

## The possibility of exchange

A. J. Julius

It can happen that two persons each holding some good or capable of some work exchange the good or the labor one for the other. It can happen that each person performs, as her part of this exchange, an action for which she has sufficient reason. It can happen that each person, by taking the other as a partner in trade, treats that person well.

These things can happen, but they are tricky. Exchange, if it's to be rational and right, asks more of us than is acknowledged within some attractive ways of thinking about markets. Many of the transactions praised by market thinkers in the name of generally beneficial, individually voluntary exchange are not okay. Error is systematic where the poor go to work for the rich.

### 1

I think that certain ways of getting a person to do things are wrong. Coercive ways, for example. Think of

threatening to kill a person unless she hands over the money

threatening to fire a worker if she attends a union meeting

threatening to expose your adultery if you give me a bad review

What moral mistake do I make when I approach you in some such way?

I shouldn't kill the person I'm talking to. Some people think that, if my z'ing is wrong in virtue of some way in which it matters for you, and if my y'ing gives you reason to believe that I will z, then my y'ing is also wrong.<sup>1</sup>

It's not obvious that this is true. You might suppose that, if I should believe that I will hurt you when you've angered me, I have not only a permission but a duty to warn you of the beating that's in store.

As a characterization of wrongful coercion this looks in any case incomplete. A threat to do what's independently permissible can count as wrongfully coercive. I should not announce that unless you do my chores I'll sell a couch of mine that holds fond memories for you. My broadcast of an intention to report the affair, when it figures in a plan for manipulating the adulterer's conduct, seems wrong even on the hypothesis that I may pass along what I know.

Other views trace coercion's wrongness to the wrongness of making a person worse off, or of making her less free, by depriving her of options for action. I don't see much hope for these, either. By threatening to spit on you if you take a seat on the bus I deprive you of the option of sitting there unspat-upon. But I subtract that same option, among others, when I sit down there myself.<sup>2</sup> Only the first option shrinking seems wrong. It's distinguished from the second by the would-be spitter's intention to keep her fellow passenger from sitting down. Blind to that action-minded distinction, these views threaten to overgenerate judgments of wrongness. They tend at other points to underproduce them, as when they sign off on my threat of leaving money to a worthwhile charity that you disapprove of unless you polish my grave. That threat carries no cost to your wellbeing, it does not worsen your options, but it is wrong, I would say. Again I am thinking that it owes that wrongness partly to the way in which it makes a target of your action. And so I'd like to consider the ethics of action through which persons produce other actions.

A person should act for reasons, I think. Or, better to say, she should not act not for reasons. Like any other person you face a rational requirement like

(1) You should not (do x as the result of some attitude of yours in favor of your x'ing and fail, for some R, to [do x because you take R as giving you sufficient reason to do x]).

Rationality requires that a person come to do a thing, if she does it because of an attitude in favor of it, then thanks to her taking reasons as supporting it. I believe that a related requirement regulates the action through which a person produces other action. Here's what I have in mind.

On the coldest day of winter I am seized by a desire to go outside wearing no clothes. I don't see any reason to do that. I simply want to do it. I also want to stay warm, and this second desire keeps me inside. I realize that if I were to throw my only suit of clothes out of the window I would recognize a reason to go out and retrieve them whose recognition would be enough to send me outside. But I shouldn't throw the clothes for the sake of getting myself to go out naked.

This is not because my throwing the clothes would lead me to violate (1) by going out. If I were to throw them I would presumably go out for the reason I'd really then have to go out. The produced action is one of which (1) can approve.

Nor is it safe to assume that (1) opposes what I would do with the clothes. Maybe I have some good reason for throwing them out that is nothing to do with its influence on my going outside. And maybe I am doing it partly for that reason. If I

am *also* doing it because I want to go out naked and in the belief that, before I throw the clothes, I have no reason to do that, then I'm making a mistake.

