DOMINOS AND THE FEAR OF COMMODIFICATION

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But tho' this self-interested commerce of men begins to take place, and to predominate in society, it does not entirely abolish the more generous and noble intercourse of friendship and good offices.

DAVID HUME, A Treatise of Human Nature

I. INTRODUCTION

The market order and the liberal individualism that order expresses and reinforces has, throughout its history, been subjected to a complex critique that has united traditionalist and revolutionary opponents of capitalism. This critique invokes a number of familiar themes: alienation from self; alienation from community; the loss of values and of a sense of rationality that transcends the instrumental; the corruption or narrowing of moral sensibility. Almost any malaise that is directly experienced or believed to be suffered by others in market societies has been laid at the doorstep of liberal individualism and the market. This psycho-philosophical critique often takes form around the notion of commodification. An object, or activity, or skill, or character trait is commodified when its value is perceived to be determined by what that object, or performance of that activity, or the exercise of that skill, will bring through impersonal economic exchange.

The process of commodification leads an agent to produce objects, engage in activities, exercise or develop skills, not for the sake of the value that agent directly attaches to those objects, activities, etc., but rather for the sake of what the market offers in return. When what is offered in exchange is not itself a tangible object or service directly valued by the agent but, instead, a payment in money, the agent's productive activity further loses touch with, further loses the character of being expressive of, his own felt values. The productive activity comes under the sway of external, alien, depersonalized forces. The agent learns that rationality consists in submission to these market forces and dismissal of his own pre-market evaluations of his activities, interests, and relations. The result is, under the best of circumstances, a wealth-maximizing zombie whose soul can be restored only by return to precapitalist, traditional, and intentional (e.g., feudal) economic relations or a transcendence to a post-capitalist economy by and for self-realized species-beings.

Margaret Radin’s “Justice and the Market Domain” and “Market-Inalienability” represent a sophisticated and measured exploration of elements of the commodification critique so boldly presented here. I shall pursue a number of the issues she introduces. Special attention will be paid to the domino theory and to universal commodification. The domino theory asserts that market evaluations of objects and activities are imperialistic, driving out other and better ways of perceiving or evaluating objects and activities. Once some individuals attach a price to a given object, relation, or activity, they and others tend to lose their capacity to perceive or evaluate that object, relation, or activity as anything but a commodity with a specific market price. Moreover, the theory asserts, once certain objects or activities are commodified, there is a tendency for other objects or activities of the same sort or even of other sorts also to be seen and evaluated merely in terms of their actual or potential market value.

For example, when a market in blood is allowed, a price is
attached to a pint of blood. The value of providing that blood and the value of receiving it will then be reduced to the dollar value at which it sells. Others with blood to provide or with a need for blood will tend to see any provision and any receipt of it as being on a pari with the provision or receipt of an equivalently priced bottle of toilet water. Moreover, the commodification of an otherwise "priceless" object or activity such as blood creates or reinforces a tendency toward the commodification of further otherwise "priceless" objects or activities, e.g., bodily parts or acts of friendship. Commodification of blood will incline people to think of their healthy kidneys (or those of their recently deceased loved ones) as alienable capital assets. These bits of human capital will come to be perceived as mere commodities that should rationally be sold if the price is right. Or, if their possessor should somehow still wish to donate these kidneys, the donation will tend to be seen, by donor and recipient, as equivalent to a gift of their market price. Even charitable acts become market surrogates. When commodification is complete, I experience my acts of friendship as transfers to my "friends" of what they otherwise would have had to pay to secure or as trades in which I barter my acts of "friendship" in exchange for their supplying me with equally genuine acts of "friendship."

Fears about increasing commodification can be divided roughly into fears about loss of self (or personhood) and fears about the loss of valuable personal interactions and relations (or community). In the first case, the victim comes to see all of his attributes and possessions as fungible commodities. He comes to experience himself or his life as a bundle of market values so that his value is the sum cost of acquiring the items in that bundle. In the second case, commodification is feared to undercut comradeship, familial ties, cooperative and mutually satisfying work, and so on. Here I will focus more on the second set of fears, although the first set will be addressed indirectly in the course of remarks about the strange doctrine of universal commodification.

Whereas the domino theory asserts the existence of domino processes that radically transform the motivation of agents, universal commodification is a doctrine about what motivation underlies all human action and/or all rational human action. Universal commodification can be understood prescriptively or descriptively. Prescriptively, it is the claim that all agents are profit-maximizers. Prescriptively, it is the claim that rational agents are profit-maximizers. Obviously, concern about domino processes requires disbelief in both versions of universal commodification. For, if all of us are profit maximizers, then domino processes will at most alter the specific details of our profit-seeking and will not radically transform our motivations. And, if to be rational we must be profit-maximizers, then domino processes are not to be feared but rather to be welcomed as leading us down the path of reason. Disbelief in universal commodification is, however, entirely consistent with concern about others’ belief in or promulgation of this doctrine. Indeed, it is natural and fitting that someone fearful about domino processes also be concerned about ways in which belief in universal commodification sustains those processes or is an expression of their insidious strength.

In what follows I shall engage in the type of speculative moral sociology that characterizes all discussions of commodification. I seek to allay fears about rampant commodification, especially the sorts of fears that inspire politically imposed limitations on the scope of the market. As the reader will soon discover, this chapter represents a series of observations and analyses and not a geometrical proof or refutation of some precisely defined philosophical thesis. In the next section, I try to identify more clearly the claims of the domino theory. Section 3 clarifies the doctrine of universal commodification and begins an inquiry into its plausibility and danger. In section 4, I attend, in a highly idiosyncratic fashion, to instances in which nonmarket activities and relations persist in a substantially market world. This persistence is accounted for in terms of a distinction between internally and instrumentally valued activities. This distinction also provides the basis for a further criticism of, and further doubts about, the seductiveness of, universal commodification. The penultimate section reasserts the usefulness of the internal versus instrumental distinction as a prophylactic against domino processes. The final section speculates about what sort of a mix of internally and instrumentally valued activities and relations can reasonably be expected in an enviable life. The entire chapter travels through murky waters. Its goal is more to trace certain of the currents than to arrive at any particular bank.
II. The Domino Theory

