ONE

Exchange in Human Goods

For I can raise no money by vile means:
By heaven, I had rather coin my heart,
And drop my blood for drachmas . . .
JULIUS CAESAR 4.3.80–82

There is no production market for human blood and organs. In most parts of the world, it is illegal to sell your blood and you cannot offer one of your kidneys (or those of a dead relative) for sale. With the major exception of plasma in the United States, these goods—all of which are in great demand—are supplied for free by voluntary donors.

The gift exchange of these goods is unusual enough to have provoked a long-running though sporadic debate about its importance. Thanks in part to new possibilities for commercial trade in human goods opened up by medical science, and to the growth in for-profit traffic in human organs and tissue around the world, these arguments have recently been taken up with renewed vigor in a number of disciplines.[1] At their core are questions about how and why the introduction of money affects formerly noncommercial goods and the social relations that surround them. Is there something special about the things we reserve for nonmonetary exchange? Does gift exchange have beneficial effects that market exchange does not?

Although gift giving is the mechanism through which most blood and organs are collected, it does not happen everywhere in the same way or to the same extent. The number of organs and the volume of blood given each year, both cross-nationally and within particular countries, vary widely. This fact has not received enough attention in debates about the morality of gift and market exchange in human goods. Yet its implications are striking. If donation simply involves individuals coming forward to give, in much the same way everywhere, why is it so much more common in some countries and regions than in others? Why, for instance, have more than 40 percent of French people given blood but only 16 percent of Norwegians? Why is it that, in the United States, the Midwest yields twice as many organ donors, proportionate to its population, as the South? Does this variation have something to do with the ways the procurement of blood and organs is organized in different places? This is the question I ask in this book.

Put in its broadest terms, my argument is this: to understand this world of goods we must get away from the character and motives of individual donors and look instead to the cultural contexts and organizational mechanisms that provide people with reasons and opportunities to give. Further, we will not understand the social organization of procurement—whether gift based or for profit—if we think there is a simple division between giving and selling. In this introductory chapter, I sketch the theoretical questions at stake and give some background on the specific cases of blood and organs. I then go through some current arguments about commodification and altruism in more detail, with an eye to their relevance to the main question. Finally, I lay out the argument of the book.

Commodifying the Body

Exchange in human goods has grown rapidly over the past thirty years. By human goods I mean body parts or products, from corneas to cadavers; by exchange, any transfer of them, from altruistic donation to for-profit sales. A sense of the size and variety of the "body bazaar" can be found in a recent survey that documents the growth in markets for products as diverse as human hair, leukemia cells, eggs, entire bodies, genetic material, placentas, and brains.[2] As the range and volume of this kind of exchange has grown, so has debate about the form it should take, the risk of exploitation to those involved, and, above all, the proper role of the market. As a rule, the debate is cast as one in which existing relations of selfless, altruistic exchange are threatened with replacement by market-based, for-profit alternatives.

Blood and organ donors give of themselves both figuratively and literally. This mingling of metaphor and reality means that exchange in human goods always has the potential to be more than a simple transfer of products. The U.S. blood supply grew out of the war effort in the 1940s, when the idea of the "nation's blood" was not merely an abstract idea.[3] Blood donations always jump suddenly after disasters as people express their sorrow in a direct and practical way, even though their gift may not always be needed. The long queues outside hospitals and blood centers around the country following the September 11 attacks are the most striking recent example of the moral economy of donation.[4]

