

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 she has reason to perform. 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 difficult. A practically rational, morally decent exchange 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 free exchange are not rational, not right. Error is systematic where the poor go to work for the rich.

I

A

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

- (1) 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 strike such a stance?

I shouldn't kill the person I'm talking to. In condemnation of my threat to kill her you might mention

- (2) 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.¹

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 (2) 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 owe such a report to the spouse.

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

1. Thomas Scanlon endorses a similar principle at p. 76 of *Moral dimensions*, Harvard, 2008. He doubts that it's enough to explain the wrongness of wrongful coercion.

same option, among others, when I sit down there myself.² 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.

B

You should act for reasons. Or, better to say, you should not act not for reasons.

You face a rational requirement like

(3) You should not (do x as the result of some attitude in favor of your x'ing and fail to [do x because you believe, of some reasons R, that they give you sufficient reason to x]).

This can be disputed in various ways.³ But I'll take it for true. 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 thinking that reasons support her doing it.

I believe that this requirement reaches, beyond (3), to take in the action and thought 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 know of any reason for doing that. I just want to do it. I also want to stay warm, and this keeps me inside. I realize that if I were to throw my only suit of clothes out the window, I would see a reason to go out and retrieve them whose recognition would be enough to get me to do it. 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 to my violating (3) 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 act is one of which (3) can approve. Nor is it safe to assume that (3) opposes what I'd 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 acts in virtue of which

2. I owe this point to Stephen White, who brings it out in his unpublished 2009 paper "What's wrong with coercion?"

3. The principle is too strong, isn't it? You can, without violating any plausible rational requirement, do certain things routinely or idly or on a whim and so without believing that you have good reason to do them. And it's not clear how best to weaken (3) so as to formulate these dispensations. But my subject—the ethics of trying to bring it about that a person acts—allows me to set this aside. When you make a target of a person's future conduct, locking it in the sights of your current planning, you don't act routinely or idly or otherwise acceptably unthinkingly.

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

(4) I should not try to bring it about that I do x and fail to believe with justification that, for some reasons R independent of me, I am thereby making it more probable that I [do x because I believe that R give me sufficient reason to x].

C

Have another look at the examples in (1). When you develop these 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.

So consider

(5) I should not try to bring it about that you do x and fail to believe with justification that, for some reasons R independent of me, I'm thereby making it more probable that you [do x because you believe that R give you sufficient reason to x].

This standard—call it “the independence principle”—is an interpersonal cousin of my intrapersonal (4). Taken together they require of a person that she not aim to produce an act, whether her own or another's, except by helping the doer of that act to do it for reasons she already has.

A person's rational success—her discovery in thought of the reasons that apply to her, and her followthrough to action—is a value for every other person. This 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.

How's 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 extend the same attitude toward your action. Insofar as I throw my weight behind some act of yours, I should be doing that in aid of your response to reasons that already favor it in the situation within which I'm deciding what to do.

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 (5) is the generalization to relations among two persons of an intrapersonal principle like (4) that's backed by direct reflective evidence of its importance within a person's government of her own action.

If it seems to you that the stances in (1) and in
(6) threatening to sell my couch unless you wash my clothes
threatening to give to a charity unless you polish my grave
are wrong, and if you suspect that they have in common some feature that makes
each of them wrong in the same way, and if you think that these are not true of the
examples in

(7) taking a seat on the bus before you sit there
warning you that I will beat you

then you might accept as evidence for (5) the fact that, of the principles I've
mentioned so far, only (5) agrees with you about all of that: the acts and attitudes
in (1) and in (6) violate that principle while the acts and attitudes in (7) are
untouched by it. And if you find it plausible that (5) outlines an important
structural feature of action's regulation by reasons, it might impress you that a joint
explanation of impermissibility in (1) and in (6) and of permissibility in (7) that
grounds those in (5) is grounding them in something that plausibly matters.

D

"I'll scratch your back," you say, "if you'll scratch mine." On one understanding of
this sally, you're trying to get me to do something, not for an independent reason
that has already supported it, but for a reason you manufacture by conditioning
your backscratching on mine.

An unobjectionable exchange of one good turn for another is possible, however. It
happens all the time. Everyone thinks so. These thoughts seem a hundred times
more secure than any abstract plea on behalf of independence. And so (5) must go.