According to Radin: "The domino theory implicitly makes two claims: first, as a background normative premise, that it is important for a nonmarket regime to exist; and second, as an empirical premise, that a nonmarket regime cannot co-exist with a market regime. The market drives out the nonmarket version, hence the market regime must be banned." However, I shall identify the domino theory with the second, Greshamite, claim. It is helpful to decouple the domino theory proper (that is, the second claim formulated by Radin) from the normative assertion that "it is important that a nonmarket regime exist." This makes it clear that one may question the momentum of domino processes while still endorsing the imposition of limits on the market for the sake of a larger nonmarket regime than would exist in the absence of those limits. Similarly, one can be dubious about the force of domino processes while endorsing the imposition of limits on the market, if not for the sake of the value of a specific nonmarket preserve, for the sake of the general value of nonmarket, noncommodified dimensions in people's lives. This, I take it, is Radin's own position—one that she wants to contrast sharply with the "traditional liberal view" that a nonmarket regime is important and can exist if a sufficiently sturdy wall is built between it and "the market regime."

Finally, of course, one can be dubious about the domino theory proper and, for that reason, project a satisfactory nonimposed coexistence of market and nonmarket dimensions of our lives.

We should note that only an extreme version of the domino theory asserts categorically that the market drives out the nonmarket. We can distinguish between a number of more or less extensive domino theses. There is the thesis that any commodification of objects and activities, or at least any commodification beyond a certain threshold, creates significant pressure toward the commodification of all objects and activities, even or especially those objects and activities least appropriate for commodification. There is the thesis that the commodification of certain types of objects or activities—presumably those least appropriate for commodification, e.g., bodily parts or sexual interactions—creates a significant tendency for all objects and activities to be commodified. And there is the thesis that the commodification of certain types of objects or activities—again, presumably those least appropriate for commodification—creates a significant tendency for all objects or activities in those sensitive classes to be commodified.

The last of these theses, by most narrowly construing the range of domino processes, would seem to be the most modest version of the thesis. Yet it seems that this is the version about which Radin is most dubious. This is because Radin has two different sorts of objections. The first, which I share with her, is an objection to domino theses at large, that is, that people have at least some capacity to continue to appreciate the nonmonetarized aspects of their activities and relations even in a world that allows considerable monetarization. The other objection, however, is specifically against a presumption of the third domino thesis. The presumption is that there are distinctive classes of objects and activities that especially should not be commodified and that are especially vulnerable to commodification. Radin associates this presumption with the "traditional liberal view" that proposes protectively quarantining these classes of objects and activities from the market's infectious commodification. Her claim against this presumption and the traditional liberal proposal is simply that there are many more classes of objects, activities, and relations that ought not to be fully commodified and yet are in danger of full commodification in market society; that "the traditional view is wrong in granting too much ground to the market." This is why, in contrast to the liberal quarantine, Radin says, "The way to a less commodified society is to see and foster the nonmarket aspect of much of what we buy and sell, rather than to erect a wall to keep a certain few things completely off the market and abandon everything else to market rationality." Since Radin's doubts about the domino theory are substantially doubts about its most restrictive version, they serve to discount the more modest traditional liberal response to concern about domino processes while, at the same time, to pave the way for more wide-ranging limitations on the market.

Finally, we should note that the domino theory is really one of a class of similar theories asserting some undesirable domino process. According to each of these theories, once some external result is employed as the standard for evaluating certain actions,
relations, etc., there is a tendency for actions, relations, or personal conditions that should be valued for their own sake to come to be perceived in terms of and evaluated solely on the basis of the extent to which they promote that external result. Consider, for example, the hedonic domino theory, according to which, once pleasure motivates or is recognized as the standard for evaluating certain actions, policies, etc., other actions or relations, for example, acts of friendship and familial relations, which should be valued for their own sake come to be seen in terms of and evaluated on the basis of the pleasure that they promote. It is the pleasure principle rather than the profit motive that is corrupting and destructive. What we have been calling and will continue to call the domino theory is, more strictly speaking, the monetary domino theory. One knows a good deal about any social theorist when one knows what form his dominos take.

### III. Universal Commodification

Belief in and concern about monetary domino processes requires disbelief in the doctrine of universal commodification, the expression of which is market rhetoric. If what one must disbelieve can also be pictured as the expression of and the cause of the commodifying processes that one disvalues, so much the better for the unity of one’s worldview. What is false turns out also to be potently bad. According to Radin:

universal commodification means that everything that people need or desire, either individually or in groups, is conceived of as a commodity. . . . Hence, under universal commodification, all social value is capable of being expressed in money terms. . . . [E]verything that is desired or valued is conceived of and spoken of as a “good.” Everything that is desired or valued is an object that can be possessed, that can be thought of as equivalent to a sum of money, that can be alienated. The person is conceived of as the possessor and trader of these goods, and hence all human interactions are sales.⁹

Radin holds that in market rhetoric, everything can in principle be assigned a monetary equivalent; the individual good is to be sought in maximizing individual gains from trade. This is why, Radin thinks market rhetoric invites us to see the person as profit-maximizer.⁹

Even before we inquire about precisely what universal commodification amounts to, it is clear that it is a conveniently outrageous view. It is precisely what the critic of the market order might want to represent as the ideological expression of market social relations. We are to picture the victim’s implicit acceptance of universal commodification as the source of his losing touch with valuable nonmonetizable aspects of life.¹⁰ Furthermore, the explicit promulgation of universal commodification may also cause people to adopt this mode of thought and thereby injure their self-development.

