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The moral limits of what, exactly?

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Abstract

While moral arguments for limiting market expansionism proliferate, a fundamental question has been left unanswered: the moral limits of what, exactly? Moral Limits of Markets (MLM) theorists tend to employ different terms – markets, putting a price tag, buying and selling – interchangeably and inconsistently to describe the phenomenon they are troubled by. I clarify this ambiguity by offering a novel taxonomy of different dimensions of exchange I identify as the sources of the normative concerns of most MLM arguments: Alienation, Commodification, Marketization, Privatization. This taxonomy allows us to better understand why and what about ‘markets’ should be limited.

Keywords: Moral limits of markets; commodification; marketization; privatization; alienation

Several decades ago, when the world was flattening and history was about to end, a vast normative literature on the ‘moral limits of markets’ (MLM) developed within analytical moral, political, and legal philosophy (Walzer 1983; Pateman 1988; Anderson 1993; Radin 1996; Titmuss 1997; Fabre 2006; Barber 2007; Satz 2010; Sandel 2013; Brennan and Jaworski 2016). The underlying motivation for this intellectual movement was a concern shared by philosophers and non-philosophers alike about the ongoing invasion, or expansion, of the market economy and market norms into a growing number of social spheres. It was a ‘fear of commodification’, in Jeremy Waldron’s words, a ‘widespread sense of unease that many people feel about a world in which everything is for sale, everything has a money price, everything is dealt within the market-place’ (Waldron 1995: 164).

While arguments for limiting market expansionism proliferated, a fundamental question has been left unanswered: the moral limits of *what*, exactly?

To illustrate the worry, consider Waldron’s quote above on the ‘fear of commodification’. He alludes to at least three different sources of concern: ‘everything is for sale’, ‘everything has a money price’, and ‘everything is dealt with in the marketplace’. Are having a money price, being for sale, and being dealt with in the marketplace the same thing? Is it part of what Waldron calls ‘commodification’?

How is ‘commodification’ different from ‘the market’? Waldron does not provide us with answers to these questions.

And Waldron is not alone. As I will show, MLM theorists tend to employ the same few terms – commodification, marketization, commercialization, privatization, market-alienability, putting a price tag, buying and selling – interchangeably as well as inconsistently to describe fundamentally different things. Thus, the MLM literature, and as a result, our normative assessment of market expansionism – a key political phenomenon of our era – suffers from substantial conceptual ambiguity, or so I will argue.

My aim in this paper is to clarify this ambiguity by offering a novel (and non-exhaustive) taxonomy of what I identify as the sources of the different normative concerns of MLM theorists:¹

- (1) *Alienation*: Transferring a good or service from one person to another.
- (2) *Commodification*: Buying and selling a good or service. The buying and selling in this category can be for money or in exchange for other goods and services (barter). This category also captures different aims of exchanges: exchanges for the use value of the good (namely, to use the commodity that is being bought) and for the good’s exchange value (that is, buying a good to sell it in the future for profit).
- (3) *Marketization*: Trading goods and services *within* a market – a complex set of social institutions that operate on a considerable scale. While the mere buying and selling of a good can occur outside an institutionalized market, the market adds distinct systematic elements that go beyond commodification, such as the patterns of allocation to which markets give rise (usually inequalities), a preference-based price system, market competition, and so forth.
- (4) *Privatization*: The transfer of publicly provided goods or services to private entities.²

¹As far as I am aware, there have been two previous rudimentary attempts to create something like a taxonomy for the different dimensions of exchange with which MLM arguments are concerned, one by Rose-Ackerman (1985) and the other by Radin (1987). While useful, these taxonomies are lacking for the following reasons. First, they pre-date most of the important works within the MLM literature. Thus, both taxonomies were not meant to make an intervention in the existing MLM literature and were a part of a separate argument about property rights and entitlements. Second, Rose-Ackerman’s taxonomy lays out all the different possibilities of *legally limiting* markets, without virtually any engagement with non-legal normative arguments. Third, Radin’s taxonomy includes a distinction between what I call alienation and commodification, but she does not distinguish between commodification and marketization. Fourth, both do not include a discussion of privatization, a problem that became more prevalent after their publication. Fifth, they do not discuss the relations between each dimension of exchange and different market norms, as I do in sections 1 and 4. Additionally, Anderson’s (1993: 143–163) discussion on three alternatives to the market (i.e. professional internal standards in civil society, gift exchange, and public goods) as well as Claassen’s (2009: 424–425) typology of five modes of provision, have also been instrumental in developing my taxonomy. Both sources include certain aspects of my taxonomy, but they are merely ‘brief expositions’, as Claassen (2009: 425) himself notes, rather than a developed and defended taxonomy.

²As Shelby (2022: 127) explains, ‘privatisation can involve two types of rights transfer: the transfer of *ownership rights* (emphasis in the original) to assets (such as land, facilities, vehicles, or machinery) and the transfer of *operating rights* (emphasis in the original) to an enterprise (say, the prerogative to provide certain goods or services)’. Indeed, this is an important distinction, but it has no effect regarding the discussion on privatization in this paper, and therefore I put it to one side.

Notice that categories (1)–(3) are concerned with if and how we should exchange a good: whether it should be transferred, in return for what, and under which rules of regulation. Category (4) is a bit different. It is about the kind of entity that owns the good or performs the service. In other words, it is about who and not about how. Despite this difference, for simplicity's sake, I refer to all four categories as different *dimensions of exchange*. My argument is that when MLM theorists wish to put limits on 'the market' or argue that some things 'should not be for sale', they, in fact, allude to one, or a few, of these categories (typically, they are not concerned with all of them at once).

The taxonomy I offer allows us to better identify the underlying moral reasons for limiting certain dimensions of exchange and, correspondingly, to determine which dimension of exchange should actually be limited. Each dimension of exchange may be normatively objectionable for different reasons and hence point us toward different remedies. As I will show, it is one thing to limit commodification; it is an entirely different thing to limit alienation, marketization, or privatization. Identifying the correct dimension of exchange is therefore crucial to achieving the correct normative conclusion.

I proceed as follows. I begin by outlining my taxonomy. I define the different dimensions of exchange and highlight the unique traits of each category (section 1). I then move on to argue that the taxonomy I offer has an additional analytical advantage. It provides us with tools to better identify and classify the different potential MLM arguments in complicated cases where a prevalent distinction in the MLM literature between 'legal' and 'moral' arguments might lead us astray or is at least inadequate (section 2). Next, I analyse three different MLM arguments made by three prominent MLM figures concerning three different goods, thereby demonstrating the pervasiveness of the conceptual ambiguity I am concerned with and the contribution of my typology to the existing literature (section 3). In the final two sections of the paper, I address two plausible objections against my account. The first objection is that my taxonomy is redundant, as existing lists of market norms and characteristics provided in the literature (e.g. inequality, objectification, commensurability) are enough to do the conceptual work my taxonomy purports to do (section 4). The second objection challenges the distinction I make between commodification and marketization (section 5).