Say that a reason to x is *independent of A* if the fact that this reason counts in favor of x'ing does not depend for its being a fact on attitudes and actions in virtue of which some person A counts as trying to bring it about that x is done. Then a principle warning me against the mistake I've just described is

(2) I should not (do y, intend by y'ing to bring it about that I do x, and fail to believe with warrant that, for some reasons R independent of me, my y'ing facilitates my [doing x because I take R as giving me sufficient reason to x]).

This intrapersonal principle puts my examples of interpersonal coercion into an interesting light. When you develop these examples in the usual way, you suppose about each of them that the speaker is trying with her speech to get the listener to do something. The mugger would have her victim give the money up. The boss would have his employee stay away. As you'll also suppose, each speaker expects that, if her speech delivers that effect, this won't be by leading the listener to act for reasons she has independently of the speaker. The threat is for turning her attention away from those reasons, activating other motives that send her in a direction more convenient to the speaker's purpose.

Perhaps this stance is also a mistake. Consider

(3) I should not (do y, intend by y'ing to bring it about that you do x, and fail to believe with warrant that, for some reasons R independent of me, my y'ing facilitates your [doing x because you take R as giving you sufficient reason to x]).

I'll call this standard "the independence principle." It is an interpersonal cousin of the intrapersonal (2). Taken together they require of a person that she not aim to produce an action, whether her own or the action of another person, except by helping the person who performs the action to do it for a reason that favors the action independently of what is done to produce it.

A person's rational success—her discovery in thought of the reasons she faces and her followthrough to action—is a value for every other person. This is not a merely spectatorial good. I don't just admire or pray for your doing what you should as I might root for the home team or appreciate a beautiful tree. My stake is practical. Your reasons help to determine what I have reason to do in my own right.<sup>3</sup>

How is that? I've claimed that my efforts to get myself to do things should serve my coming to [do them because I see reasons for doing them that hold independently of my production of them.] I now claim that I should take the same stance toward your action. Insofar as I throw my weight behind some action of yours, I should be doing that in aid of your response to reasons that favor it independently of the things I do to bring it about.

The slogan is ridiculously abstract. It will not ring too many bells right away. I'm not expecting that you'll leap to endorse it as a self-evident truth. Instead my hope is that the ideal of respect for another person's response to reasons that it describes will strike you as the sort of thing that *might* mark out a significant value. That possibility becomes a plausibility, I think, once you notice that the independence

principle (3) is the generalization to relations among two persons of an intrapersonal principle like (2) that is backed by direct reflective evidence of its importance within a person's government of her own action.

If it seems to you that actions on this list

- threatening to kill a person unless she hands over the money
- threatening to fire a worker if she attends a union meeting
- threatening to expose your adultery if you give me a bad review
- threatening to sell my couch unless you wash my clothes
- threatening to give to a charity unless you polish my grave

are wrong, if you suspect that they have in common some feature that makes each of them wrong in the same way, and if you doubt that actions like

- taking a seat on the bus before you sit there
- warning you that I will beat you

share that same wrong-making feature, then you might accept as evidence for (3) the fact that, of the principles I've mentioned so far, only (3) agrees with you about all of that. The actions and attitudes in the first list violate that principle while the actions and attitudes in the second are untouched by it. And if you find it plausible that (3) outlines an important structural feature of action's regulation by reasons, it might impress you that a joint explanation of these judgments that refers them to (3) is grounding them in something that might well matter.

## 2

*A*

"I'll scratch your back," you say, "if you'll scratch mine." On one understanding of this sally it's your attempt to get me to do something, not for an independent reason, but for a reason you make by conditioning your backscratching on mine. Understood in this way your offer violates independence.

An unobjectionable exchange of one good turn for another is possible, however. It happens all the time. Everyone thinks so. The thought seem a hundred times more secure than my abstract plea on behalf of independence. And so independence must go. I will try to answer this objection, in section 3, by describing a form that exchange might take such that it upholds independence.

Exchange is tricky. Even when the claims of independence are put aside, it's surprisingly tricky to say exchange might be such that exchange makes sense. In this section I will try to bring out a few of the difficulties.<sup>4</sup>

*B*

My front door lets in the draft. You've advertised your services as a carpenter. When I respond, it comes out that I make shoes and that you need a new pair.