I will answer this objection, in section III, by describing a form that exchange can
take such that it upholds independence. But first I'll try to drum up some support
for this conception of exchange by raising a problem for some of its alternatives.

II

A

Think of an idealized Craigslist. The users of my site—"Kantslist"—are pretty
special. None of them ever does a thing, nor intends to do it, unless she has
sufficient reason to do it. None of them believes a thing unless she has reason
enough to believe it. These facts are common knowledge on the site.

You've advertised your services as an expert piano tuner. My piano needs
attention; when I respond, it comes out that I am adept in the removal of unwanted
tattoos, like the ex-lover's name that's stencilled somewhere on your skin.

I imagine that there's a possible exchange in piano tuning and tattoo removal
through which each of us could do a little work for the other while acting,
intending, and believing only for sufficient reason. How should we understand
exchange so that this turns out to be true?

B

Maybe your interest in erasing the past is reason enough for me remove your
tattoo. Maybe my need to play in tune provides you with a sufficient reason to go

to work on my piano. Because egoism is false—the interests of other persons give us reasons by the bushel—it’s hard to rule this out.

But when each 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’m hard-put to understand our encounter as an *exchange*. An exchange is not a bare coincidence of oppositely directed, independently motivated gifts. It’s a pair of services each performed because its author takes it to bear some interesting relation to the other.

C

Some people think that, if you do me some good, and if I pass up a chance to waive the benefit that results, I then and therefore owe it to you that I help you in return. Some such *compensation principle* might require of you that you repay the tattoo removal with service on the order of a piano tuning.

(8) If I remove your tattoo, then you have sufficient reason to tune my piano.

And it might recommend that I reward your piano labor with tattoo work.

(9) If you tune my piano, then I have sufficient reason to remove your tattoo.

Here each act turns out to depend for its rationale on the fact of the other. In this way compensation might furnish a groundwork for exchange.

D

Suppose that each of us accepts (8) and (9) and that this is common knowledge between us. Each knows in common, again, that each will act, intend, and believe as reasons recommend. Suppose that’s all we know. Consider the propositions

I have sufficient reason to remove your tattoo.

You will tune my piano.

You have sufficient reason to tune my piano.

I will remove your tattoo.

I have sufficient reason to remove your tattoo.

In the epistemic situation I’ve just described, a warrant to believe any one of these propositions would depend on a warrant to believe the next. It would follow that this belief is warranted, if at all, then ultimately in virtue of a warrant to believe it. But that’s no good. Good reasoner that I am, I won’t believe it.

To break this circle you might add to each person’s information some empirical ground for expecting the other to do her part. I’ve seen you do it before. Then maybe there’s a path to the warranted conclusion that I should do my part.

The conclusion that rational exchange presupposes such an empirical background in past interaction would confine it to an overly narrow range of situations, I think. An optimist about globalization, I look forward to doing business with the strangers I’ll meet on an interstellar or intergalactic Kantlist.

E

However compensation is not the only value at stake in our encounter. Each person has reason to try to bring about the valuable results of the other person’s prospective labor. When these reasons interact with compensation, they seem to offer a sufficient motivation for exchange.

Consider

(10) If I intend to [remove your tattoo if you tune my piano], then you have sufficient reason to tune my piano.

If I hold the intention in (10), then by tuning the piano you can bring it about that I erase your tattoo. So my forming this intention maybe gives you reason to tune the piano as a way of getting me to erase the tattoo.

For its part the compensation standard (9) seems to justify the conditional intention mentioned in (10). I have reason to intend to do, in a circumstance, that which I have reason to do in that circumstance. So I have reason to intend to remove the tattoo where tattoo removal pays you back for piano tuning. Because I intend as I should under (9), I form the intention. Because you do as you should under (10), you tune the piano. Because I do as I should under (9), I erase the tattoo.

F

This template for exchange draws another objection, and this one is harder to dispel. The compensation standard has got to be general if it's to ground principles like (8, 9) in the case of any two services in which we might make a good exchange. 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 year, perhaps. But I can't believe that. I don't see that I owe you anything like that. And so I doubt that (8) or (9) can be sustained.

G

Maybe the road to exchange is paved with fancier intentions?