When the market rhetorician invites us to see the person as profit-maximizer in all things, a stark and substantively valueless universe is conveyed to us. It is the universe of the senseless and unending pursuit of money—a pursuit that is no less senseless and barely more satisfying in the rare moments of success allowed to some of its alienated participants. The image evoked by this characterization of market ideology serves to reconfirm the dismal picture of the increasing and destructive commodification of life that proceeds in domino fashion from existing market relations. Universal commodification has a triple role to play in a view like Radin’s. It must be clearly false so that the prospect of monetary domino processes can be both real and frightening. It must also be seductive enough to be guilty of contributing to those processes. Finally, it must be expressive of the underlying character of market society so that its falsity and its guilt reflect back upon the market. I shall suggest, however, that universal commodification is so clearly false that it cannot be very seductive and, further, that it is more of a parody than an expression of the underlying character of the market.

Presumably, the market rhetorician, whoever and wherever he is, is presenting a claim about the ultimate objective of action, or rational action, that is universalistic and of standard consequentialist form. That is, the rhetorician purports to reveal what goal underlies all action, or rational action, whether the action occurs in the market, in nonmarket aspects of market-oriented societies, or in thoroughly nonmarket societies. Descriptively, all the motivation for action derives from agents’ interest in the
specified goal. Prescriptively, all the motivation for rational action derives from the agents' interest in the specified goal. Universal commodification is, then, one member of a class of similar universally consequentialist theories. Each such theory identifies some state of affairs, for example, some type of experience or condition, as the ultimate goal of all action and/or rational action. Other states of affairs and, especially actions and relations, are pursued or are rationally pursued only on the basis of their contribution to attainment of that ultimate goal. Consider, for example, universal hedonism, according to which the ultimate objective of all action and, presumably, the only thing it makes sense to pursue for its own sake, is pleasure. Other states of affairs, for example, an agent's being alive or being knowledgeable, and all actions and relations are pursued and/or are rationally worthy of pursuit only insofar as they contribute to pleasurable consequences. As always, hedonistic utilitarianism is the paradigm of standard consequentialism. Complex forms of consequentialism that attach intrinsic value of either an agent-neutral or an agent-relative sort to actions or relations fall outside the standard format.

Obviously, there are two basic types of objection to any given theory that has this consequentialist form. One can deny that it correctly identifies the ultimate goal (or basket of goals) of all action or of all rational action. Or, more fundamentally, one can deny that actions, practices, relations, etc., need be motivated and/or evaluated in terms of their ultimate consequences. The opponent of universal hedonism can insist that something other than pleasure is the ultimate motive for all action or the ultimate standard for all rational action, or the opponent can insist that certain actions, practices, or relations are or deserve to be engaged in for their own sake and not merely for the sake of any further consequence. This more fundamental objection can take the form of a more complex consequentialism that assigns intrinsic value to certain actions. Or it can take the form of a deontic doctrine that yields judgments about the rightness or wrongness of actions that are not based on prior judgments about the value or disvalue of states of affairs or actions. This section takes note only of the first basic type of objection to universal commodification. The second basic type of objection, in the form of a more complex consequentialism, appears in the next section in connection with the contrast between internally and instrumentally valued actions.

What does the commodificationist assert to be the ultimate objective of human action? It cannot be money per se. This would at least be manifestly false with regard to actions undertaken in societies employing little or no money. Yet the imperialist economist seeks not only to explain apparently non-economic behavior in market societies, but all behavior in all societies. According to universal commodification, all things of value are described in money terms, can in principle be assigned a monetary equivalent, and all gains are monetarizable. Moreover, the monetary descriptions of all things of value, their monetary equivalents, are not epiphenomena that play no role in motivating or in evaluating action. Rather, it is the monetary equivalent of the object of any action that motivates that action and/or provides the basis for evaluating it. The money equivalent does the work. To say that I am a profit-maximizer in all things is to say that maximizing the sum of the monetary equivalents of the objects and states I possess explains my choices. But what precisely is it the maximization of the sum of which accounts for my decisions? What am I maximizing when, for example, I forego a certain amount of actual currency for the sake of leisure? It will not do to say that I am really increasing my income, as measured by that currency, because I would have paid more for that leisure than I have foregone to get it. For even if this is true, it neither explains or displays the rationality of my choice. Why would I have paid more of that currency for the leisure? The only answer consistent with the profit-maximizing model is that there is some more primordial currency in terms of which the leisure is worth more to me than the mundane currency I have to forego to get that leisure.

The commodificationist is, it seems, committed to there being a sort of ur-currency (The Exchangeable An Sich) such that the implicit goal of every person's (or every rational person's) actions is the maximization of his holdings of it. So, besides presupposing the commensurability of the good things of life in terms of their respective monetary equivalents, universal commodification is committed to a bizarrely inverted picture of the world. All the good things of life are portrayed as being pursued and/or as being worthy of pursuit because their attainment
maximizes the ur-currency payout. The value that resides in
our having anything consists in its potential for exchange.

No doubt it is the anticipation of the progressive adoption of
this view that inspires fears about loss of self. For this view does
not contemplate persons, with their respective bodily constitu-
tions, beliefs, desires, and commitments, for whom various
conditions, objects, relations, and actions are valuable either as
constitutive of their respective goods or instrumental to those
ends. Rather, the view abstracts from the concrete person for
whom these conditions, objects, etc., are valuable, sees their
value as their impersonal market value, and attempts to recon-
struct the value of the person or his life as the sum of those
abstracted, impersonal values. This does leave us with the vision
of persons as bundles of fungible goods. The person who has
that vision of himself will significantly lack what we normally
take to be a sense of self.13

If this is universal commodification, it surely is manifestly
false. Descriptively, even if we allow that for the goal of any
action there is a description in (ur)money terms that expresses
the value the agent places on attaining that goal, at least in
genral it will be the agent's placing value on or seeing value in
the goal that then allows the goal to be described in (ur)money
terms. While there may be some plausibility to the psychological
hedonist's claim that all outcomes are pursued because of their
perceived hedonic fecundity, it is far more difficult to credit the
intrinsic motivating force (much less the uniquely intrinsic force)
of The Exchangeable An Sich.14 And, prescriptively, even if we
allow that for any valuable goal there is a description in (ur)money
terms that corresponds to the value of the goal, there is no
plausibility to the claim that the goal's value is due to its mone-
tary equivalent. If this be universal commodification, it is so
manifestly false that those who fear its insidious effects should
encourage its explicit proclamation. Nothing else would so read-
ily remind us that, for any goal, action, or relation that has a
monetary equivalent, that monetary measure is not the source
of the value attached to that goal, action, or relation.