I assume that there's a kind of exchange such that you and I can make an exchange of that kind in carpentry and cobbling even as each person acts, intends, and believes in ways for which there is sufficient reason. I also assume that, for each of many other pairs of services and pairs of persons, those persons can make, in those services, an exchange of the same kind as this one while acting, intending, and

believing with sufficient reason. I will make a couple of further assumptions about what exchange is like; I'll try to mark those clearly where they come into play. My question is whether there's a kind that fits these assumptions.

### C

Maybe your need for shoes is reason enough for me to make a pair for you to wear. Maybe my need for shelter provides you with a sufficient reason to give me shelter, to repair my door. Because egoism is false—the needs of other persons give me reasons by the bushel—it is hard to rule this out.

When each person does her task only because she has this reason to do it that's independent of any relation to the other piece of work, I am hard-pressed to understand our encounter as an *exchange*. An exchange of the kind I'm trying to characterize is not, I'll assume, a bare coincidence of oppositely directed, independently motivated favors or gifts. It's a pair of services each performed because its author takes it to bear some important relation to the other.

### D

Some people think that, if you do me some good, and if I pass up a chance to waive the benefit that results, I owe it to you that I help you in return. A principle of *reward* might recommend that I reward any carpentry you do with some cobbling. Then the one action might depend for its rationale on the performance of the other. Reward might furnish a groundwork for exchange.

Reward is not the only value at stake in our encounter. A person might have reason to try to bring about the valuable results of the other person's prospective labor. Consider

(4) If I intend to [make you some shoes if you fix my door], then you have sufficient reason to fix the door.

If I hold the intention mentioned in (4), then by fixing the door you can lead me to make the shoes. My forming this intention might give you reason to fix the door as a way of getting me to make the shoes. For its part reward seems to justify this conditional intention. I have reason to intend to do, in a circumstance, that which I have reason to do in that circumstance. And so I have reason to intend to cobble in a circumstance of which it's true that cobbling pays you back for carpentry.

Because I intend as I should, I form the intention. Because you do what you have reason to do, you fix the door. Because I do as I should, I make some shoes.<sup>5</sup>

But this reward principle needs to be general if it's to underwrite every good exchange of the kind that I'm trying to characterize. And so it requires of me, for example, that, if you paint your house in my favorite color, and if I go on walking past it when other routes to my bus stop are open, I do you some small favor in return. Drag your trash to the curb every week for the rest of the month, perhaps. After all this is a pair of actions in which we might have made a decent exchange. But I can't believe that I owe you any such reward.

### E

Perhaps the road to exchange is paved with fancier intentions. Consider

(5) If I intend to [make the shoes if you have the intention in (6)], then you have sufficient reason to fix the door.

and

(6) If you intend to [fix the door if I have the intention in (5)], then I have sufficient reason to make the shoes.

If you take the attitude in (6) while I strike the posture of (5), each person intends to do her job.<sup>6</sup> In carrying out her intention each then does something that, according to (5) or (6), she has reason enough to do.

If you have the (6) intention and I form the (5), you'll be doing some carpentry for me. Do I have sufficient reason to cobble? I've already ruled out a principle for reward as basis for such a reason. The other source that comes to mind is the way in which my action might help to bring it about that you will fix the door. But my (5)-style intention already suffices for that outcome. Once the *intention's* in place my *action* makes no further difference to whether you'll perform your action. So this action need not be one that I have reason to do in the indicated circumstance. It's false that I should intend to do in a circumstance an action for which I lack good reason there. So, for all that we can say, it's false that I should form this intention.

*F*

If intentions won't convey us to exchange, something more committal might go the distance.<sup>7</sup> I promise that [if you'll fix my door, I'll make you some shoes]. Maybe you then have sufficient reason to fix the door as a prompt to my cobbling. And if my promise will lead to your carpentry, that's maybe a reason to make it. Perhaps it's by making and keeping such promise that people enter into and execute exchange.