While the free gift of blood is seen as an expression of social solidarity, profit-making blood centers have been held up as examples of the depths to which the market can drag a society. In the early 1970s, when the for-profit sale of blood was at its peak in the United States, news features about the squalid world of "ooze for booze" blood centers were common.[5] The international market in blood has proved a powerful symbol of global inequality, too. Douglas Starr describes the fate of the Compañía Centroamericana de Plasmaféresis, a large plasma center in Managua during the Somoza dictatorship that bought its product from poor locals and sold it to companies in the United States. The Somoza family appeared to be involved in the business. After a journalist investigating the plant was killed in suspicious circumstances, the building—known locally as *casa de vampiros*—was attacked by protesters and burned to the ground.[6] Commercial trade in both blood and organs has been seen as the leading edge of a market invasion. Organ procurement has uncomfortable echoes of nineteenth-century body snatching and grave robbing.[7] Policy critics like Jeremy Rifkin and Andrew Kimbrell have argued that technological change in science and medicine, combined with the profit motive, has led companies to turn the human body into a "human body shop."[8] Anthropologists have documented the recent growth of black and gray markets in human organs, in which poor Brazilians, Moldovans, or Filipinos sell their kidneys to wealthy citizens of more developed countries in transactions facilitated by organ brokers.[9] For all these reasons, the sale of human body parts is a standard trope in broader debates about commodification.

The blood supply is generally sufficient for medical needs but is prone to shortages. The demand for organs, by contrast, far outruns the supply. For some commentators, the natural solution to shortages is to introduce a financial incentive—a market price for organs —thus turning donors into paid suppliers. Long considered beyond the pale, the for-profit exchange of blood and organs is now a serious alternative to current policy. For many, however, the prospect of commercial traffic in organs remains disturbing, even obscene, and an altruistic system seems the only morally viable solution. Their intuition is that if the market is going to do damage anywhere, it will be in the exchange of human body products or parts. This area, they believe, is naturally governed by norms of gift giving, altruism, affection, or love, all of which are prime candidates for dissolution or debasement by market institutions.

Commodities are goods produced in order to be traded on markets for profit, and to commodify something is simply to create a market for its exchange where none existed before. But ever since Marx's critique of commodification, the term has connoted much more than this. Marx sees two main things wrong with commodity exchange under capitalism. First, it is exploitative. Marx argues that capitalism cannot exist without a pool of workers who have nothing but their labor power to sell and that the cycle of competition between capitalists will tend to keep wages low.[10] Workers are therefore systematically vulnerable to capitalists in the labor market. Second, this exploitation is obscured because capitalist markets lead people to believe that commodities possess value in their own right, rather than because of the social labor that goes into producing them. This is commodity fetishism.[11] Capitalism is not the only exploitative economic system, but in most others the ultimate source of value—the labor of peasants in a manorial economy, for instance—is at least clear to everyone. Under capitalism, these social relations of production are obscured because people are linked only through the exchange of goods in the market. As a result, the goods appear to have value through some mysterious power of their own.[12]

In one sense, Marx's arguments imply that markets in human goods are no different from other markets. Here, as elsewhere under capitalism, we can expect the vulnerable to be preyed upon. It is not such a big step from exploiting the labor power embodied in workers to exploiting those bodies themselves. Marx's rhetoric, however, shows us that there might be more at stake. His critique of capitalistic commodification is filled with metaphors of bodily violation. The commodity form is "always ready to exchange not only soul, but body, with each and every other commodity."[13] The factory night shift "only slightly quenches the vampire thirst for the living blood of labour,"[14] while apologists for industry insist that "British industry, . . . vampire like, could but live by sucking blood, and children's blood, too."[15] Whereas labor power has "no other repository than human flesh and blood,"[16] the magic of credit means "man himself has been changed into money or money has become incarnate in him. Human individuality, human morality has itself become both an article of commerce and the material in which money exists. Credit no longer analyses money value into money but into human flesh and the human heart."[17] Conversely, the "capitalized blood of children" or other workers moves easily from one country to the next. In all, "capital comes dripping from head to toe, from every pore, with blood and dirt."[18] In considering trade in human blood and organs, then, we find ourselves facing a *literal* market in the very things Marx used as metaphors of capitalistic excess. Horror at the prospect of wholly commodified bodies is built into the foundational critique of capitalist society. We should not be surprised, then, when people see these markets as a confirmation of Marx's intuitions about the insatiability of capitalism.