Three clarificatory remarks are in order before I begin. First, this is not a discussion about linguistics. It is not my aim to grasp what we mean when we say, for instance, 'commodification' in natural language. My taxonomy aims to elucidate a conceptual confusion within a specific (and central) literature.

Second, I do not attempt to refine, object to, or defend the different arguments in the MLM literature. Within the confines of this paper, I take them at face value.

Finally, some of the concepts I use might echo or resemble Marxist and Marxist-inspired concepts (for instance, 'alienation', 'commodification', 'use value' and 'exchange value'). Nonetheless, my taxonomy is dedicated to the MLM literature alone. Therefore, writings within the Marxist tradition about alienation, commodification, marketization and privatization are left, by and large, outside the boundaries of my taxonomy, as are the idiosyncratic meanings ascribed in these writings to the words I use (for a valuable overview of Marxist-inspired definitions for these concepts, see Cohen 2001: 415–18).

1. The Moral Limits of Alienation, Commodification, Marketization and Privatization

Four main dimensions of exchange recur, often interchangeably, in MLM arguments: alienation, commodification, marketization and privatization. While it might be possible to further distinguish other dimensions, these four capture and elucidate much of what MLM theorists struggle to explain. In what follows, I characterize each category by highlighting its distinctive features.

1.1 Against Alienation

Some arguments against ‘markets’ in certain goods, such as voting (Radin 1996: 19; Umbers 2018), are troubled by the possibility of these goods becoming alienable (Andre 1992: 36). Similar arguments have also been made concerning human rights (Frankena 1955; Brown 1955), organs and different kinds of human labour (Dworkin: 1983). By and large, to say that some good should be inalienable means to normatively negate the option of separating the good from a particular person (Radin 1996: 17). In the voting example, it means that one *should* not be able to transfer one own’s vote to someone else. Although inalienability can have many meanings, within the context of arguments against ‘markets’, transferability is the most relevant (Rose-Ackerman 1985: 935; Radin 1996: 19).

While arguments against alienability are being made against ‘markets’, the reason for concern does not stem, or at least not only, from the effects that markets, or buying and selling, would have on such goods. For example, someone who holds that people cannot transfer their human rights, to take one example, holds it regardless of money or markets. Therefore, arguments against alienability apply to all transfers – *including free transfers*.³

Indeed, it might be worse to transfer something inalienable for money or within a market than transferring it for free (for some moral reasons I do not explore here). But the main issue with alienability is the transfer itself. So, the link between arguments against alienability and markets is not straightforward. Markets simply happen to be one very common setting in which such transfers occur in our society. Indeed, when markets expand, they can make formerly inalienable goods alienable, so there is a contingent link. But, as said, arguments against alienability go beyond markets and cannot be uniquely attributed to debates about market expansionism.

1.2 Against Commodification

Arguments that fall under this category are concerned with making something an object of exchange *for something else*.⁴ Within this context, goods that are being

³For a kind of an essentialist view about organs, see Dworkin (1983: 39). See, also, the discussion of essentialist views regarding reproductive labour and sexual labour in Satz (2010: 40–44, 117–21). For an example of such argument, see Pateman (1988: 207).

⁴Rose-Ackerman (1985: 935) calls this ‘modified inalienability’. An important discussion that I do not address here concerns the question of at what point in time non-commodified goods gain the status of being commodities. Is it at the time of exchange, or rather when they are offered for sale? I use the term commodification in a non-restrictive way to include both options. For a full discussion of this with regard to Marx, see Cohen (2001: 416–17).

given for free (and with no other strings attached) are of no concern. In other words, this category is about alienable yet commodified goods.⁵ Notice that the problem with commodification is not necessarily about goods being exchanged within an institutionalized market. Using Debra Satz's words, 'an exchange can be noxious without there being a noxious market' (2010: 15). For instance, someone might oppose the buying and selling of organs, even if it is being made under a centralized governmental system where there is no market whatsoever. So the argument against the commodification of good X is independent of whether this good is being bought and sold on the market.⁶

Now, 'exchange for something' could mean different things that, in turn, might lead to different normative implications. Without committing to a full account of different kinds of commodification, there are at least two main distinctions to consider. One is about the reason for exchange: a person can use the good she purchases or sell it to a third party to make a profit. The other distinction is concerned with the things being exchanged: a good can be exchanged for money, another good, services, other financial devices and so on.⁷

Let's begin with the first distinction. Sometimes people buy goods for their use value, such as a shirt, because they like it and want to wear it. People also buy goods for their exchange value. For example, they buy a shirt at a low price to sell it to a third party for profit. Some people do both: they buy something to exchange it later, albeit not for profit but for the use value of something else. For example, buying a shirt and then exchanging it with a friend in return for a record. The shirt, in this case, is being bought for its exchange value although not to gain monetary profit and accumulate wealth, but rather the use value of the record. One implication of this distinction might be that sometimes trading something for its use value would not be as objectionable as exchanging it for its exchange value because at least the good is bought for what it is (e.g. a shirt) and not just as another replaceable good aimed to generate profit. Again, I do not wish to defend this claim here, just to point out that this distinction could carry important normative implications.

⁵Actually, according to Brennan and Jaworski (2016: 10–11), explaining how one can be in favour of voluntary transfer for free but against voluntary transfer for money is the key challenge that all MLM arguments face. Their main (and sweeping) argument, according to which 'if you may do it for free, then you may do it for money', aims to show that de facto the category of commodification is empty: there is no situation in which we think something can be voluntarily transferred, but not bought or sold. If they are right, so they argue, the conclusion that follows is that there should be no limits to markets. The taxonomy I offer shows that even if their sweeping argument is correct, their conclusion that it is enough to show that markets should have no limits is wrong. Arguments against alienation, marketization and privatization do not face this challenge. Their conclusion is thus based on the false assumption that all four categories can be reduced to the commodification category.

⁶Thus, when Radin calls nonsalability 'market-inalienability', or when she argues that 'when something is noncommodifiable, market trading is disallowed from of social organization and allocation', she conflates commodification and trading in a market (1996: 15, 20). Radin later acknowledges that there is a range between completely commodified goods and incompletely commodified goods, but this still is not enough to explain the difference between commodification and marketization. Similarly, in her discussion about 'what should not be exchanged for gain', Andre (1992: 36–42) also conflates commodification and marketization. The explicit distinction I provide, therefore, sets my taxonomy apart from Radin's and Andre's taxonomies in a significant way.

⁷For an illuminating discussion on different kinds of exchanges, see Cohen (2001: 421).

Turning to the second distinction, sometimes people barter. They exchange goods or services for the goods or services of others. At other times, they exchange goods or services for money. Commodification by barter could have the same normative implications as commodification by money. For example, it seems as if there is no significant difference between paying someone for her kidney or giving her, say, a flat. However, one might argue that there are cases in which trading something for money can be worse than trading it for a good or a service. For instance, as I will elaborate in a few paragraphs, when money is involved, a commodified good is valued based on the same unit as an infinite number of other goods available to purchase for money. In a barter deal, where trading is being done without using money, only the goods or services in the specific barter are commensurable, which in certain contexts might be considered preferable.⁸

These two distinctions create a metric of commodification, as it were, with different possibilities, each potentially leading to different normative implications. So delineating the contours of the concept ‘commodification’ not only allows us to demarcate it from other dimensions of exchange but also opens new avenues for a more refined analysis of different kinds of commodification, a level of analysis that MLM accounts, maybe due to the conceptual ambiguity I am concerned with, normally do not provide.