Here I make my final assumptions about the kind of exchange I'm trying to characterize. I assume that, for at least one instance of that kind, the following are true. Each person has *decisive* reason to do her part of the exchange—to make any promises, to form any attitudes, and to carry out any service that helps constitute the exchange. Each person does and is known to do any action that she has decisive reason to do. And the situations of the two protagonists A and B are symmetrical in the respect that if A has decisive reason to promise that if B does her task A will do hers, then B has decisive reason to promise that if A does her task B will do hers. Think of two virtuous doctors, each the world's only specialist in what ails the other. I am assuming that exchange is such that each can have decisive reason to join the other for an exchange of life-saving medical treatment. I'll now show that my assumptions cannot all be true if exchange partly consists in the one person's promising to [do her task if the other does her task].

If you promise that, if I do my task, you'll do yours, then I have decisive reason to do my task. Because you have decisive reason to keep your promise, and because you do what you have decisive reason to do, my doing my task will lead you to do yours. Because I do what I have reason to do, your promise will lead me to do my task. It seems to follow from these facts alone that you have decisive reason to make your promise as a way of getting to do my task. Call this the "apparent implication."

If the apparent implication holds, then, because each of us does what she has decisive reason to do, you are going to make your promise, I am going to do my task, and you are going to do your task. If the apparent implication holds, my

promise is not needed to induce your promise, it's not needed to induce your labor, and it's not needed to assure you that I'll do my labor. I conclude that, in this case, I lack decisive reason to make my promise. But if you have decisive reason to make your promise, then by symmetry I have decisive reason to make mine. So the apparent implication must not hold. But if it does not hold, I don't see what else could account for your having decisive reason to make your promise.

Two sufficiently symmetrical persons, each known to do what she has decisive reason to do, must lack decisive reason to perform their parts of an exchange that involves these conditional promises. This is not the kind I'm looking for.

G

It is tedious, but I need to discuss one last interlocking structure. It might seem that

(7) You have sufficient reason to promise that [if I make the promise in (8), you'll fix my door].

and that

(8) I have sufficient reason to promise that [if you make the promise in (7), I'll make your shoes].

For, where you match my promise, mine leads you to repair my front door. Maybe I have sufficient reason to make this promise as a means of recruiting your assistance. Similar reasoning favors your promise as a ploy for procuring my help. Each conditional promise in this syndrome fulfills the condition of the other. So each obligates its maker to carry out her side of the transaction.

This is effective, and, unlike the last form, it tolerates symmetry. But I worry that it does violence to the ethics of promising. I have trouble reconciling it with an apparent truth about reasons for making promises. It seems to me that, where I have sufficient reason to promise a person that I will do a thing, I have at least one reason for making this promise that consists in some way in which my being obligated to do that thing is valuable for my promisee. The millionaire who is going to pay me off if I make a promise to his niece does not give me reason to do that unless the obligation that this establishes also holds some importance for the niece. Otherwise we're just abusing promise.

If you make your promise in (8), my promise provokes you to repair my front door. I am saying that this can't be my *only* reason for doing it. The trouble is that I can't find any other sufficiently general reason for making this sort of promise.

Rather run through all the candidates that occur to me I offer a quick survey of considerations of *assurance*. My becoming obligated to x can often enough help my promisee by allowing her to take for granted that I will x as she's deciding what to do. Or just by winning her some peace of mind when she would otherwise worry whether I will x.

Suppose that I make the promise in (8) before you ever open your mouth. By putting myself under an obligation to cobble for you if you make your promise, I allow you to rely on this consequence of your making it as you're deciding whether to make it. But *your* promise holds no such deliberative value for me. I've already made my promise, so yours can't touch my decision to make mine. And mine obligates me to do the cobbling work if you make your promise. So the grounds of *that* decision are also independent of whether you'll fix my door and so

of whether you're obligated to do it. The person who speaks second can't, by putting herself under an obligation to perform her task, aid the other's deliberation. Suppose instead that we make our promises at the same moment. As before each promise has no assurance value for the opposite party's deliberation about whether to perform. And now because they're simultaneous these promises hold no such value for anyone's deliberation about whether to make them.