Marx presented a comprehensive critique of capitalism as a whole, and this is not the place to assess its merits or detail its difficulties. But the problems he identified—systematic exploitation and the atomizing, socially destructive nature of market exchange—are, though often in more refined or narrowly targeted forms, still central to contemporary debates.[19] Critics worry that, by allowing market logic to dictate the terms of an exchange, we risk losing something important. Markets reduce different ways of valuing things to one dimension, measured in money. They encourage us to treat people as means rather than ends. They erode our desire to carry out principled actions unmotivated by profit. They undermine altruistic action—whether heroic or mundane—by rendering it unintelligible. (Why do something for free when you could be paid for it?) They break up social relations, networks, or forms of organization and replace them with ersatz equivalents devoid of depth and meaning.[20] It is also often argued that commodification can have negative effects both on the goods being traded and the people who exchange them.[21] Goods can be debased by money, as, for instance, when someone tries to buy an award or an academic degree. In the same way, people can be corrupted by money, as they come to act only out of self-interest or for profit, and treat others as means to their own ends.

Recent commentators are much less likely than Marx to believe that all goods and actions are equally susceptible to the market's dangers. It is hard to see how commodifying the exchange of, say, paper clips would do anything to debase the paper clips themselves. And it is easy to think of cases where self-interest is an uncontroversially appropriate motive, as when one fends off an attacker. Indeed, as Jon Elster points out, while we can imagine a (nasty) world where everyone is always and only self-interested, a world populated only by pure altruists is harder to conceive. It might be possible for some people to always and only care for the welfare of others, but this could not be true of everyone. Accepting assistance means putting yourself first at least some of the time, and in this sense altruism is parasitic on self-interest. [22] As for the moral dangers posed by commodification (as opposed to mere self-interest), few if any argue that trying to make an honest living in business is an inherently debasing activity that entails being corrupted by money. There is a distinction between profit making and profiteering.

This raises the question of where to draw the line. Goods will not conveniently classify themselves for us: There is little point in "searching fruitlessly for the magic distinction between commodities and other sorts of things."[23] (To think this distinction is built into goods is just another kind of commodity fetishism.) We can roughly distinguish three orientations to commodification. Some things are uncontroversially commodities and we do not worry about their marketability at all. In other cases, commodification is acknowledged as a problem—something that in principle ought not to happen—but corrective responses are possible; a certain amount of it may even be seen as inevitable and tolerable. In the final case, the problem is much more severe: commodification is thought to undermine basic distinctions or sacred values or to threaten social institutions that have powerful defenders.

What kinds of things provoke this last response? It turns out that many intuitively compelling examples of commodification involve, not tangible goods or products in the usual sense, but a social relationship. Depending on the particular relationship, this sort of commodification may be thought to be especially pernicious. Friendship, for instance, is a social tie that is not supposed to be instrumental. Trying to purchase a friend, the argument goes, shows that the buyer (or seller) just doesn't understand what friendship is. Whatever you are getting for your money, ipso facto it cannot be friendship. Goods like friendship, love, and respect by definition cannot be brought to market. When we see items or services for sale bearing those labels, we are really looking at some ersatz or debased alternative, not the good itself.

Michael Walzer's influential catalog of "blocked exchanges" is a list of goods he claims are in this sense naturally and properly outside the sphere of monetary exchange.[24] It does not include many items that you could put in a shop window, apart from human beings. Instead, it is made up mainly of social relations and institutions: he procscribes the sale of political influence, freedom of speech, marriage, criminal justice, and so on. The commodification of political influence, merit, justice, and the like prompts charges of corruption. Indeed, sales of these goods have well-established names: graft, nepotism, simony, bribery.In many of these cases (the pursuit of political office, for instance) we wearily expect money to be present, even if we might prefer to keep it out.