Now, what is wrong with commodification? It seems that the main normative issue that repeatedly arises in arguments against commodification is that it changes for the worse the way people value goods or the way people value the people with whom they trade.

Two main evaluative norms are mentioned in this context, namely, *objectification* and *commensurability*.⁹ Let’s start with objectification. To take the concept’s most common, Kantian-inspired¹⁰ meaning, objectification occurs when an object is treated merely as a tool – an instrument for one’s own need – not as an end in itself (Anderson 1993: 144; Radin 1996: 34–41; Fabre 2006: 139).¹¹ Ostensibly, when people buy and sell commodities, they treat commodities, and sometimes the people with whom they exchange, as objects. MLM theorists object to

⁸For a more detailed discussion about the difference between barter and exchange for money, see Andre (1992: 41–42).

⁹Radin similarly presents a very fruitful ‘indicia of commodification’ that includes: (1) objectification; (2) fungibility; (3) commensurability; (4) money equivalence (1996: 118). However, she does not categorize these indications according to the different dimension of exchange I propose here. I put fungibility to one side since it is not as popular in the literature as objectification and commensurability.

¹⁰For Kant’s famous dictum, see Kant (2012 [1785]: 41).

¹¹To be sure, this is not the only meaning of objectification. Nussbaum (1995) lists seven meanings that people attach to this concept. For the purpose of this paper, only three of them are relevant: instrumentality (which I used as the definition of objectification presented in the text), fungibility and ownership. Fungibility is discussed in the literature as a separate market characteristic as I mention in footnote 9 above. Nussbaum’s definition of ownership is similar to my definition of commodification. Therefore, my discussion captures the relevant items from her list. In contrast to Nussbaum’s account, Jütten has developed a different account of objectification, according to which the defining feature of sexual objectification is instrumentalization, but ‘the imposition of a social meaning on women, which marks them out as proper objects of instrumentalizing attitudes’ (Jütten 2016: 28). For the purposes of this paper, I refrain from supporting a specific account of objectification, but notice that the way objectification is defined might have further normative implications about the proper limits of alienation or commodification in specific cases.

certain 'markets' where this kind of instrumental relationship is normatively inappropriate, demeaning and so forth.¹² Take, for example, the argument offered by Radin:

[C]onceiving of persons or of essential attributes of personhood as fungible commodities tends to make us think of ourselves and others as means, not ends. (Radin 1996: 84)

Evidently, an institutionalized market is absent from Radin's argument. Her point is that treating a good as a commodity is enough to give rise to objectification. No market system is required for her argument to run.

Moving to commensurability, the definition presented by Chang holds that '[t]wo items – values, goods, etc. – are incommensurable with respect to V just in case there is no common unit by which they can be measured with respect to V' (2017: 6). Correspondingly, two items are commensurable where there is a common unit by which they can be measured with respect to V.¹³ The MLM claim in this regard (to which I gestured at above while discussing the additional wrongs of exchange for money in comparison to exchange of barter) is that commodification turns goods that should be incommensurable – say, a family heirloom (Anderson 1993: 144) – into commensurable goods. This is because a commodified good can be measured by a common unit of other goods, normally money (but not necessarily). And, in some cases, commensurability seems normatively objectionable. As Chang explains:

Indeed, if all values were ultimately commodity values measurable by a market price, then many of our most cherished and fundamental attitudes would require radical revision. If, for example, the contribution of having children to the good life can be measured by the same unit that measures the contribution of a beach vacation, then the difference in your attitudes toward your children and toward having to forgo a holiday in the Maldives should be a matter of degree – the loss of dear Suzy is worth twenty such vacations while troublesome Johnny is worth only ten. (Chang 2017: 6)

But again, similarly to objectification, there is no need for a market in some specific good for that good to become commensurable (Anderson 1993: 59–64; Radin 1996: 8–9). Take judicial services as an example. A judge provides her judicial services to

¹²To be sure, people *can* value the same thing in different ways at the same time. One can treat something as an object and appreciate it as an end; see Fabre (2006: 140). As mentioned, in this paper I do not defend the content of the different MLM arguments.

¹³As Chang emphasizes, some use the term 'commensurability' to describe both commensurability and comparability, which are two different concepts. Two goods are comparable if a positive value relation holds between them and we can say something affirmative about what their relation is: one good is better than the other, worse than the other, or equal to the other. Chang calls this the 'trichotomy thesis' (1997: 4). See also Raz (2002: 46). MLM arguments are normally not concerned with comparability, since heirlooms, children, and sex are all comparable goods. We can compare their value to other things, just not according to one common unit. The problem with 'markets' is not that they make an heirloom comparable to a car; this is already the case. It is that markets measure the value of the heirloom and the car *on the same scale*, which is normatively inappropriate, according to some MLM theorists.

the state for money. Her salary is commensurable to other salaries, but in most countries, there is no market for judicial services (putting private arbitration aside for the sake of argument). Thus, commodification seems to be sufficient to trigger (potentially objectionable) commensurability (assuming that there are other goods that are traded for money – with or without a market).

1.3 Against Marketization

The modern market system is a distinct, complex set of social institutions that operate on a considerable scale. Generally speaking, in a market system, individuals have property rights that grant them ownership over certain goods. With these, they can trade with whomever they wish, according to the parties' willingness to pay and willingness to accept.

To maintain this complex system, markets rely upon a functioning legal system that is in charge of enforcing contracts, compensating for fraudulent transfers, interpreting agreements, assigning property rights, fostering and maintaining market competition, and so forth (e.g. Friedman 2002: 12–13; Satz 2010: 15–39). Things traded within the market are sometimes called commodities. But again, commodification can take place outside the market system, and philosophers' worries about the market as an institution are distinct from their worries about commodification.

Arguments against marketization usually focus on two basic traits of the market system: *inequalities* and the *preference-based price system*. Starting with the former, markets normally lead to economic inequalities, which, in turn, give the wealthy greater market power. Notice, however, that the MLM literature is *market-specific*. That is to say, the essence of MLM arguments from inequality is that regardless of one's general view on principles of distributive justice and social welfare functions (e.g. egalitarianism, libertarianism, prioritarianism), there are specific goods that should not be traded within a market system. So not all inequalities are objectionable, but some, according to MLM theorists, are. For example, a paradigmatic MLM argument from inequality is that there are specific markets wherein the unequal economic power of the trading parties allows the wealthy to exploit or take advantage of the vulnerability of the poor and, therefore, such markets should be limited (Wertheimer 1992: 212–214; Fabre 2006: 200–204; Satz 2010: 97–98). Other worries about specific inequalities are unfairness and the expression of disrespect inequality entails (Anderson 1993: 186; Fabre 2006: 142–44; Satz 2010: 97; Sandel 2013: 11; Brennan and Jaworski 2016: 147–50).