Or consider peace of mind. A trader who wants not to be a sucker might worry whether her partner will execute her side of some exchange that's under way. If an exchange were in the offing I would have a primary reason to win you some peace of mind by promising that I'll hold up my end. But exchange is itself set in motion by the promises in (7) and (8). If I don't make my promise, there's no deal between us and no danger I will cheat you out of your due. My extending the promise to you isn't favored over my withholding it by any reason I have to put your mind at ease over whether I will make a sucker of you.

### *H*

It's characteristic of a good exchange that each person can be rationally moved to join it by some consideration that relates her own service to that of her partner.

The proposals I've considered all attempt the same abstract form for that interdependence. Each imagines that I'm given reason to do my part by some fact to the effect that you will do yours or are intending to do it or are committed to doing it in some circumstance. Call the relevant fact about your action, intention, or commitment a "base fact." I've been looking for a kind of base fact such that (A) a fact of that kind makes it true that I have sufficient reason to do my part; and (B) you have *unconditional* sufficient reason to take the stance that makes such a fact true. Where both conditions are met for both persons, and where each person takes the stances she has reason to take, each is ultimately given reason to do her part by some fact that relates her service to her partner's.

So far this hasn't worked out. Every revision that made (A) safe undermined (B). Each contortion that forced (B) into place threw (A) out of whack. No doubt other samples of this structure remain to be inspected. But it's not too soon to wonder whether I've been going for the wrong form.

### 3

It seems to me that I sometimes think about what we should do. I'd like to take that appearance at face value. Just as there are facts about what I should do or about what you have reason to do, so there are facts about what you and I should do and about what you and I have reason to do.

#### The *joint recommendation*

(9) You and I have sufficient reason to do (you lift the south end of the couch, I lift the north)

is an example. Our two actions have a valuable property that each lacks on its own: they are a levitation of the whole couch. This property might recommend to the two of us that we do these actions.



I think that this joint principle can ground an individual one. I have sufficient reason to lift the north end of the couch because it's one of a pair of actions that we have reason enough to do.<sup>8</sup>

Here is another thing we might do. We might each help the other by performing carpentry or cobbling. A principle that recommends this is

(10) You and I have sufficient reason to do (you fix my door, I make your shoes).

An occurrence of these two actions constitutes each person's helping the other. This is a property that neither action enjoys on its own, and it might recommend the pair of these actions to us both.<sup>9</sup> That recommendation might in turn make it the case that you have sufficient reason to fix the door and that I have sufficient reason to make some shoes that you can wear. Each task is worth doing because it falls into this worthwhile pattern.

An exchange between two persons, I imagine, consists in each person's doing what will help the other because she believes that the pair of these actions is jointly recommended to the two of them as a pattern in which each helps the other. Beliefs to that effect, about any of a large class of possible pairs of services, are sometimes true and warranted. So, for each such pair, a possible exchange of this kind does not involve its protagonists in any epistemic or practical mistake.

If each person does her part because she believes that the two are jointly recommended, each part happens because its author takes it to bear this significant relation to the other. An exchange of this kind meets the condition that, as I claimed in 2C, distinguishes exchange from mere bilateral gift giving.

It gets there without succumbing to the perplexities that took over when I tried to ground my reason for making your shoes in your disposition to fix my door under particular conditions. I'm suggesting that we replace that psychological or behavioral base with a normative one—with a principle or a reason. The joint recommendation (10) supplies the relation between my action and yours that explains why I should do mine.

"I'll make some shoes for you if you repair my front door." Sometimes this form of words announces that one action is causally contingent on the other. It dangles a carrot, luring you in a direction that, but for the carrot, you're not expected to take.

