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James Stacey Taylor. *Markets With Limits: How the Commodification of Academia Derails Debate*. Routledge 2022. 234 pp. $160.00 USD (Hardcover ISBN 9781032171494); $44.95 USD (Paperback ISBN 9781032171487).

The debate over whether the commodification of certain goods is morally problematic is in crisis. The debate seems to be in crisis in large part due to the influence of Jason Brennan and Peter Jaworski's *Markets Without Limits: Moral Virtues and Commercial Interests* (Routledge 2016). The problem is that this influential text severely mischaracterizes the nature of opposition to commodifying many goods and services. Things are worse than this. Academics currently have few incentives to engage with the sources cited by prominent texts. Thus, many academics are unlikely to understand whether a particular text accurately characterizes the arguments with which it engages.

There are two general kinds of arguments that those who oppose the commodification of certain goods and services raise, at least according to Taylor's specific target, Brennan and Jaworski. The first is the Asymmetry Thesis, which claims that there are goods that 'can be given away freely but they should not (morally) be bought or sold' (2). The second is a family of semiotic objections. These objections hold that 'the sale of certain goods or services is wrongful because such sale would necessarily communicate a wrongful attitude, either toward the goods or services in question or toward something that they are associated with' (2).

The first few chapters of Taylor's text are an almost punishing demonstration that none of the alleged advocates of either of these two objections actually advocates them. Chapter 1 focuses on those who putatively endorse the Asymmetry Thesis. Consider just one author Taylor discusses, Michael Sandel: Brennan and Jaworski characterize Sandel as holding, for example, that '"it is permissible for you to hold a spot in line for your kids, only to jump out at the last minute so they can ride the roller coaster in your place. But he doesn't want people to sell line-standing services. You can hold the line for free, but you can't sell your spot"' (12). Taylor shows that this is not Sandel's view. Sandel's target is the claim that '"market exchanges make (*ex ante*) both parties to them better off, and so improve social utility"' (12). Sandel then argues that markets for places in line might not improve social utility more than simply waiting one's turn. Sandel's concern is a consequentialist concern. It is then an open empirical question whether markets for queues better improve social utility in any particular area (13). Taylor elegantly characterizes Sandel's concern as 'the question of whether in addition to being a market *economy*… the contemporary United States should also be a market *society*' (13, emphasis original). Similarly, Taylor argues that Sandel would not object to some things being sold at nominal costs. Thus, Sandel does not endorse the Asymmetry Thesis.

Semiotic objections to markets are alleged by Brennan and Jaworski to be the most common objections to commodification (35). There are at least three versions of semiotic objections to commodifying certain goods and services. First, the Mere Commodity Objection: this objection holds that '"buying and selling certain goods or services shows that one regards them as having merely instrumental value"' (37). Second, The Wrong Signal Sbjection: this objection claims that '"buying and selling certain goods and services communicates, independently of one's attitudes, disrespect for the objects in question' (37). Third, The Wrong Currency Objection: this objection says that '"inserting markets and money into certain kinds of relationships communicates estrangement and distance, and is objectionably impersonal"' (37). Brennan and Jaworski have multiple rebuttals of each of these objections. In short, they claim that there is no set of attitudes necessarily signaled by commodifying anything (38). Meaning and symbolic meaning are matters of convention; and conventions can be changed. Taylor thinks that their argument to establish this fact is sound.

The problem here is that Brennan and Jaworski suggest that all three of the aforementioned objections aim to show that marketizing certain objects and practices necessarily conveys certain meanings and attitudes toward those objects and practices. However, Taylor observes that essentialist semiotics is rejected by almost every philosopher who has ever written – including the ones that Brennan and Jaworski claim rely on it (39). Indeed, chapters 3 through 5 are devoted to showing that 'Sandel, Anderson, Satz, Walzer, and Archard' do not employ essentialist semiotics.

Chapter 7 is an intermezzo of sorts. Taylor devotes time to classifying various forms of expressivist arguments. The goal is to set aright the commodification debate. In particular, he argues that not all expressivist arguments are semiotic arguments (93). 'An expressivist argument is one that is offered to justify or condemn acts or practices by appeal to their expressive functions' (95). A semiotic objection 'communicates… something wrongful' (95). To consider only one portion of this discussion, Taylor invokes Joel Feinberg's explanation of why some activities count as punishment rather than penalties. Feinberg 'argues that punishments can be distinguished from…penalties by the fact that punishments have a "symbolic significance" that penalties lack' (96). Feinberg rejects essentialist semiotics and 'aims to identify what makes a punishment a punishment' (96). Taylor characterizes Feinberg as offering a descriptive expressive argument to explain the difference between punishments and penalties. But, since Feinberg's argument does not aim to be normative – it does not aim to identify a wrong – it does not count as a semiotic argument.

The third portion of the text contains a series of provocative ideas. The driving question is 'How is it that seriously flawed work can be published, and published in "top venues"?' (141). The key claim is that market norms, rather than academic norms, have driven a great deal of scholarship. To combat this problem, Taylor argues that academic norms should govern academic research. Or, as he very cautiously puts it, the argument 'is merely that given the (contingent) beliefs and desires of current academics, 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' (159). Moreover, the 'argument is not that market norms are inherently inappropriate to direct academic research' (159). Taylor is equally careful to note that he characterizes 'norms in terms of appropriateness rather than obligation' (149). This 'allows for the possibility that in certain situations more than one type of behavior could be appropriate' (149). He seems to follow Elizabeth Anderson in holding that the norms of the market '"are impersonal, egoistic, exclusive, want-regarding, and orientated to 'exit' rather than 'voice'"' (149). This is contrasted with the good of academic work, which aims at 'understanding' (149).

Academics face incentive problems. They have incentives 'to publish as much and as good as possible to secure… external rewards' (149). Referees are in a similar position. Referees have little to gain by hunting down the references and sources an article employs (159). Taylor sketches means of reconfiguring incentives to overcome these problems. The restructured incentives would support and inculcate academic norms and displace market norms. He even advocates for referees to be paid bounties for catching shoddy research (186). Taylor, in the final chapters, considers and rejects a series of defenses proponents of market norms might endorse. These chapters are worth reading carefully and will likely be the subject of significant debate.

As far as objections go, readers might wonder about Taylor's treatment of market norms. He seems to use the term in a purely descriptive manner in his discussion. He then contrasts this with an openly idealized conception of academic norms. He invokes Anderson's claim that excellence in professional 'roles is judged by the standards of goods internal to the practice' (150). He then identifies understanding as that good in academia. This asymmetry seems problematic. Also, readers familiar with Brennan and Jaworski will wonder if all their empirical claims are false. After all, Taylor notes that the likes of Anderson and Sandel agree with Brennan and Jaworski that markets are problematic only under certain conditions. Brennan and Taylor cite a great deal of empirical research to show that Sandel, in particular, is wrong about what markets do. That issue receives scant treatment in this text.

Despite this, the text is lively and playful. There are frequent jokes that I suspect only academics – and maybe even only academics who run in certain circles – would get. Taylor is also self-aware in encouraging readers to hunt down his references – or at least to read the often-humorous footnotes. The text, footnotes and all, is a timely and enjoyable read.

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