These anti-marketization, inequality-based arguments are different from anti-commodification arguments because the focus of the anti-marketization argument is not the buying and selling. In a world where, say, votes could be commodified so that economic inequalities could not be translated into political inequalities, those who oppose marketization would have nothing to complain about. On the other hand, the anti-commodification theorist might still find the commodification itself objectionable in such a case. Take another example. Consider a theorist who objects to markets in kidneys because such markets are characterized by exploitative relationships between the trading parties in contemporary societies. In a world where a centralized yet commodified system of allocation could prevent the

exploitation of the vulnerable, such a theorist would not object to the commodification of kidneys *per se*.

Moving on now to arguments against a preference-based price system, the value of goods on the market is determined by supply and demand, which in turn is affected by, roughly, the cost of production, exclusivity, and the scarcity of the good on the one hand, and individuals' will and ability to buy the good, on the other. Goods and services are exchanged without regard for the reasons people have for wanting them. If people have enough money and a preference for owning good X, then their willingness to pay and the seller's willingness to accept will determine whether the exchange will take place, not the reasons (either good or bad) people have for wanting to buy or sell. For instance, it does not matter if the buyer wants to buy the good to make someone else jealous, because of a medical need, or just for fun.

There is a distinction to be made between two groups of anti-marketization arguments, each directed at a different aspect of the preference-based price system. According to one group of arguments, the *value* of some goods should be determined by factors other than supply and demand (Walzer 1983: 108; Anderson 1993: 145; Satz 2010: 17; Sandel 2013: 33, 89). The value of a renowned artwork, for example, should not be set according to the price system. Some argue that the value of teaching humanities at universities, to take another example, should not be set according to supply and demand but rather according to the intrinsic value of the humanities or their contribution to society as a whole, whether or not people prefer to have it (Nussbaum 2016).

The second group of arguments focuses on *allocation* according to a price system. Some goods, so the argument goes, should be allocated to people in a very specific way, regardless of people's (normally self-interest-driven) willingness and ability to pay (Anderson 1993: 159). Healthcare and housing are often cited as examples of such goods. Proponents of this view argue that these goods are essential for securing people's basic needs and so they should be allocated according to needs-based criteria rather than a self-interest-driven, preference-based price system (Williams 1973: 240; Walzer 1983: 89; Radin 1996: 240–43).

Arguments against the price system also differ from arguments against commodification. Consider a case of a fully centralized system for the allocation of kidneys, in which the government buys kidneys from those who wish to sell them at a fixed price and allocates them according to, say, need, also at a fixed price. People who buy kidneys can only do so if they have a need-based reason, not based on any whim or preference they may have. And the government can only sell it for a specific reason (we can complicate the example so the initial sellers would also be able to sell their organs to the government only for specific reasons). In such a case, one might still argue against the commodification of kidneys, although it is not managed according to a preference-based price system.

An additional feature of arguments against the price system, which has been largely neglected in the literature, is that one who objects to marketization on the grounds of preference-based allocation or preference-based value would *also* need to object to preference-based alienation for free. Emphasizing this point is significant, as it allows us to identify a unique group of goods – namely, goods whose commodification is not objectionable (for instance, since the buying and selling is

being done not exclusively according to people's preferences), even as their preference-based alienation and marketization is objectionable. Radin, for example, argues that this group of goods is of no importance since 'few things can be sold but not given away' (1996: 18). However, the taxonomy I offer shows that this is not the case.

To illustrate this point, consider again the example of judicial services. Normally, a case is assigned to a judge without regard to the 'customer's' wishes – namely, those of the prosecutor, the defendant, or the plaintiff (in civil cases). Moreover, judges cannot (and should not) provide their services for free to whomever they want and treat the court as their own. There are rules of conduct that determine judges' behaviour. So, their preferences also do not count. Nevertheless, judging services are commodified in the strict sense I have defined commodification, as judges are usually paid by the government for their work (contrary to some Buddhist monks, for instance, who provide their service without payment, or certain judges and magistrates in the UK who volunteer to do their work for free), and parties are often required to pay the court a certain fee to use these services.

And it seems there are many other goods in this group.¹⁴ Soldiers who defend the country's borders are another example. Soldiers are paid to defend the country, and thus, their services are commodified. The people living within the country are provided with defence or security services, regardless of their preferences. And the soldiers themselves cannot choose whom to defend. They are not allowed to provide their services according to their own will to whomever they wish.¹⁵ The fact that the taxonomy I offer highlights the existence of this important and overlooked group of goods and helps us draw connections between the different dimensions of exchange (in this case, between alienation and marketization) is another example of its usefulness in depicting a more nuanced picture of the morality of markets.

Finally, notice that two less common characteristics also appear in arguments against markets: *orientation to exit* and *competition*. Starting with the former, according to Hirschman's influential conceptualization, if one does not like a specific product, brand, or store, one just 'exits' the transactional relationship and chooses another brand (1970: 21–30). Presumably, this process is a desirable recuperation mechanism. When many people stop buying a certain product, the seller tries to improve the quality of the product, becomes more efficient and so forth. The issue some MLM theorists have with orientation to exit is that within a market, one does not try to protest or convince the manager to provide better merchandise, as one does not have a 'voice' (or is disincentivized to use it where there is a decline in service quality), using Hirschman's terminology again. And, in certain circumstances, it is normatively desirable that people use their voice to create social change instead of simply exiting (in politics, for instance) (Anderson 1993: 146; Satz 2010: 107).

¹⁴Lawyers can be considered as another example. For normative discussions on the market in legal representation see Wertheimer (1988), Wilmot-Smith (2019), Agmon (2021) and Sharon and Agmon (2021).

¹⁵Notice, that this kind of argument is not directed against privatization of public goods, as Andre, for example, has argued (1992: 35). These goods can be privately owned without being marketized, or publicly owned and marketized, as I explain in the next sub-section (1.4) on privatization.

Regarding the latter, notice that in the market, people compete. In certain contexts, competition may not be the most suitable approach for allocating goods or organizing institutions (e.g. Hussain 2020). Take, for instance, Cohen's famous camping trip example. In the camp, using a marketized competitive mechanism to distribute goods or dictate behaviour, rather than a cooperative one (which, according to Cohen, is the point of the trip), could be perceived as inappropriate, or normatively objectionable (Cohen 2009).¹⁶

The thing to notice about all four market mechanisms and characteristics that I mentioned – inequalities, a preference-based price system, orientation to exit and competition – is that they are straightforwardly linked to, or appear concerning only within, an institutionalized market system. The mere commodification of a good seems insufficient, at least in most cases, to give rise to these traits. It is just hard to envision cases (though maybe not impossible) where inequality as a social phenomenon, evaluative patterns created by a price system, exist as a recuperation mechanism, and competition, can accrue, or be normatively meaningful in the MLM sense, outside the context of an institutionalized market.