It is not easy to specify the alleged feature of life within the
market order of which universal commodification may be thought
to be a revealing manifestation. My guess is that the alleged
feature is the reduction of all motivation and practical rational-
ity to pointless instrumental motivation and rationality. I imag-
ine the idea is that: (1) There is a strong tendency for each
individual in the market order to be motivated to engage in or
pursue and to believe himself to have reason to engage in or
pursue actions, relations, and states of affairs only insofar as
they are perceived to have monetary payoffs; while (2) mone-
tary payoffs lack the substantive value they would have to have
in order to confer even genuine instrumental value upon the
means to those payoffs. The crucial and contentious claim is (1),
which is hardly subject to philosophical evaluation. Were (1)
true, however, one would expect a higher savings rate than
characterizes our market society and less consumer spending.
The response that by means of consumer spending, people
display their monetary success, is one which posits something
other than monetary payoff as the ultimate goal of people's
actions.

IV. OPTING FOR THE NON-CASH Nexus

The concern evoked by the monetary version of the domino
theory is, in fact, not about people being caught up in a conceptu-
ally bizarre maximization of The Exchangeable An Sich. Rather,
it is a concern that actions and relations that are not appro-
priately perceived and evaluated in monetary terms—ordinary
monetary terms—will come to be so perceived and evaluated.
The concern is with the psychological monetarization of these
activities and relations. In order to begin to get a purchase on
this fearful monetarization, consider a homey example. For
Christmas I bought my wife a nice wool sweater. I did not buy
her a gift certificate equal in cost to that sweater even though
doing so would have economized on my shopping time and
would have less constrained her consumer choice. Worse yet,
from the perspective of what is supposed to be market rational-
ity, I did not hand her an envelope with the equivalent cash—
even though this was the alternative that would most fully have
economized on my shopping time while also most fully preserv-
ing her consumer sovereignty. The sources of my conduct are,
no doubt, many and varied. Perhaps as a victim of commodity
fetishism I enjoy shopping and, perhaps paternalistically, I pre-
fer my taste in women's sweaters to my wife's. Yet I do not think
that factors of this sort explain why I prefer bestowing the sweater to conferring the cash-filled envelope. And I cannot satisfactorily account for my choosing to shop for and bestow the sweater rather than presenting a cash-filled envelope by citing my wife's preference for gift bestowal over cash conferral. This citation would just raise the question of why she has that noneconomic preference and why I wish to satisfy it.

Consider another, more complex case. A friend is in the hospital and has used a lot of blood. I go to the hospital and donate blood to his account. For every pint donated to his account he is not charged for a pint of blood he has used. However, my friend is not in dire financial straits; and—in these circumstances anyway—were the available alternative a cash donation sufficient to cover the charge for one pint of blood, I would not make that payment. If I had a choice between the two forms of donation, I would certainly opt for the in-kind donation. (In the real world circumstances it occurs to me that my friend's medical coverage probably picks up most of the charges for blood used. Yet this somehow does not seem relevant to my decision. It would seem more relevant if the only available form of donation was cash.)

I value giving a pint of my blood more highly than I value giving the $50 that would buy my friend a comparable pint of blood. Do I prefer donating the blood to donating the $50 because I value the money more highly than I value the blood? Apparently not. For I would not sell the pint of blood for this amount of money. The cost to me of going through the process of giving blood were I to go through this process for the sake of a $50 payment exceeds the cost to me of foregoing that payment. Yet the value to me of giving blood for this friend clearly exceeds the $50 which I forego in sales revenue.

What these fascinating little stories bring out is that what one sometimes cares about is being engaged in a certain activity or relation. One wants to please a loved one, express one's affection in a way that especially exemplifies one's sense of another individual, or to stand by a friend in a personal way that directly responds to what he has undergone. Here we are two steps removed from any standard consequentialist account of the value of actions. We would be one step removed from that standard picture were we to ascribe value to some action, for example, the direct donation of blood, in virtue of what type of action it is and not simply in virtue of the value of the states of affairs the action produced. Here we are further removed by valuing, not the occurrence of an action of a certain type, but rather one's own particular engagement. One does not abstractly value the performance of certain types of action, much less the type of condition produced by the action. Rather, one values one's doing this or that with respect to this special individual (or group of individuals).

My having the option of simply and directly saving my friend $50 by applying $50 to his hospital bill does not lead me to view my donating my blood as merely a matter of saving him $50. If it did, I would not donate the blood since I would not donate the $50 (given his financial condition) were that my only alternative. Indeed, my recognition upon reflection on the mechanics of the blood donation and insurance systems that at most he only benefits financially from my actual donation of the blood, does not deter me from giving the blood. For, despite this reflective knowledge, I continue to perceive my action as a precisely responsive and personal reaction to his having lost blood. And since this is what I value doing, this is what I do. Were my friend to learn of my blood donation, presumably he would not perceive this as equivalent to a cash donation to either himself or to his insurance company—although this would be the view of standard consequentialist eyes. Similarly, my having the option of presenting my wife with the cash equivalent does not lead me to view bestowal of the sweater as merely a matter of saving her the cost of securing that sweater. It does not lead her, I hope, to seeing my action as equivalent to saving her a certain outlay in cash and time.