Other goods seem to have a different character. The threat of commodification provokes especially strong reactions where aspects of persons (and their social relationships) that are supposed to be intimate or sacred are made to yield marketable goods or services. Within the household, for instance, money mixes with domestic relations in complicated ways. People frequently end up in court as a result. Social scientists and legal scholars have recently begun to pay serious attention to how money works in these intimate relations.[25] Women's domestic and reproductive labor is typically embedded in the institution of the family, but it also has the potential to be a marketable service. The most common good that is both intimate (usually embedded in affect-laden social relations) and marketable (capable of being separated from a particular individual and sold commercially) is domestic labor. In the 1960s and '70s, proposals to commodify housework often provoked strong reactions, as today do arguments about the growth of markets in child care.[26]

Blood and organs can be thought of as tangible counterparts to these intimate yet marketable social relationships. They are literally part of oneself but can now be turned into discrete, marketable items. The same anxiety-provoking questions—about the place of money in theory and in practice, its role in exchange, and its potential to corrupt people or debase social relationships—are raised in both cases. But unlike a social relationship, you really could put a kidney in a shop window, which makes the prospect of debased exchange seem that much more real.

Do we see these negative outcomes in practice? Equally important, is the implied alternative—exchange governed by norms of gift giving or altruism—as straightforward as it seems? Empirical research is thin. There are few sociological studies of the blood supply and even fewer of the organ industry. At the same time, the blood and organ procurement industry has changed enormously over the last thirty years. Even though the supply still depends on free gifts, tissue procurement and distribution systems are by now remarkably complex. As a rule, they are not yet commercialized at the point of procurement, but the supply is managed in ways that make commonsense understandings of donation seem naïve. We need a way to think about the relationship between those who give (or sell) human goods and those who receive (or buy) them.

Four Arguments about Incentives and Actions

Arguments about the process of commodification and the effects of market exchange are closely related to our ideas about people's motives for their actions. Promarket rhetoric emphasizes the ability of markets to maximize individual utility and collective welfare in a decentralized fashion. Antimarket rhetoric focuses on what for-profit exchange will do to us as human beings: markets will corrupt our motives, diminish our moral worth, appeal to our basest desires, lead us to see others as means rather than ends, and so on. Every account of the market and its effects rests on some sort of theory of what people's motives and desires are or ought to be, and of what money will do to them. There are many such theories, and they go in and out of fashion. This is not the place to present or evaluate all of them. Instead, I will focus on recent research that has tried to pin down this relationship more precisely. The approaches I discuss differ in method, but each tries to get at the role of money and monetary incentives in people's decision making.

Recent discussions of commodification, altruism, and the market draw on one of four contrasting views about the relationship between people's motives and their actions: (1) People are rationally motivated by incentive systems. (2) People adapt their motives to the incentive system. (3) Incentive systems can be subordinated to people's motives. (4) People are culturally constrained to give certain accounts of their actions.

People Are Rationally Motivated by Incentives

This is the easiest approach to describe. It is also the most clearly worked out, most frequently criticized, and most rhetorically successful. Expected-utility theory says that people are motivated by self-interest and have a complete, transitive, continuous set of preferences that allow them to choose between different bundles of goods and services. In general, markets enable goods to flow to those who value them most highly, as measured by their willingness to pay. Free markets are the most efficient way to allocate goods because the equilibrium of supply and demand maximizes welfare, defined as the sum of consumer and producer surplus.

The theory of rationality that underlies these ideas is quite thin.[27] It makes relatively few assumptions about what people are like, but the assumptions that are made have far-reaching implications. Of the arguments presented here it is the only one that does not see money or the market as themselves having any particular effects on people. Money is a neutral medium. In theory it is a way of expressing value in an easily calculable way. In practice it facilitates the exchange of goods. Money does not corrupt or ennoble those who use it; the market is just a way of bringing buyers and sellers together. It promotes the general welfare through an unexpectedly elegant process of decentralized allocation by the invisible hand.[28]