1.4 Against Privatization

Broadly speaking, privatization is a process of transferring the ownership of public goods, or the responsibility to perform certain public services, into private hands. Some have raised doubts that privatization is an important normative category. The sceptic's view on privatization is that it is a redundant normative category since the identity of the agent who owns the goods or performs the service does not matter.¹⁷ The private and public, according to this view, are interchangeable (Cordelli 2020: 46–48).

To explain this point, assume that healthcare should be provided to everyone according to their need. Why, the sceptic might ask, should we care about *who* is providing it? The only thing that matters is that it will be provided to all according to a need-based criterion, be it a private or public entity. The sceptic's question could be translated into the categories of this taxonomy in the following way. Concerning the healthcare example, according to the sceptic, the MLM theorist should argue against or for the marketization of healthcare, not against its privatization. Healthcare can be provided by a market mechanism while publicly owned (by using a voucher system, for instance) and privately provided according to needs-based principles anchored in strict regulations outside the market. Thus, for those who hold the sceptic's interchangeability assumption, privatization is a normatively empty category.

In response to the sceptic's challenge, some have argued that *there is* something distinctively wrong about privatization. Dorfman and Harel (2013), for instance, argue that some goods are inherently public and cannot, by their very essence,

¹⁶Another issue with competition is that while people in the market compete 'parallel' to one another (Agmon 2022), certain institutions and contexts require friction between competitors. Therefore, marketizing a particular institution or good can lead to the establishment of inappropriate forms of competition.

¹⁷For a presentation of what I call the sceptic's view (they call it the 'instrumental view'), see Dorfman and Harel (2013: 89).

be provided by private entities. Their leading example is punishment. They argue that one important goal of the criminal justice system is to publicly condemn the criminal for the wrong that was done. Private prisons, by definition, cannot fulfil this communicative aspect of punishment. To take another example, Cordelli (2020) argues that the distinct wrong of privatization should be located not in the essentialist features of certain goods but rather in its effects on the legitimacy of political institutions. In a nutshell, she argues that there are goods and services that public institutions cannot outsource as their legitimacy is dependent on the fact that the discretionary powers involved in providing these goods and services are public. Once outsourced, the legitimacy of both the institution and the private entity that replaced it is jeopardized.¹⁸

The important thing to notice about both arguments is that they focus on the transformation or delegation of some public function into private hands, not on alienation, commodification or marketization. As Cordelli (2020: 6) herself observes,

[M]any of the considerations that are relevant to determine the moral limits of markets cannot extend to privatization, since the latter need not involve the direct buying and selling of goods, and since privatization has often been conducted through nonprofit organizations, putatively outside the market.¹⁹

Thus, arguments that object to the interchangeability assumption carve out a space for a distinct and normatively important category that can be neatly separated from the MLM literature and successfully captured by the taxonomy I offer.

To be sure, similarly to arguments against alienability, there is clearly a contingent link between privatization and buying and selling, or markets, since it is usually the case that privatization involves the marketization or commodification of privatized goods and services. After all, the main argument in favour of privatization is that it leads to a more efficient distribution of goods and services in the market. This contingent link, however, does not make the distinction between privatization, marketization and commodification redundant, as privatization is a distinct category, but it does give us a plausible explanation for why MLM theorists have conflated the three.

To recap the differences between the dimensions of exchange discussed so far, before I turn to consider an important implication of my taxonomy, see Table 1.

2. An Additional Analytical Advantage

Beyond the benefits of the taxonomy specified in the earlier section, I now turn to highlight an additional analytical advantage of the taxonomy: it provides us with tools to disambiguate tricky cases that the existing MLM literature cannot properly unpack.

MLM theorists often allude to a common distinction between *moral* impermissibility – that it is morally wrong for a certain good to be alienated/

¹⁸For another view that rejects the interchangeability assumption, see Beerbohm (2016: 207–25).

¹⁹Therefore, when, for instance, Satz (2013: 994; 2018: 9–29) argues against what she calls ‘market-based privatisation’, it seems as if she is actually arguing against marketization.

Table 1. Dimensions of exchange: a taxonomy

	Against alienation	Against commodification	Against marketization	Against privatization
The source of the normative concern	Transferability	Buying and selling (for money or barter, for use value or exchange value)	Trade in a market system	Private ownership and services
Giving things for free?	Objectionable	Not objectionable (in principle)	Depends on the kind of anti-marketization argument	Not objectionable (in principle)
Objectionable norms and characteristics	The worry is the transfer itself	Objectification, commensurability	Inequality, preference-based price system, orientation to exit, competition	The worry is the change from public to private

commodified/marketized/privatized – and *legal* impermissibility – that the law should prohibit a certain dimension of exchange (Fabre 2006: 149–52; Satz 2010: 50–52, 110–11; Brennan and Jaworski 2016: 25–26).²⁰ Putting it a bit differently (and more accurately, I might add), note that this distinction is meant to highlight the difference between *prima facie* arguments that are concerned with the wrongfulness of a specific dimension of exchange itself (in a certain context) and all-things-considered arguments about what the law regarding this specific dimension of exchange should be.

Now, absent the taxonomy I offered, in certain tricky cases, it is very hard to tell whether an argument is a *prima facie* one or an all-things-considered one. In these tricky cases, the three following distinct beliefs are being held simultaneously:

- (1) A *prima facie* MLM argument *for* dimension of exchange X (say, the commodification of organs is permissible);
- (2) An all-things-considered MLM argument *against* dimension of exchange X (say, the commodification of organs should be banned) because;
- (3) A *prima facie* argument against dimension of exchange Y (say, because the marketization of organs is wrong).

In such cases, the problem is that, without distinguishing between the different dimensions of exchange and without knowing the source of the normative concern, we are left with no analytical tools to distinguish between arguments (2) and (3). To explain, consider the following example:

²⁰There is another important distinction in the literature between making something illegal, criminalizing a certain act, or not enforcing certain contracts. See for example Fabre's (2006: 211–17) discussion on surrogacy contracts. I do not elaborate on this distinction here.

Hanna is a social worker. In principle, she thinks there is nothing wrong with buying and selling babies for adoption (belief 1). However, she is a staunch objector to a market in babies because she believes the price system of the market should not determine the value of the baby itself or of having a child, from the perspective of the parents (belief 3). Thus, she is someone who is against the marketization of babies but not their commodification. Now, assume that there is no effective regulation that can prevent a market in babies, to which Hanna objects, from emerging, except full restriction on trade, because of, say, some domino effect to which commodifying baby adoption would lead (belief 2).²¹ Despite having no principled objection to the commodification of babies, Hanna supports an all-things-considered argument against it due to a *prima facie* argument against the marketization of babies.

Without distinguishing between the different dimensions of exchange, an MLM inquiry of this case would probably go as follows. The theorist would try to determine whether Hanna is making a legal or a moral argument. Hanna's statement that she has no principled *prima facie* argument against the commodification of babies *would probably be the end of the story*. Since there is only one, undifferentiated dimension of exchange (be it 'market', 'buying and selling' and so forth), the theorist would conclude that Hanna is making a legal argument against a 'market' in babies, not a moral one. And this would be a mistake since, in fact, Hanna *is* making a moral argument, just not against commodification, but against marketization (indeed, there can be cases in which the MLM theorist would get it right, but that would practically be a coincidence since they would not have the analytical tools to do so).