I am claiming that there's another way to understand the episode. I've come to see that we should perform this pair of actions, and I'm suggesting that we do it. I'm not sweetening the payoff to some individual strategy of yours. I'm turning your attention toward this thing that we could do, nominating it as a way forward for us, helping you to act for a reason you already have for doing your part of it.

This conception of exchange answers the objection to the independence principle that I raised at 2A. Offers are sometimes innocent, after all. They are a means by which we can communicate to our possible partners our awareness of the independent reasons we share for acting in the collective patterns they propose.

But this picture of exchange is also distinguished, from the other accounts I've managed to track down, by its consequence that on general assumptions a person can come together with others in exchange while acting, intending, and believing as reasons recommend.

#### 4

I am rich. You are poor. I own a machine with which a person can produce consumption goods in proportion to the time she spends operating it. You don't own any machines like that or any goods that you could trade for temporary or permanent access to a machine.

Early one morning you are walking through the forest when in a strange clearing you come upon a machine like the one I've described. You *could* run the machine all morning and then carry the product of that half-day's labor to the gates of my palace. But you don't have reason enough to do that. I am rich. Other persons' reasons for extending my already vast control over consumption goods are quite feeble. You'd do far better to spend the time scrounging for food or medicine. Or pursuing inexpensive pleasures or projects that let some meaning or flavor into your life. It's incredible that you'd have reason enough to dedicate those hours to *me*.<sup>10</sup>

But the machine in the forest is my machine. Alerted by security I hurry to the clearing. I'm about to drive you off when I think better. "If you'll work all morning on this machine and deliver the product to my estate," I tell you, "I'll let you stay on in the afternoon to make some stuff that you can take home with you."

An afternoon on the machine would net you a day's ration of consumption. This beats your alternatives, you think. You fire up the machine.

Independent reasons don't recommend that you spend half the day producing goods that I'll control. By saying these words to you I bring you to do it all the same. I'm apparently making the moral mistake that the independence principle finds in coercion.

This conclusion comes too soon however. Consider

(11) You and I have sufficient reason to do (you work half the day producing goods that I'll control and half the day producing goods that you'll control, I allow you to use the machine in this way).

This joint principle might vindicate my engagement of you, lending it the character that section 3 ascribed to the exchange of carpentry for cobbling. When we do what this principle recommends, you help me by putting new goods at my disposal, and I help you by allowing you to make some stuff that you'll control. My job offer simply raises this plan for your consideration.

Take a closer look at the action it assigns to you. You're to work half the day in my service and half to your own benefit. This *daylong* project is not well supported by the reasons independent of me. The afternoon session helps a person who badly needs help—you. The morning is all but wasted—on me. There's no reason-

bearing connection between these two sessions that calls for doing the morning as part of your doing something that includes the afternoon. And I assume that reasons don't support my doing (x and y) if y is not well supported and if there's no reason-bearing connection between my doing x and my doing y.

We are used to thinking that in a situation like yours you should take the job. But if that's true, it's true because I make it true by conditioning the afternoon work on the morning. I put these two stretches of action into an artificial relation such that you can't do the worthwhile part unless you first do something that makes considerably less sense.

Next consider my member of the pair in (11). What does it come to that I allow you to use the machine? If I have a moral right against your using it, then when I waive that right I make this day's work morally eligible for you. I doubt that property in production assets carries a power of this kind. But I'll assume for argument's sake that my allowing you to use my property gives you a morally permissible access to it that you would lack if I were not to allow it.

In earlier sections I was talking about exchanges of labor for labor. But with this understanding of property in place we may understand exchanges in goods. I own a screwdriver. You own a cheese grater. We might do (I allow you to use the screwdriver for an hour, you allow me to use the cheese grater for ten minutes). In the limit we might do (I allow you to use the screwdriver forever by relinquishing my title, you allow me to use the cheese grater forever by relinquishing your title).

It's plausible that some such pattern is something you and I have sufficient reason to do as a way of our each helping the other. If so I uphold independence when I lead you to do your part of the exchange by proposing it.

