight, "Video Appears to Show Police Horses Trampling Canadian Trucker Protesters," *MSN* (February 18, 2022), accessed online at: https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/video-appears-to-show-police-horses-trampling-canadian-trucker-protesters/ar-AAU3isX.

who are familiar with the book and are interested in a fresh examination of this timeless novel from a thematic, structural, and character-development point of view.

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