These little stories, especially the blood donation story, suggest an account of how the domino theory can be false. It is simply that a given nonmarket interaction is not simply a fee-free version of its (closest) market counterpart. Providing someone with funds to cover the fee for needed blood does not accomplish what one accomplishes in donating blood. This discrepancy between what the market can deliver and what can be delivered in a nonmarket manner is especially clear in the area where the domino theory is manifestly empirically false: sex or sexual love. Why does a market in sexual services not drive out
or undercut free-of-charge sex? Because we are talking about two radically different—albeit not absolutely different—forms of human interaction. What I have called, with intentional perversity, free-of-charge sex, is sex engaged in by the agent for the sake of the pleasure of that agent, the pleasure of the agent's partner, the pleasure in the pleasure of the partner, the pleasure of the partner in the pleasure of the agent's pleasure about being the agent of this partner's pleasure, etc., where "pleasure" of course is a misleadingly narrow term for all the valued sensations, emotions, relations, etc. involved. Qua agent in such a sexual exchange one correctly does not think of oneself as providing a service. And qua recipient in such a sexual exchange one correctly does not think of oneself as receiving a service.

This is not to say that marketed sex cannot ever have or be perceived as having the qualities of nonmarket sex or that nonmarket sex cannot at all be motivated by instrumental considerations. There is no readily observed limit to the complexity of our motivations, to our ability to combine incongruent motivations, and to our capacity to delude ourselves about what we are doing and why. But the potential for a complex intermeshing of sex engaged in purely for the sake of an external payoff and sex engaged in for the sake of the valued intrinsic features of that sexual relation does not negate the difference between these two or the capacity of the typical supplier or consumer to recognize this difference. This, again, is why the supplier of nonmarket sex will not see himself as merely saving his partner the price of a prostitute. Hence, even in a world in which commercial sex exists, he will still think that he can give effect to and fulfill his noninstrumental motives for giving sex.

Understanding even such simple and common nonmarket actions and relations and the discrepancy between them and their closest market counterparts requires abandonment of the standard consequentialist picture. It requires that actions (and perhaps other non-states of affairs) sometimes be valuable and undertaken for their own sake and not merely for the sake of their anticipated consequences. We should distinguish between internally valuable and motivated activities and (merely) instrumentally valuable and motivated activities.¹⁶ The existence of internally motivated actions contradicts the descriptive side of standard consequentialism while the existence of internally valuable actions contradicts its prescriptive side. The existence of these actions is the basis for the second and more fundamental objection to any version of standard consequentialism, for example, to universal commodification, anticipated in section 3.

Internally motivated actions are undertaken by a person because of the value that person perceives in or attaches to his performance of that action, to the relations it places him in, or to the overall scheme or way of life that is partly constituted by his performance of that action. When value attaches to this person's action in virtue of the value that attaches to the relations or ways of life the action helps to constitute, there is a sense in which the value adheres to the action because of the value of the action's results. Yet in such a case there is a complex interplay between the value of the result and the value perceived in the action itself. One values another's being better off as a result of one's generosity. But it is at least partially that other person's being better off by means of one's act that one values and that feeds back into the value of one's generous act. In contrast, an action is instrumentally motivated insofar as it is performed for the sake of an outcome that is conceived of and valued entirely separately from one's performance. The value of the action entirely derives from the external value of its yield.

It seems clear that there are internally motivated activities; except to the dedicated moral skeptic or standard consequentialist, it seems plausible that some of these are internally valuable. Productive activity carried on for its own sake, the proverbial self-actualizing work, epitomizes internally motivated and valuable activity. Economic activity engaged in for the sake of payment, in cash or kind, the proverbial alienating labor, epitomizes instrumentally motivated and, at most, instrumentally valuable action. The monetary domino theory, requiring as it does disbelief in universal commodification, requires belief in internally motivated and valuable activities. These must exist so that monetary domino processes can threaten their extinction.

Yet, rather than heighten fears about monetary domino processes, I think that this distinction helps allay them in two ways. The first way, already mentioned and to be re-emphasized in the next section, is that the distinction reminds us of how readily people operating out there in the real world can identify and be motivated by the value of various activities and relations and
thereby resist the pressure of domino processes. The second way is that the distinction between internally valuable and motivated actions and (merely) instrumentally valuable and motivated ones allows us to dispel a misleading contrast between the altruism of nonmarket activities and the selfishness of market activities. The association of nonmarket activities with altruism and market activities with selfishness falsely conveys a sense of mutually repelling polar opposition between nonmarket and market activities. But the distinction between altruism and selfishness does not in fact correspond to the distinction crucial to describing and anticipating the force of domino processes, that is, the distinction between internally and instrumentally motivated and valuable activities.

It is mistaken to think of all those internally valued activities as altruistic in the sense of having the purpose of serving others, especially at some perceived loss for oneself. And it is mistaken to think that the type of displacement of internal valuation by instrumental valuation that domino processes are supposed to threaten must occur through the invasion of a market rationality that is selfish in the sense of having the purpose of advancing one's interests fairly narrowly construed.

Radin herself recognizes that attention to nonmarket sex relations reminds us that not all nonmarket activities are altruistic. She writes, "Those who are against monetized sex are probably against altruistic sex also." Nevertheless, she continually suggests a general association of nonmarket interactions with altruism and service to others. For example, workers who care about their work and not merely the money it brings are thereby declared to be givers. But this association of productive activity (or athletic or artistic activity) engaged in for its own sake or for the sake of valued productive cooperation with "altruism" is as forced as the tie between internally valued sexual activity and sacrificial service to others.

At what point does internally valued activity that is perceived as enhancing another's welfare become altruistic? The donation of blood to a friend is done for the value of one's standing in a certain special relation to that person, albeit the friend's need is a precondition of the relation's being possible and valuable. More distant and impersonal contributions, for example, the donation of cash for famine relief, also can be done nonaltruist-

cally—out of generosity, sympathy, and sense of solidarity even with far-off people and for the sake of realizing those traits in oneself—albeit the need of those people is a precondition of one's valued action. It should be clear that these are no more egotistical accounts of internally valued actions than are the nonaltruistic accounts of the knowledge-seeker's or the stamp collector's internally valued actions. My point is simply to undercut the implied link between internally valued activities and altruism and the implied polar opposition between internally valued activities and (purportedly) selfish market activities.