When we carry this out I exert a further influence over your action. I allow you to use my screwdriver and so help to bring it about that you use it. I am trying to bring this about insofar as I'm trying to help you by allowing it. That helps you, after all, only if you use the tool. But using the screwdriver is something you have reason to do in virtue of considerations independent of me. You need to screw a screw into something. So my component of our exchange itself complies with the independence principle.

That's important. Suppose to the contrary that some member of a pair of actions violates the independence principle. Then I'd say that we don't have reason to do the pair. And my initiating the pair can't itself be justified, under the independence principle, by appeal to the fact that you and I have reason to do the pair.

I'm afraid that the plan proposed in (11) has this suspicious structure. The action that it assigns to me is the action of allowing you to do the action it assigns to you. I've just argued that this action of yours—working half the day for me and half the day for you—is something you lack good reason for doing independently of my activity. If I were to allow you to do it as a way of helping you—as would be required for this to constitute an exchange—I would be acting so as to bring you to perform your action. But then I would violate independence. It seems to follow that this pair of actions is not jointly recommended. And so independence also condemns my putting this plan in motion by offering you the job.

If the joint principle (11) were true, this principle could make it the case that you have reason to work the full day as part of the pattern it recommends. And then my doing my part of that pattern—allowing you to do yours—would uphold independence. This would ensure, in turn, that my action recommended in (11) upholds independence. And so it would remove, as an objection to (11)'s truth, the appearance that one of the actions it recommends violates independence. But I'm pretty sure that this won't fly. It seems badly circular.

Until some solution to this problem emerges, we should not accept (11). And so we should not suppose that I may get you to work for me by conditioning your subsistence on your work. When I do this I am bending your action away from the reasons that govern it. I am treating you, not as the person who is accountable to those reasons, but as the tool who wields my tool.

## 5

These observations might hold the germ of an understanding of exploitation. They might help to explain why it's generally wrong for rich people to hire poor people for work from which the rich draw a substantial surplus.

In my story the sequence of events over which you came to work for me has raised you to a better material position than the one you started in. And you chose to take the job. That a transaction is voluntary, and that it makes everyone better off, are not enough to make it right.

The worker's poverty, the owner's prosperity, and the owner's enjoyment of a surplus are important elements of the story. They explain why the offer of employment is not an invitation to a jointly recommended project, and so they help to confirm that the transaction's apparent violation of the independence principle is genuine. Because the worker is poor, and because the rich owner is a major direct beneficiary of her work, she lacks good reason for doing the work as part of a pattern that also encompasses the owner's allowing her to use the equipment. It's not clear that this argument will reach beyond its primal scene to condemn the employment of experts or managers by firms whose stockholders enjoy a standard of living not much higher than theirs.

Distribution and poverty figure in this explanation, but they have a derived significance for it. The explanation dispenses with any appeal to independent standards of fairness or duties of aid. It's concerned not with what you get but with what you do and with how you are made to do it, with property's sway over labor.

People who have nothing to sell but their own skill and energy, who are locked out of the places where these fetch a higher price, will sometimes go to work at low wages for the rich. This puts food on the table, but it has a sour taste.

Exchange, on the other hand, is wonderful. Can we do it? Yes, we can.

## Acknowledgments

For discussions of this paper or its predecessors I thank Richard Arneson, Sameer Bajaj, Charles Beitz, Selim Berker, David Bordeaux, Lindsey Chambers, Thomas Christiano, Tiffany Teeman Cvrkel, Helena de Bres, Ronald Dworkin, Ada Fee, Ashley Feinsinger, Elizabeth Harman, Robert Hughes, Brian Hutler, Heidi Hurd, David Kaplan, Sari Kisilevsky, Veronika Krakhmal, Michael Martin, Adam Masters, Brad McHose, Benjamin McKean, Richard Miller, Matt Mortellaro, Véronique Muñoz-Dardé, Colleen Murphy, Thomas Nagel, Thi Nguyen, Philip Pettit, Japa Pallikkathayil, Alexi Patsaouras, George Pavlakos, Ira Richardson, Matthias Risse, Andrea Sangiovanni, Thomas Scanlon, Chad Van Schoelandt, Kieran Setiya, Karl Shafer, Sophie Siow, Lucas Stanczyk, Nicos Stavropoulos, Anna Stiltz, Michael Thompson, Sabine Tsuruda, Laura Valentini, Emmanuel Voyiakis, Jeremy Waldron, and Steven Wall. For major help I thank David Bordeaux, Arudra Burra, Jerry Cohen, Barbara Herman, Louis-Philippe Hodgson, Alexa Green, Seana Shiffrin, Stephen White, Andrew Williams, and Matt Zwolinski.