The ostensible neutrality of money and the automatic action of the market may be carried over to the self-presentation of those who subscribe to the theory. Economists sometimes think of themselves as presenting technical results beyond the reach of normative debates, thanks both to the features of their theory and to its apparently positive concept of rationality. This belief is not really true, but it has two important implications. First, rational self-interest is allowed to serve as the default model of action in many policy debates. Second, the presumed technical neutrality of economics can be parlayed into moral authority and thus becomes a rhetorical asset.[29]

From this perspective, a market for blood or organs should be much like any other market. There may be some altruists who would not give their organs away if a market for them existed. But our experience with other goods strongly suggests that creating a market for, say, kidneys would—if the incentives were right—result in a larger supply, even if most of the altruistic suppliers dropped out. Such markets are illegal at present, but those who advocate them argue that this will surely change sooner or later. As blood and especially organ shortages become more acute, the pressure of demand will lead the market to emerge as the obvious solution. The simplest blood and organ markets would involve direct contracts between willing buyers and sellers, with perhaps some state regulation to ensure the quality of the products. But this is only one of several possibilities. A market in organs need not involve people hawking their kidneys in classified ads or on eBay. Some kind of indirect reimbursement—a health insurance premium reduction, for example, or a futures market of some sort—might do just as well, while bypassing the concerns of the squeamish.[30]

People Adapt Their Motives to the Incentives

If we suspect that people are not simply rational utility maximizers, the relationship between monetary incentives and individual motives becomes more complicated and our theory less elegant. For instance, it may be that not everybody is selfish, or at least not all the time. If there are altruists in a population, then the presence of money rewards will discourage rather than encourage them to act. Richard Titmuss made this case for blood. He suggested that if a blood supply runs on cash incentives, then altruistic suppliers will be driven out and be replaced by selfish ones.[31] But because he wrote as though people were either egoists or altruists, Titmuss really just replicated the economistic view of action with a morally disapproving spin. The egoists beat the altruists, and this is bad for everyone. (In chapter 5 we will see that things are more complicated than Titmuss thought.)

Bruno Frey's formulation of this idea is more interesting.[32] He conducted a survey of Swiss citizens who were to decide whether they wanted a nuclear waste dump in their area. (The waste dump proposal was a real proposition, not a hypothetical experiment.) Slightly more than 50 percent of the respondents were prepared to have the waste dump in their backyards, so to speak, even though a large majority (80 percent) knew what the risks were. Respondents were then told that the Swiss government was offering substantial monetary compensation to the residents of the host communities.[33] The rate of consent dropped by half. Frey suggests that the offer of money "crowded out" other motives, such as civic virtue, that had motivated a majority to agree to the proposal without any tangible incentive. Unlike Titmuss, Frey does not distinguish between born egoists and born altruists. Rather, he suggests that people will respond in kind to the incentives they are offered. The point is not simply that bad incentives lead to perverse or unhappy outcomes as individuals make rational choices in the light of those incentives. Rather, actors may assess themselves and their choices using the model of action implied by the system. In Frey's terms, an incentive system designed for knaves will cause people to behave like knaves. Each system will get the people it deserves.

There are several versions of this view. They can be distinguished from one another by the degree to which the authors think that people's motives will be debased by the introduction of monetary incentives. Michael Walzer's early, influential formulation argued that different goods exist in different spheres and that we try to keep the metrics associated with these spheres from leaking into one another.[34] The trend in the more recent literature has been away from this idea. But many commentators are unwilling to give up the idea that money tends to have a corrupting influence on people and their relationships. Margaret Radin's work on commodification is a good example. She rejects Walzer's argument and acknowledges that many relationships are "incompletely commodified" without a great deal of harm being done to them. Many relations or exchanges have a market-oriented aspect, but they will generally have many nonmarket features as well. This leads to the optimistic idea that "the values of personhood and community pervasively interact with the market and alter many things from their pure free-market form."[35]