Nor am I implying that no acts are really altruistic. But, ironically, the actions that are most plausibly described as altruistic are performed as instrumentally valued means toward standardly consequentialist ends. I am acting altruistically if, solely on the conviction that this will increase the balance of good over bad in the world, I take an intrinsically unrewarding second job in order to contribute the proceeds to famine relief. I act for the sake of that balance of good over bad without personal reward either in the results or the course of my activity. The irony is that a policy of acting in accord with such a standardly consequentialist view threatens precisely the more particularist values of personhood and community that anti-commodifiers cherish.

It is not only that the actions demanded by a standard consequentialism will compete with and morally outweigh the actions constitutive and expressive of one's personhood and personal relations. In addition, acceptance of such a morality commits one to evaluating all one's possessions, skills, hopes, personal ties, etc., in terms of their payoffs for and their costs in the universal maximizing program. A thoughtful person will inevitably come to see his more personal projects, his distinctive values and commitments, as costly, unjustified self-indulgences. By pursuing intrinsically rewarding work, I rob others of the good I might have done for them either directly or through financial contribution. By donating blood for a friend, I rob others of the famine relief funds that I could have generated through the sale of my blood. Calculation for altruism, the potential demands of which are unending, can threaten the perceptions and evaluations needed for personhood and community as much, if not more, than calculation for individual
the potential blood donor may think that the only thing that differentiates him from the blood seller is his willingness to forego the $50, his willingness that the blood recipient be spared a $50 charge.

This is less of a mistake than the lover’s thinking that he is saving his partner the cost of a prostitute. But isn’t it still a mistake? Whatever reasons we have for regretting the prospective discouraging of the blood donor (aside from worries about the overall supply of blood, which could be handled by offering a high enough price for blood) are reasons for the potential donor himself to distinguish between giving blood and (merely) saving the recipient the price of blood. Those reasons have to do with the values of acting out of friendship or fellow feeling in particular ways that, at least conventionally or symbolically, represent direct responses to another’s condition, and the value to the recipient of being responded to in this way. The donor’s action still achieves these values or, perhaps, especially achieves these values, in a world in which some blood moves in the market. It seems that all potential donors have to do in order to avoid making the lover’s mistake is to remember that sometimes what is valuable is one’s engagement in a particular action or relation. One need only remember that what is valuable for each of us is our living our lives in certain ways, not simply our being generators of or ready receptacles for good consequences.

Typically, one can know the price of something yet not identify the value of that something with its monetary price because the two somethings are not identical. Giving blood is not the same as giving cash to purchase blood. The friendship one receives free of charge is not the same as the friendship one would otherwise pay for. What is paid for when one “buys” a child is the opportunity to become parent to that child (the child it will become through one’s parentage of it); one does not buy that developing child and one’s relation to it. The costs incurred for such an opportunity can hardly be identified with the value (even the discounted value!) one enjoys in the child.

The value for oneself of what one has or does need not be identified with the market price one foregoes or the market price one pays. Neither should the value of what is done for one be identified with the market price which otherwise one might have paid for the closest market counterpart to what one

financial enrichment. Indeed, the particularist character of the values of personhood and community seem to be more threatened by the prescriptive call for universal hedonism or welfareism than by either the prescriptive call for the maximization of ordinary monetary holdings or the prescriptive call for the maximization of The Exchangeable An Sich. For, whatever their implausibilities, universal hedonism and welfarism at least avoid positing as ultimately valuable something that is obviously solely of instrumental value or something that is contentless.

V. The Persistence of Internally Valued Activities

There must be some difference between blood and sex—for there is some evidence that commodified blood does crowd out nonmarket blood—indeed, crowds out more nonmarket blood than commodification at standard prices draws forth. The sort of story told by Titmuss and Singer about how this crowding out occurs is not inherently implausible. The speculation is that when blood has no market price potential donors are strongly motivated to give blood because they (correctly) perceive that only through such gifts will those needing blood receive it and that to give under such circumstances is to bestow an enormous benefit—life itself. This motivation is lost, it is suggested, when commercial blood enters the scene and more giving is discouraged than selling is encouraged.

Blood is a good while sex is an activity (or a service). The blood with which the patient is about to be transfused is much further detached from its donor and, therefore from the donor’s motivation, than the sex that the partner is about to enjoy is detached from the sexual agent—especially since the sex depends upon an ongoing complicated interplay between agent and partner. For this reason it makes sense to say—there is a sense in which it is true—that purchased blood is as good as, because it is the same thing as, donated blood. (I leave aside contingent complications regarding both the quality of blood and the quality of sex.) The recipient is unable to distinguish between blood that has been given and blood that has been sold. In this respect there is no discrepancy between what the market can deliver and what can be delivered by gift. Focusing on this fact,
has received. Yet the Titmuss/Singer account also focuses on how commercialization of blood is supposed to diminish the value to the recipient of receiving blood and on the fact that this diminution undercuts donation on the part of those who want to give something of great, indeed, unmeasured, value. Here, again, I want to suggest that insofar as this process actually occurs, it rests on a mistake on the part of the potential donor. It is simply not true that the value to the patient of the blood that is donated to him is what he would otherwise have to pay for it. Were the subjective value of commodities identical to their market price, no commodities would ever exchange (and there would be no market prices and no commodities). A system that provides the patient with blood for a $50 charge enormously benefits him. In this case, as in others, even the very object that has a market price (that is, the blood) can be priceless valuable. If you donate the blood or receive a donation, you are still directly and intentionally giving life or receiving it, even though it is also true that via commercialization people can get life at a bargain price. It remains true that the donor has saved somebody’s life even if there was another Good Samaritan or paid rescuer waiting in the wings.

I have argued that commercialization should not stand in the way of one’s realizing the value of responding in friendship, or empathy, or solidarity, to the needful condition of another. But commercialization does stand in the way of realizing a related, but more complex, desire. This is not the desire to respond in a certain way given the other’s needful condition, but rather the desire that this response on one’s part be needed. It is the desire that one’s responsive act be indispensable to the relief of the other’s needful condition. Even less attractively, it can be portrayed as the desire for the needful person to be utterly dependent upon one’s going to his aid. (But not because one wants to threaten not to go to his aid.) It is not a desire merely for opportunities for altruism but rather for there being dependents upon (one’s) altruism.