Thus, the taxonomy I offer provides us with analytical tools to get a more accurate picture concerning the type of arguments MLM theorists are making in complicated cases: all-things-considered arguments or *prima facie* ones.

3. Yes, The Problem *Is* Real

Thus far, apart from mentioning a single quote by Jeremy Waldron in the Introduction, I have not done enough to establish my claim that the MLM literature actually faces a fundamental ambiguity. I immediately introduced a taxonomy aimed at resolving it, assuming its significance. This section addresses the concerns of potential sceptics who may rightly question whether the conceptual ambiguity I am concerned with is indeed a serious issue and not merely hand-waving.

So to underscore the prominence of these conceptual ambiguities, I focus on three paradigmatic MLM arguments (arguments from dignity, inequality, and corruption)²² made by three prominent MLM figures (Elizabeth Anderson, Debra Satz and Michael Walzer) aimed at three different goods (reproductive labour, sexual labour, and exemption from military conscription). My aim is to show that the conceptual ambiguities with which I am concerned are pervasive and not limited to a specific philosopher, good or argument. Moreover, if I am correct, it means that

²¹See Radin (1996: 96–99) for more about 'domino effect' arguments.

²²Notice, that there are other kinds of MLM arguments, and different versions of arguments from dignity, inequality, and corruption. For the purpose of this paper, I present each argument very briefly.

it is unlikely (although not logically impossible) that existing taxonomies that distinguish between different kinds of goods or different kinds of MLM arguments can be used to dispel this ambiguity.²³

Let us begin, then, with Anderson's argument against the 'market' in women's reproductive labour. According to Anderson (1993: 171):

Few things reach deeper into the self than a parent's evolving relationship with her own child. Laying claim to the course of this relationship in virtue of a cash payment constitutes a severe violation of the mother's personhood and a denial of her autonomy. The surrogate industry enforces its domination of the mother's evaluative perspective by denying her dignity and undermining her social bases of self-respect.

Anderson makes an Argument from Dignity, according to which a 'market' in reproductive labour would lead to treating surrogate mothers as mere means.²⁴ But which dimension of exchange degrades women's dignity in this case? The quote above points at two potential answers: the cash payment (namely, commodification, the mere buying and selling of the good) and the broader 'surrogate industry' (meaning, marketization, something like an institutionalized market in women's reproductive labour).²⁵

Starting with the latter option, is it an institutionalized market in reproductive labour, specifically, that violates the mother's personhood and infringes on her dignity? It might be, but not necessarily. Consider, for example, a situation in which the state is responsible for buying and allocating women's reproductive labour for a fixed price. There is no competition over the good as the allocation is accomplished through, say, a lottery. In this case, marketization is clearly not the issue, as *there is no market*. Still, some women in these circumstances could be considered mere 'hatcheries', 'rented property', or as 'a surrogate uterus', as they are giving birth in exchange for a 'cash payment' (Anderson 1993: 178). As Anderson (1993: 190) herself acknowledges, sometimes, 'a good does not have to be traded on the market or privately owned to be treated as a commodity'. So, even if we accept Anderson's argument from dignity, there is a need for a further argument to show that marketization is the relevant dimension of exchange that is doing the (repugnant) normative work and not commodification.

We are left with the option that Anderson's normative concern lies with the mere buying and the selling of reproductive labour (namely, commodification). Once a

²³For a helpful taxonomy of different kinds of arguments in the moral limits of markets literature, see Brennan and Jaworski (2016: 51–68). For taxonomies of the different kinds of goods discussed in the literature, see Andre (1992) and Panitch (2020). For a useful categorization of what makes markets noxious, see Kanbur (2004); Satz (2010: 94–100). Notice that Satz, in her categorization of things that make markets noxious, similarly to my way of presentation, presents her categories as 'sources' of controversy. While Satz's 'sources' denote different indicators of the noxiousness of certain 'markets', my taxonomy explores a different question. It is not focused on the normative noxiousness of certain dimensions of exchange, but rather on what dimensions of exchange philosophers argue against to begin with.

²⁴To be clear, this is not the sole argument put forth by Anderson; rather, it serves as an illustrative example highlighting the conceptual ambiguity under discussion.

²⁵Anderson (1993: 171) uses this term at other places as well.

woman can sell her reproductive labour to others, inside or outside a market, she is being treated as an object of use. It looks as if this option fits better with Anderson's argument, but again, we cannot know for certain, as she sometimes refers to the surrogate industry (which is according to my interpretation, a kind of marketization) as the source of her dignity-based concerns.

Choosing between these two options is important.²⁶ To see why, consider the following objection offered by Fabre (2006: 218) against arguments such as Anderson's: 'Objections standardly raised against [commercial surrogacy] have been shown to fail: regulation . . . goes a long way towards alleviating concerns expressed over the commodification for women's labour'. But, at least according to one of the interpretations suggested above, this is not the case. Strict regulation can alleviate concerns about a market in reproductive labour by ensuring that the good is not being allocated by market principles or within a market system. But it does not alleviate concerns regarding its commodification. Distinguishing between these dimensions of exchange using the taxonomy I provided above could help clarify the source of disagreement (in this case, between Fabre and Anderson), prevent theorists from talking past each other, and elucidate each theorist's perspective on what should be limited.

Let us turn to a different argument, made by Satz, concerning the 'market' in sexual labour. Satz's argument is a version of an Argument from Inequality. According to Satz (2010: 135), 'prostitution . . . is wrong insofar as the sale of women's sexual labor reinforces broad patterns of sex inequality'.²⁷ Like Anderson, Satz's argument can be interpreted as directed both against the commodification of sex – 'the sale', in her words (Satz 2010: 135) – and against the marketization of women's sexual labour. Both options seem plausible. Commodification could be the source of the wrong since even in a highly regulated setting – within a society where gender inequality is pervasive – the mere buying and selling of sex could presumably perpetuate gender inequalities. Alternatively, a market in sexual labour could definitely be the source of 'broad patterns' of inequalities. Again, to know precisely what Satz wishes to limit, there is a need for further explanation.

Finally, consider another case, this time of a 'market' in exemptions from compulsory military service (conscription) in wartime. According to Walzer, the duty to serve in the military in times of war is a paradigmatic example of what he calls a 'blocked exchange', a good the social meaning of which does not allow it to be 'marketable' or 'commodified'. Selling an exemption from military service should be blocked since it abolishes 'the *public thing* and turn[s] military service (even when the republic was at stake!) into a private transaction' (Walzer 1983: 99–100).

This argument is an Argument from Corruption. Namely, for some goods, being in the 'market' or being 'commodified' changes, degrades, or corrupts their proper

²⁶Notice, that Anderson is making arguments against both buying and selling and the surrogate industry. But it is not clear if her dignity-based argument is directed at both dimensions of exchange, and whether it even can be. So it might be the case that we should not actually choose one option over the other, but again there is a need for a further argument to show why.