(11) If I intend to [remove your tattoo if you have the intention in (12)], then you have sufficient reason to tune my piano.

and

(12) If you intend to [tune my piano if I have the intention in (11)], then I have sufficient reason to remove your tattoo.

If you take the posture of (12) while I strike the attitude in (11), each intends to do her respective job. And then when acting on one of these intentions each person does something that in the circumstance she has reason enough to do.

H

You might doubt that intentions are capable of the self-referential contents on display in (11) and (12).⁴ Even putting that issue aside and supposing the intentions to be well-formed, I don't see what could make these principles true.

Suppose that you have the intention in (12). If I form the one in (11), you'll be tuning my piano. Does it follow that I have reason enough to remove the tattoo? I've already ruled out a freestanding compensation requirement as a ground for "yes." The only other source of reasons that comes to mind is the way in which my action might help to bring it about that you'll tune my piano. But my (11)-style intention already suffices for that outcome. Once the *intention*'s in place, my doing my *act* makes no difference to whether you'll do yours. So this act need not be one that I have reason to do in the indicated circumstance. Because it's false that I

4. For related discussion see Kite Fine, "The structure of joint intention," unpublished, 2010.

should intend to do in a circumstance an act for which I lack good reason, the intention is not one that I should form.

I

If intentions won't convey us to exchange, something more committal might go the distance. Think of a promise.

(13) I promise that [if you'll tune my piano, I'll remove your tattoo.]

This promise, even when it's paired with your corresponding commitment about the piano, does not require my performance. Your making your promise does not ensure the antecedent of mine since it can't without circularity obligate your performance. But we should again consider an interlocking structure (and again I'll look past any misgivings about self-reference):

(14) You have sufficient reason to promise that [if I make the promise in (15), you'll tune my piano].

(15) I have sufficient reason to promise that [if you make the promise in (14), I'll remove your tattoo].

Where you make no promise of this kind, mine is of no consequence. But where you match my promise, mine leads you to tune my piano. Maybe I have sufficient reason to make it, then, as a means of recruiting your assistance. Similar reasoning favors your promise as a device for procuring my help.

Each conditional promise in this syndrome fulfills the condition of the other. And so each obligates its maker to carry out her side of the transaction.

J

Interlocking promises are in this way a recipe for exchange. It's a little troubling that they're the only such form that's turned up. We exchange things all the time without giving any obvious sign of promising. But maybe that's an illusion. Against the crowded market's roar of shouted offers and counteroffers, we speak in a shorthand, abbreviating a promissory dialogue like (14, 15) that describes the true form of a rationally faultless exchange.

K

I have a different misgiving about that dialogue. It's to do with the nature of reasons for promising. About this I claim that

(16) If I have sufficient reason to promise to A that I will x, then I have at least one reason for making this promise that consists in some way in which my being obligated to do x is valuable for A.

Call a reason of the kind that (16) mentions a *primary* reason for promising. And say that a reason for promising to x is *secondary* if it doesn't consist in the value for my promisee of my being obligated to do x. The proverbial millionaire who is going to pay me off if I make a promise to his niece gives me, if any, only a secondary reason to do it.

Take another look at the argument by which I motivated (14, 15) in subsection *I*. There I noticed that, if you make your promise, mine leads you to tune my piano. In the terms just set out, this amounts to a secondary and not a primary reason for making the promise. According to (16) this can't be my sole reason for doing it. The trouble is that I can't make out any other sufficiently general primary reason for making this sort of conditional promise.

L

Considerations of assurance offer the main examples of primary reasons. My becoming obligated to *x* can 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 (15) before you ever open your mouth. By putting myself under an obligation to remove your tattoo 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 remove the tattoo if you make yours. So the grounds of *that* decision are also independent of whether you'll tune my piano 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.

What about 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 (14, 15). If I don't make my promise, there's no deal between us and so 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.

M

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 consideration 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). Every contortion that forced (B) into place threw (A) out of whack. No doubt other candidates of this form remain to be inspected. But it's not soon to wonder whether I've been going for the wrong form.

III

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*

(17) 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 acts 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 acts. I think that this joint principle can ground an individual one.

(18) I have sufficient reason to lift the north end of the couch.

Where (17) makes (18) true, I have reason to do this act of mine because it's one of a pair that we have reason to do.⁵

Another principle for us.