Commercialization frustrates this sort of desire by eliminating the needful one’s dependency on those who value one’s dependency on them. This speaks well for commercialization, for this sort of desire seems to me to be thoroughly worthy of frustration. Again, this is not to deny the value of acts of direct friend-

ship, generosity, etc.—their value to those who perform them and the value of the knowledge that they have been performed to the recipients of those acts. To be shown friendship and noncalculating support in a time of need is a good that quite literally cannot be purchased at any price. It is because neither it nor any close substitute can be purchased that commercialization need not threaten the bestowal of this good or the good of bestowing it. The only good reason for desiring dependency on such acts is the proposition that, if dependency does not obtain, the value of the acts and reception of them will dissipate or be forgotten. Since I find this proposition dubious, the only remaining reasons I see for desiring dependency are the unwhole-

some desires to be depended upon and to be dependent.

VI. THE PERSISTENCE OF
INSTRUMENTALLY VALUED ACTIVITIES

In seeking to cast doubt on the idea that, within the market order, monetarizing domino processes develop dangerously powerful momentum, I may seem to have endorsed implicitly the normative ideal that the best life is one in which all actions are internally motivated. On the contrary, however, such an ideal is at best silly. Imagine that we were miraculously freed from the need to engage in decisions and endeavors for the sake of their externally valued consequences. That is, imagine that we were finally and totally released from the realm of necessity. One’s only choices would be about which of the available internally valued activities or relations one should pursue. Let us further assume that such choices would themselves be effortless either because the available alternatives would not conflict or because their respective intrinsic values would be readily commensurable. There would be no hard choices impinging upon the realm of freedom. Yet, under these circumstances, one’s life would hover between the brutishness of immediate (albeit, perhaps, polymorphous) gratification and the godliness of post-revolutionary fulfillment. The tendency would, I think, be to settle on the former. The more elevated fulfillments would only be available to those individuals who had previously postponed gratification in order to prepare themselves for those highbrow evenings of literary criticism. Absent
such instrumentally motivated preparation, there would not be
much of a self to be gratified or fulfilled.

Moreover, it would be a mistake to forget the many less lovely
forms of internally motivated actions. The individual acting out
of malice, sadism, or power lust is also engaged in activity for its
own sake, or for the sake of the relations of power or domi-
nance it serves, and not for the sake of some entirely externally
valued end. The sadist’s actions as much involve the personal
touch as the lover’s. With respect to such cases, we may well
long for an insidious domino process which, for example, by so
focusing the sadist’s mind on the financial opportunity costs of
his leisure-time torture, leads him away from his meaningful
personal relations into an alienating pursuit of Mammon.

This is not to deny the possibility of lives in which all or almost
all major undertakings are significantly and attractively suffused
with the agents’ respective values. It is not crazy to aspire to a
rewarding career, valued avocations, and warm, affirming, fa-
miliar relations and friendships. But these and similar com-
ponents of an enviable life all have their inescapable and deeply
embedded necessities. These include the costs of opportunities
foregone, the costs of developing the insights and skills and
strength of will needed to choose well among opportunities, and
to choose apt and mutually coherent routes to chosen ends. A
tolerance for costs, either in the form of foregone ends or
nonrewarding means, is crucial to life building, that is, crucial
to personhood and community. A social system that does not
free its members from all internally unrewarding necessities
need not be an enemy of personhood and community.

Moreover, at least in socially complex and technologically
advanced societies, the islands of self-realization that indi-
viduals do create are secured and supported by vast networks
of nonintrusively instrumental ties. There are the commonly
impersonal ties to one’s employer, to the manufacturer of one’s
favorite camera, fishing equipment, or music albums, to one’s
real-estate agent or neighborhood drug dealer, to the trustee of
one’s annuity plan, and the impersonal ties of all of these people
to yet others. It is precisely these networks that made possible
the great variety of chosen arenas for self-fulfillment that char-
acterize pluralistic liberal societies. These impersonal ties, which
sustain a pluralist pursuit of personhood and community be-
cause they do not require uniformity of belief in substantive
values, are constituted by market relations that are motivated
largely by anticipated monetary payoffs.

It is certain, however, that observation of and participation in
market relations does act as a solvent of traditional and habitu-
ally valued patterns of behavior and does encourage people to
pursue or create alternative courses of action on the basis of the
longer term and, hence, external payoffs of those courses of
action. One of the great liberating features of the market order
is the way it challenges existing social patterns. Consider the
traditional housewife who, upon seeing many women from her
neighborhood working outside the home and hiring household
help, begins to wonder whether what she is doing is merely
saving the household budget the cost of a housekeeper. Is this a
hurtful commodification of her previously internally valued ac-
tivity or a necessary ingredient in her more autonomously de-
ciding what to do with her life? Another liberating feature of
the market order is precisely its depersonalization and monetar-
ization of otherwise oppressive and intrusive relations. One is
freed from society as one big family. The alternative to the
society of contract is the society of status. While the latter may
provide its creatures with a sense of self and place, it is an
assigned self and a confined place.

Life in a market order does encourage the instrumental
rationality of projecting and choosing among complex plans
that involve elaborate hierarchies of instrumentalities, and that
may require the postponement, or even abandonment, of oth-
erwise available forms of satisfaction. Of course, the special role
of instrumental rationality and the postponement of gratifica-
tion within the market order can be exaggerated. This exag-
geration is natural in reaction to the false nostalgic picture of prior
ages in which hearty yeomen and self-realized craftsmen could
achieve their long-term goals of sustaining themselves, their
families, and their lords and bishops by rewarding and joyful
toil.