²⁷I should clarify that Satz conducts a thorough discussion on the legalization of sex work. So, she does explicitly argue for what we should limit and for what reasons. But the fact that, in one instance, an explicit discussion about what we should limit disambiguates the general conceptual ambiguity with which I am concerned, does not make the ambiguity itself less troubling. Even in Satz's case.

social meaning (Walzer 1983: 100). However, when discussing the reasons for blocking certain exchanges, Walzer (1983: 97–105) melts ‘private transaction’, ‘commodities’, ‘marketable goods’, ‘the sphere of money’, and ‘goods and services for use and pleasure’ into one ambiguous pot.

Contrary to the reproductive labour and sex work examples, it seems that, in this case, the source of controversy is neither the marketization nor the commodification of the good. One interpretation could be that if, in a particular society, the social understanding is that everyone able to serve has, in times of war, a duty to serve, one just cannot be discharged from one’s duties or transfer them to someone else. What follows, of course, is that one should not be able to exchange exemption for money.²⁸ But it also follows that one should not be able to be discharged for free either. For instance, consider a case of substitution where someone volunteers to join the military in the place of their loved one – be that a friend, a sibling, or a child. If Walzer’s objection is about the alienability of the conscription duty, then the loved one’s conscription duty cannot be transferred, period, even for a volunteer. Indeed, as mentioned, perhaps paying to get discharged is even worse than being discharged for other, altruistic reasons. Yet, in terms of transferability, both options under this interpretation are normatively objectionable.

Another plausible interpretation is that Walzer objects to the delegation to private persons of the discretionary power to decide who has a duty to serve. In other words, the problem is not alienation; it is privatization (see also Pattison 2010).

Again, each interpretation leads to different normative implications and different regulatory regimes. Under one interpretation, the focus will be to prohibit transfers altogether, while under the other, the aim will be to preserve the public nature of the good.

To be clear, I do not think the conceptual ambiguity I have highlighted goes as far as to undermine Anderson’s, Satz’s or Walzer’s accounts. But it does obscure the normative debate on markets and thereby hinder our understanding of what is at stake. In other words, it is a real, serious, and, most importantly, ubiquitous problem. Disentangling it through the application of my proposed taxonomy can therefore help us push our normative understanding of market expansionism (and, as a result, the MLM debate) forward by clarifying the sources of the normative controversy and by discerning more nuanced normative implications about what should be limited.

Now, although existing taxonomies within the MLM literature that distinguish between different kinds of goods or different kinds of MLM arguments are unlikely to be used to dispel this conceptual ambiguity since, as I have shown, this ambiguity is pervasive across various goods and MLM arguments, there might be another way forward already existing within the MLM literature – a standard solution, so to speak. This move involves classifying different objectionable *market norms and*

²⁸Notice that there might be a normative difference between the action of the person who passes on her duty to serve, and the person who is willing to have that duty transferred to her. Walzer does not address this difference. Actually, many times in the MLM literature, a nuanced analysis of the differences between the buyers and sellers is missing. For the purpose of this paper, I leave it to one side. For helpful examples of the implication of these differences, see Andre (1992) and Fabre (2006).

characteristics to identify what should be limited instead of different dimensions of exchange (as I suggest). If the antidote for the conceptual ambiguity already exists, then the taxonomy I offer would indeed be redundant. The following section is devoted to exploring and ultimately rejecting this possibility.

4. What's Wrong with the Standard Solution?

Instead of explicitly defining the relevant dimension of exchange, some MLM theorists provide us with a list of norms and characteristics they attach to the 'market'.²⁹ These norms and characteristics are presented as the source of the normative concerns that 'markets' raise (Walzer 1983: 108–23; Anderson 1993: 143–50; Satz 2010: 15–39).

There are numerous norms and characteristics associated with 'markets', but certain ones have piqued the interest of MLM theorists in particular (I have already discussed them while presenting my taxonomy in section 1): objectification, commensurability, inequality, preference-based price system, orientation to exit, and competition.

Anderson's definition of commodification is a good example of such an attempt.³⁰ According to her (1993: 193), 'a good is treated as a commodity if it is valued as an exclusively appropriated object of use and if market norms and relations govern its production, exchange, and distribution'. Notice that, once again, this definition conflates being exclusively an object of use (which can be the result of merely buying and selling) and being governed by market norms (which alludes to something more systematic – being part of a market).³¹ But, putting this ambiguity aside, Anderson's definition evidently relies on what she thinks market norms and characteristics are. So, presumably, if MLM theorists can point at a specific norm or characteristic – say, objectification – that underlies their normative concern and provide a clear explanation of what should be limited for it to be avoided, then the conceptual ambiguity could be resolved without the need for a novel taxonomy as I suggest.

Now, recall that in section 1, I have highlighted the links between each dimension of exchange and the different norms and characteristics in question (you can find a recap of these links on the bottom row of Table 1). I showed that arguments against commodification are normally concerned with objectification and commensurability, while arguments against marketization focus on inequalities, preference-based price system, orientation to exit and competition. Meanwhile, I maintained that the link between privatization, alienation, and specific market norms and characteristics is less clear since both privatization and alienation are categories that extend beyond market or commodity exchanges, and MLM considerations may not always be applicable to them. Regarding privatization,

²⁹I do not provide a detailed explanation of the difference between a market norm and a market characteristic as it does not make a difference in the context of my argument.

³⁰Radin's (1996: 118) 'indicia of commodification' mentioned in footnote 9, in which she lists several market norms and characteristics, is another good example of the standard solution.

³¹Satz (2004: 11) also provides a similar definition, according to which commodification is 'the production and exchange of goods and services through markets'. As you can see, it also conflates between marketization and commodification.

note that it can occur independently of markets, commodification, and money but can also involve marketization, commodification, and alienation. Similarly, alienation can be problematic even in situations where something is provided for free. The point is, therefore, that different items on the list might be relevant for arguments against alienation or privatization, but it is challenging to generalize clear links between specific items and these dimensions of exchange, as can be done regarding marketization and commodification. Evaluation of which item is relevant, and if the list is relevant at all, must be made on a case-by-case basis within these categories.

Thus, to determine whether the standard solution is enough to elucidate the conceptual ambiguity with which I am concerned, the key question is: What *exactly* is the nature of the links I have drawn above between the different norms and characterizes and the different dimensions of exchange?

One answer, which I think is the correct one, is that there are common ties between specific dimensions of exchange and certain norms and characteristics – as I have tried to show above – but these ties are *not logical necessities*. For example, although objectification is *usually* tied to commodification, alienation could also give rise to objectification in some contexts. Imagine a couple who cannot have children and require reproductive labour services. This couple lives in a country where surrogacy is allowed only if no money changes hands. Buying and selling reproductive labour is not allowed. Luckily, Amanda, an altruistic Samaritan, offers to help. Despite the altruistic nature of her transfer, the couple still treats Amanda as a mere means, an instrument for their needs. In such a case, objectification is clearly not linked to commodification but to the mere transfer of Amanda's reproductive labour.