## Notes

1. See for example Scanlon 2008: 76. Scanlon endorses the principle but doubts that it's enough to explain the wrongness of wrongful coercion.
2. I owe the form of this example and the point it makes to Stephen J. White. See White 2009, and for other discussion of the perplexities of an option-centered outlook on coercion see Nozick 1969.
3. I believe that this is an aspect of the objectivity or publicity of reasons. For discussion see Nagel 1970, Korsgaard 2009: 188-202, Wallace 2009.
4. In grappling with the problems of this section I follow such other writers as Kant 1797: 272, Prichard 1949, Radford 1984, and Gilbert 1993.
5. As a partisan of independence I hope that you will *not* fix my door as way of bringing it about that I make the shoes. That would amount to your setting out to produce an action of mine without believing that you thereby help me to do it for an independent reason. But in this section I am ignoring independence.
6. You might doubt that intentions are capable of the self-referential contents on display in (5, 6). For discussion see for example Velleman 1997.
7. I thank Arudra Burra for me to helping me to understand the role that symmetry plays in the argument of this subsection.
8. I don't claim that every true joint recommendation unconditionally grounds an individual sufficient reason to do your part. I discuss conditions under which that transmission fails in Julius 2013.

9. To accept that the two persons' each helping the other might be a reason-giving property is not to endorse a principle of reward. That principle says that your helping me puts me under an obligation to help you. The current claim is that, *independently* of what anyone does, we share not a moral obligation but *sufficient practical reason* to each help the other.

10. This partial equilibrium calculation misses many relevant reasons. If I am going to sell the goods you bring me, that will benefit my trading partners, my partners' partners, the partners of their partners, and so on. But I doubt that's enough to tilt the balance of reasons in favor of your doing the work. My customers would gain the use of your half-day's product but only after surrendering labor or goods to me. The benefits to them are probably small in comparison with what you lose when you give up half your day. Many of these people are rich, so helping them is again a low priority for you. If you don't operate my machine, I could perhaps do it instead. That would benefit the third parties just as much. And you could use the morning to help the others directly without lavishing a surplus on me.

## References

- Gilbert M (1993) Is an agreement an exchange of promises? *Journal of philosophy* 90: 627-49.
- Julius AJ (2013) *Reconstruction*. unpublished, UCLA.
- Kant I (1797) *The Metaphysics of Morals*.
- Korsgaard C (2009) *Self-constitution*. Oxford: OUP
- Nagel T (1970) *The Possibility of Altruism*. Oxford: OUP
- Nozick R (1969) Coercion. In: Morgenbesser S (ed) *Philosophy, Science, and Method*, pp. 440-72.
- Prichard HA (1949) Exchanging. In: Prichard HA *Moral Obligation* New York: OUP.
- Radford C (1984) I will, if you will. *Mind* 93 (372): 537-83.
- Scanlon TM (2008) *Moral Dimensions: Permissibility, Meaning, Blame*. Cambridge, MA: HUP.
- Velleman JD (1997) Deciding how to decide. In: Cullity G and Gaut B (eds) *Ethics and Practical Reason*. Oxford: OUP, pp. 29-52.
- Wallace RJ (2009) The publicity of reasons. *Philosophical Perspectives* 23: 471-97.
- White SJ (2009) What's wrong with coercion? unpublished, Northwestern.