Yet, whether or not instrumental rationality is especially char-
acteristic of market societies, it would be an error to picture the
typical practitioner of instrumental rationality as radically sepa-
rating instrumentally motivated activities and relations from the
internally valued activities, relations, and other ends that they
allow him to enjoy. As Radin notes with regard to occupational decisions, means to ends may be chosen partly on the basis of their own appeal. Activities and relations originally adopted purely for the sake of their external payoffs may come, perhaps through association with those payoffs and perhaps by tapping an unrecognized interest in those activities or relations, also to be valued in themselves. (Recall the previously noted capacity of people complexly to intermingle internal and instrumental sexual motivations.) People who join firms for the sake of the salaries and retirement benefits develop valued personal ties and institutional loyalties. Owners of car-repair shops may quite calculatingly set out to be friendly with and have a personal relation with their customers; their customers, in turn, may cunningly invest some time and effort in developing these personal relations. Yet that does not mean that some comfortably low-keyed bond of mutual recognition and confidence will not ensue. 21 I assume that Radin does not mean to deny this interpretation of what is instrumentally and what is intrinsically valued when she writes that “Commercial friendship is a contradiction in terms.” 22

It is, of course, always possible to develop a disproportionate occupation with the means one employs toward one's further ends, be it with money, or vitamins, or the favor of those in authority. So, in a society in which money is a key means for achieving ends, fears about the commodification of activities and relations that should be valued for their own sake are not fantastic. There are features of our society that may dim people's perception of the values internal to certain ways of acting and relating to other people. There is a consequentialist mentality, strongly exemplified by but hardly the product of or confined to Chicago economics, that portrays the value of actions and relations as entirely derivative of their consequent, external payoffs. Given this perspective, actions performed in the market for the sake of their financial payoff may come to be seen as paradigmatic of all rational action. Dovetailing with this perception is the appeal of money as the best candidate—which is not to say that it is a good candidate—for a common standard by which most, if not all, of our endeavors can be measured against one another. The plausibility of money as the measure of all things—if there is to be a measure of all things—is further reinforced in monetarized market societies that emphasize a systematic connection between success, reward, and money. These are reasons for moralists to be concerned with portraying more adequate conceptions of human flourishing. But, in standardly liberal fashion, I presume that such projects of moral edification are to take place outside of the political realm and without employing the power of the state to supplement the persuasive powers of the moralists.

But rather than attempt to defend this general presumption, I return to my basic question for those who fearfully entertain the monetary domino theory. If nonmarket activities and relations are so much better, so much more valuable, than their market counterparts (if any), and if market activities and relations do not preclude these internally valuable activities and ties (and I have argued that commercialization only precludes the indispensability of nonmarket activities and relations), then won't people in general continue their nonmarket, internally motivated, actions and relations—unless people in general be knaves or fools? And if the problem is that people are such knaves or fools that they cannot recognize or will not choose these components of human flourishing, then who is to be entrusted to design and enforce limitations on the market that will advance genuine personhood and community?

NOTES

1. Its advocates point out that production for exchange is crucial for a pluralist society because it allows cooperation among individuals who do not share substantive values. Production for monetary exchange allows this exchange to transcend the barriers of barter.
4. According to Radin: “Under universal commodification, market trading and its outcomes represent individual freedom and the ideal for individuals and society. Unrestricted choice about what goods to trade represents individual freedom, and maximizing individual gains from trade represents the individual’s ideal. All social and political interactions
are conceived of as exchanges for monetizable gains" (Radin, "Market-Inalienability," 1861).
6. The peaceful co-existence that Radin calls for between market and nonmarket aspects of people's lives is akin to a policed quota system. Only so much commodification of this or that aspect of life will be allowed. Insofar as it is feasible, so much non-commodification of this or that aspect of life will be mandated.
9. However, Radin points out in "Market-Inalienability" that "Universal commodification is an archetype, a caricature" (1862).
10. Radin speculates that "it may be that market rhetoric, the discourse of commodification ... [t]o the extent the rhetoric is internalized ... alienates us from our true selves as persons" ("Justice and the Market Domain," 190).
11. In a manner that parallels a focus on monetarization, the observer who is concerned about the force of hedonistic domino processes must disbelieve in universal hedonism. Yet that observer is likely to consider universal hedonism to be highly seductive and to perceive the belief in and promulgation of universal hedonism to be expressive of the underlying and increasing hedonism that he deplores.
12. If profit or income maximizing is not supposed to explain preferences among alternatives, but is only a different way of saying that people prefer what they do and do what they prefer, it loses all its imperial force.
13. Again, a hedonic parallel exists. If someone comes to believe that the good lies in the maximization of pleasure, in himself or across the collective, that person too may come to see all attributes, conditions, etc., as resources that are valuable only insofar as they can be converted into or traded for pleasure. Under these circumstances, we might observe the dissolution of self feared by the opponent of universal hedonism.
14. Recall that even frenzied pursuit of real mundane money is no more evidence of the pursuit of ur-currency for its own sake than is the pursuit of nonmonetary goals evidence against the universal motivating force of ur-currency. It's that sort of theory.
15. I assume no significant wealth effect. That is, the value to me of the $50 I would surrender through a cash donation is not significantly greater than the value to me of the $50 I would receive were I to sell my blood.

17. Radin, "Justice and the Market Domain."
18. The desire to preserve what I have called the "particularist" values of personhood and community against the onslaught of evaluative universalism reminds one of the strand of anticonsequentialist thought in recent moral literature that began, perhaps, with Bernard Williams's "A Critique of Utilitarianism," in J. J. C. Smart and Bernard Williams, Utilitarianism For and Against (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973). For a recent statement of this anticonsequentialism, see Loren Lomasky's Persons, Rights and the Moral Community (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).
19. Radin thinks that the concept of altruism already presupposes more distance between people than we wish to countenance in our ideals of sexuality. I suggest a parallel, but more general, tension between altruism and the ideals of personhood and community.
21. I hypothesize that here, as everywhere else, unintentionally beneficent invisible-hand forces are more at work than critics of the market realize. People pursue, usually without conscious design, an "optimal" mix of personal commitments and freedom from social bondage. And the market, which includes both for-profit and not-for-profit institutions, is always alert to the differing demands from potential customers for autonomy and for belonging.