This is, of course, only one example. But assuming it can be generalized, it means that a list of norms and characteristics is not enough to tell us what dimension of exchange is normatively objectionable since sometimes the same norm could be linked to different dimensions of exchange. Therefore, by itself, a list of norms and characteristics *cannot guide us on what to limit*.

To be sure, this list is still valuable, as it explains the objectionable norms and characteristics to which different dimensions of exchange give rise. So, the taxonomy I offer does not make this list redundant at all. Rather, it complements it. The list helps us identify norms and characteristics that are objectionable within particular contexts, and the taxonomy of different dimensions of exchange I offer here is supposed to show us the exact source of these market norms and the characteristics that should be limited. To get the complete normative picture, we need to pair norms and characteristics from the list with different dimensions of exchange. But, to reiterate, relying on this list alone just will not do.

A second answer to the question about the nature of the link between the list of norms and characteristics and the different dimensions of exchange is that the same norms and characteristics *always* and *necessarily* map onto the same dimensions of exchange. In such a case, one might argue that my list is redundant since we will be able to know what to limit by using the list of norms and characteristics alone. For instance, if we are worried about objectification, we will always need to limit commodification but not marketization.

To this claim, I offer the following response. So far, the lists of market norms and characterizes offered in the MLM literature are ad hoc, unsystematic lists. They have been used to highlight what MLM theorists *find troubling* with the ‘market’, not to signify *what should be limited*. Therefore, the sheer pairing of the different market norms and characteristics by which MLM theorists are troubled with different dimensions of exchange makes a significant contribution – even if these pairings are always the same. It provides us with tools to identify which dimensions of exchange should be limited according to the different MLM arguments about the different market norms and characteristics, tools that were hitherto absent from the MLM literature.

As said, I do not think that certain norms and characteristics *necessarily* map onto the same certain dimensions of exchange. But since both answers show that (1) a list of norms and characteristics is insufficient, and (2) the taxonomy I offer makes a significant contribution, I am happy to leave open the question of which answer is the more plausible.

5. Does the Distinction Between ‘Commodification’ and ‘Marketization’ Hold?

Another significant objection worth considering is not so much about whether the taxonomy I have offered is superfluous or not but rather that the distinction between ‘commodification’ and ‘marketization’ does not hold. At least two versions of this objection come to mind.

The first version is that the mere commodification of a good is objectionable only within a market society. Imagine a society in which the market is not a dominant institution. In such a context, the mere commodification of a good might not give rise to objectionable norms. For instance, in a non-market society, selling one’s reproductive labour could be perceived as value-neutral or even a positive thing. That is because, say, there are not many things the value of reproductive labour would be commensurable with, or that outside the market, commodification would not carry with it strong norms of objectification and commensurability. Putting the objection differently, what might be doing the (repugnant) normative work in commodification is not the mere commodification of a good, as I suggest, but the commodification of a good within a market society. So, commodification cannot be considered an independent dimension of exchange – the market as a dominant social institution is really what is doing the work.

However, the fact that commodification is repugnant only in a market society does not mean that it is not a distinct dimension of exchange. It is still possible, and indeed important, to distinguish between commodification within a market society and marketization within a market society. Moreover, the whole point of the MLM literature is to provide normative reasons to limit specific markets within contemporary, liberal, market-based societies. Thus, even if my taxonomy is suitable only for market societies, it is a taxonomy that definitely fits the needs of the MLM literature, which is the subject of my inquiry.

The second version of this objection is that the line between commodification and marketization is blurry. One obvious example of this blurriness is a case where a

person buys a good for its exchange value. When I buy a shirt to sell for a higher price later, I already assume there is a market in shirts from which I can make a profit. Thus, it is not clear, one might argue, which dimension of exchange is the source of concern in such a case – the commodification of the shirt itself or, rather, the fact that the reasons for the exchange assume the existence of a market system.³²

Another way to bring to attention the blurriness of the distinction is by pressing my definition of the market itself. Admittedly, I have not provided a very robust definition of a market. Thus, there will be a quite significant range of cases between pure commodification and full marketization (for simplicity's sake, by full marketization, I mean a completely free, almost unrestricted market). Additionally, it is possible that in many of these cases, it will not be clear which dimension of exchange is the source of concern. And if this group of cases is big enough, then it calls into question how valuable my taxonomy really is.

I am happy to bite the bullet on both counts of this version of the objection. I agree that the distinction between marketization and commodification is not perfect, that the edges of each category are blurry, and that these edges are not insignificant in scale. Moreover, I concede that I have only given a vague definition of markets (mainly in contradistinction to 'mere commodification') and that there is a noteworthy scale between an unrestricted full-fledged market in good X and the mere commodification of good X. Still, this does not make my distinction obsolete. Indeed, there might be cases in which it will be hard to identify the exact dimension of exchange that gives rise to the relevant normative concerns. Nevertheless, we will still need to identify something in order to know what to limit. It is not possible to just say, 'Let's limit the objectification of the good' or 'Let's limit the relevant repugnant inequality' without understanding which dimension (or dimensions) of exchange we need to limit.

So, even though my taxonomy is non-exhaustive, imperfect, and sometimes turns blurry, it is needed, and it is, therefore, better to have it this way than not have it at all. It does clarify the pervasive conceptual ambiguity the MLM literature suffers from, and it does give us tools to understand the normative importance of identifying the relevant dimension of exchange for each MLM argument we are making.

6. Conclusion

To properly determine what the moral limits of something should be, it is better to know exactly what it is that we wish to limit. The burgeoning MLM literature fails to do just that. This has been the main conceptual observation of this paper. In response, I have identified four main dimensions of exchange, which are the source

³²Cohen's interpretation of Marx can sever the link between commodification and marketization (2001: 421). He distinguishes between different kinds of exchanges. First there is a barter. Using Marx's terminology, C-C (where C stands for a commodity). A second kind of exchange is C-M-C (M stands for money). Here, a person exchanges a commodity for money, and with this money she buys something else. Third, there is M-C-M. What is special about this 'exchange circuit' is that the goal of the seller is to gain *capital* – to make a profit and accumulate wealth. When these kinds of exchanges are possible, then, maybe we can say we have reached a point where a modern market is functioning. I do not wish to commit to this analysis, but it might be a way to further explain the difference between the categories.

of most normative concerns that arise within the MLM literature: alienation, commodification, marketization, and privatization. I have conveyed that beyond its analytical advantages – namely clarifying a significant ambiguity in the literature and providing us better analytical tools to unpack the different kinds of MLM arguments in complex MLM cases – this taxonomy is also of normative importance, as it shows that limiting the ‘market’ means different things regarding different dimensions of exchange and that different objectionable norms and characteristics are usually associated with different dimensions of exchange. Hopefully, this taxonomy will be instrumental in advancing a clearer understanding of the normative aspects of market expansionism in the future. I believe it will.

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