(19) You and I have sufficient reason to do (you tune my piano, I remove your tattoo).

Through these acts each person helps the other. This is obviously a property that neither act can have on its own. And it might recommend the pair of these acts to us both.⁶ If it does, then the truth of (19) might in turn ground

(20) You have sufficient reason to tune my piano.

(21) I have sufficient reason to remove your tattoo.

Then 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 acts is jointly recommended to the two of them.

If each 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 *IIB*, 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 removing your tattoo in your disposition to tune my piano under particular conditions. I'm suggesting that we replace that psychological base with a normative one. The joint principle (19) supplies the relation between my act and yours that explains why I should do mine.

5. I don't claim that every true joint recommendation unconditionally grounds an individual sufficient reason to do your part. I discuss conditions under which a transmission from (17) to (18) is blocked in an unpublished 2012 paper, "Solidarity and publicity."

6. To accept that two persons' helping each other might be a reason-giving property is not to endorse "compensation." Compensation says that your helping me puts me under an obligation to help you. The current claim is that, *independently* of what anyone does, we have not a moral obligation but *sufficient practical reason* to (each help the other).

“I’ll erase your tattoo if you take care of my piano.” Sometimes this form of words announces that one act 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.

But there’s another way to understand this episode. I’ve come to see that we should do this pair of acts, 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 on a reason you already have for doing your part of it.

The current conception of exchange answers the objection to the independence principle that I raised in *IG*. Offers are sometimes innocent, after all. They’re how we can communicate to our possible partners our awareness of the independent reasons we share for acting in the collective patterns they propose.

This picture of exchange is also distinguished, from the other accounts I’ve tracked down, by its implication that on general assumptions a person can come together with others in exchange while acting, intending, and believing as reasons recommend. It explains how exchange is a general possibility on Kant’s list.

IV

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.

You are walking through the forest early one morning 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 meaning or flavor into your life. It’s incredible that you’d have reason enough to dedicate those hours to *me*.⁷

But the machine in the forest is my machine. Alarmed by security I hurry to the clearing. I’m about to chase you away when I think better. “If you’ll work all morning on this machine and deliver the product to my door,” I tell you, “I’ll let you stay on in the afternoon to make some stuff that you can take home with you.”

7. 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 finally you could use the morning to help the others directly without lavishing a surplus on me.

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

(22) 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 III ascribed to the Kantlist exchange of piano tuning for tattoo removal. 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. 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're 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 for you.

Next consider my member of the pair in (22). 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.

Does that contradict the independence principle? Probably not. I might try to bring it about that you enter my house by inviting you in. This invitation removes, as a reason against your entering, the fact I had an unwaived right that you not do it. You might have good reasons for entering that don't depend for their force on that permission. Suppose that, with my right to bar you waived, those make a sufficient case for you to come in. Then my invitation might be leading you to enter because you judged that those independent reasons give you reason enough to do it. Then it's alright.

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 cheesegrater. 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 acts 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 (22) has this suspicious structure. The act that it assigns to me is the act of allowing you to do the act it assigns to you. I've just argued that this act 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. But then when I allow you to do it, as part of the plan in (22), I probably violate independence. If so, this plan is not jointly recommended, and independence also condemns my putting the plan in motion by offering you the job.

If the joint principle (22) were true, this would make it true 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. By ensuring that the acts (22) recommends uphold independence, this would help to make (22) true.

But I'm pretty sure that this won't fly. I'm pretty sure that a normative principle can't in this way make itself true. It appears that in capitalist asset markets prices are sometimes high because they're high. But there are no moral bubbles: nothing is okay because it's okay.

Until some solution to this problem emerges, we should not accept (22). And so for the time being we should not suppose that I may get you to work for me by conditioning your subsistence on your work. It is seeming that when I do this I bend your action away from the reasons that govern it. I treat you, not as the person who's accountable to those reasons, but as the tool who wields my tools.

V

These observations might contain the germ of an understanding of exploitation. They might 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 current argument possibly refutes the “nonworseness thesis” that organizes many discussions of exploitation.⁸

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. That’s probably a virtue.

Distribution and poverty figure in this explanation, then, 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 dominion 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.⁹

8. Alan Wertheimer, *Exploitation*, Princeton, 1999, p. 289.

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