Still, Radin worries about the power of the market. In particular, she argues that if we insist on talking about all aspects of our society using the rhetoric of the market, we will end up being unable to think about it in other terms: "I don't mean to deny that the rhetoric of economics is frequently useful as one among the many ways we can think about relationships and behavior. I am arguing that something important to humanity is lost if market rhetoric becomes (or is considered to be) the sole rhetoric of human affairs, excluding other kinds of understanding." She suggests that we need various kinds of legal regulation in order to stop this from happening.[36] Radin transposes Frey's argument from internal motivations to cultural discourse and suggests that, in the absence of legal constraints, market talk will crowd out other ways of understanding ourselves. Her concerns are supported by empirical evidence that learning about theories of rational utility maximization, by taking Econ 101, for instance, tends to make people more selfish.[37]

When applied to the case of human goods, this view suggests that we get what we wish for. If we talk of blood as if it were a commodity, then people will come to commodify it in practice. By instituting a market for blood or organs, people orient themselves toward these goods in a new way. The rational calculus of costs and benefits comes to override alternative ways of thinking about the value of what is being exchanged.

Incentive Systems Can Be Subordinated to People's Motives

Frey is concerned that the introduction of money crowds out people's better motives. Viviana Zelizer rejects the general idea that money has the inherent power to do this. Rather than being slaves to money, she argues, people are a good deal smarter than it. People use different payment systems and exchange tokens to express and define different social relations.[38] Zelizer focuses mainly on the ways that people evade the supposedly homogenizing effects of money by earmarking it in different ways. Her historical research shows that even as the American state became increasingly successful at eliminating the variety of unofficial coinage and currency that had circulated in the nineteenth century, people came up with new ways to distinguish kinds of money for their own purposes. Thus, "the forms of monetary earmarking multiplied just as official money became *more* uniform and generalized."[39]

Zelizer and Frey are not talking about quite the same thing. Zelizer wants to show that money is not a neutral, homogeneous medium of exchange. She does not directly address the effects of money as an incentive. Rather, she begins with the idea that people are involved in many different social relationships and then goes on to show how they use money to mark and express those relations. But it is not difficult to see how her ideas might be extended and applied to the question of motivation. Insofar as people share conventions for earmarking—that is, as long as they know how to "read" the underlying social relationship expressed by the form of payment—an offer to enter into some *new* relationship, encoded in a particular payment token, will be easy to understand. They will be able to choose different payment conventions to express different sorts of motivations to act. And as Frey's work suggests, how people read these offers will inform how they respond. An offer of cash compensation from the government suggests one kind of relationship between the state and its citizens, one that the Swiss were quite suspicious of. It looked to them like the government was trying to buy them off. But a different form of payment—a commitment to building new schools, say, or some other form of indirect investment—might have been interpreted differently. Frey does not explore this possibility. By extending Zelizer's ideas, we can speculate that although the physical exchange of a good or service can easily take place within many different social relationships, different relationships will tend to commit the parties to different bundles of motives and expectations.

Zelizer herself does not argue explicitly along these lines, but this idea is consistent with her emphasis on the constitutive role of social relationships in distinguishing kinds of payment tokens and social obligations in different circumstances. When it comes to exchange in human goods, Zelizer's approach suggests that people will not be opposed a priori to payments or reimbursement for the time and effort they take, say, to donate blood. But the form the reimbursement takes will be very important, and the wrong choice by the collection agency might provoke a strongly negative reaction. Similarly, it might not be difficult for the families of organ donors to accept a payment in connection with their decision to donate. But because the form of the payment will mark the kind of social relationship established by the transaction, the organ procurer must tread carefully. A further consequence of these ideas is that the shape of a transaction, and how it is explained or accounted for, is vitally important to those involved and may determine whether the transaction happens at all.

People's Accounts of Their Actions Are Culturally Constrained

The fourth view is somewhat similar to Radin's argument about market rhetoric. In a number of books, Robert Wuthnow has explored how Americans think and talk about money, selfishness, and altruism.[40] He finds that it is difficult to make sense of the idea that people have clear motives for acting in specific circumstances. Instead of being motivated by a consistent underlying principle of selfishness or altruism, or by some stable set of preferences, people can cite many different reasons for why they volunteer, give money to charity, or work so hard at their jobs. In fact, there are *too many* good reasons available. Any one of them would be sufficient. This excess of reasons causes people to avoid accounting for their actions in terms of motives in the first place. They prefer to "situationalize" their actions "by telling stories that embed values in specific contexts, that frame principles as particulars. . . . Accounts of our motives, when all is said, are basically stories—highly personalized stories, not assertions of high-flown values but formulaic expressions of ourselves."[41] People prefer description to motive and like to emphasize how they just happened to get involved in something rather than give the impression that they are somehow deserving of praise.

Wuthnow tells a subtle story about the rules that organize how people talk about their own actions. Of particular interest here are the examples he presents of people shying away from altruistic explanations for their actions. Altruism is not culturally plausible. If someone appears to act in an altruistic way, we may suspect that they are really furthering their own ends. It is not just that we are cynical about other people's motives. Perhaps more significantly, we will often account for our own actions in self-interested terms, even when an unselfish explanation would be more truthful. We may even be more willing to engage in unselfish behavior if we can pretend that we are motivated by self-interest.[42]

Paradoxically, organ donation provides a particularly good example of this cultural suspicion of altruism. Occasionally, someone will approach their doctor or an organ procurement organization and express a desire to donate a kidney, while they are alive, to someone in need. Not to anyone in particular (like a sibling or spouse, as happens with most living donors), just to one of the many thousands of people they know desperately need a transplant. Such an action, on the face of it, is pure altruism of a quite remarkable kind. The donor will not meet the recipient of their organ, and there is no external motivation whatsoever to give. But even though the transplant community continuously emphasizes its gratitude to donor families, and often calls them heroes, reaction to these potential donors has been different. Until recently, transplant coordinators would not consider such an operation. Not only have doctors been reluctant to encourage such donations, but their initial reaction has been to suspect that the would-be donors are mentally ill. In newspaper accounts of transplants involving such donors, doctors commonly note that they questioned the donor's motives and were allowed to proceed only after the donor passed a rigorous psychological evaluation.[43]

What should we make of these four versions of the link between motives and actions? The first two are oriented toward the individual and are quite strongly cognitive: they make claims about what goes on in people's heads when money incentives are offered to them and lead to normative questions about commodification. For economists, the problem of how to value things is already solved and built into the assumptions of utility theory. The question then is why there *aren't* markets for blood and organs, given their superiority in allocating goods. In philosophy and law, these questions can be answered in three main ways: by relying on a theory that says what we should value and how, by having some way of calculating the good and bad consequences of commodification, or by appealing to societal values to tell us which exchanges should not be subject to the market. Although legal and philosophical work does consider empirical evidence about how people use money and how exchange is organized, its main concern is to develop normative arguments about whether and to what extent we ought to limit people's exposure to the market.

In contrast, sociological work looks more closely at the cultural and institutional basis of what is often called simply "the logic of the market." Zelizer shows that people are creative with money—they aren't simply corrupted by or enslaved to it. Neither is it a merely neutral medium of exchange. Her work broadens the debate because it shows people have more room to act, in particular to use money to draw distinctions between kinds of social relations, than other discussions credit them with. These findings support arguments of the sort made by Elizabeth Anderson and Margaret Radin, in that they show people expressing qualitatively different sorts of value in a wide variety of social relationships. But they undercut those arguments, too, by showing how flexible people can be when it comes to using money in social relationships, even intimate ones like sex or family.

Wuthnow similarly moves us away from questions of individual motive and character. This is true even though his research is filled with the voices of interviewees accounting for their charitable acts and explaining how they think about money. Wuthnow shows that people are reluctant to speak about themselves and money in particular ways. It's not that people don't want to admit that they're motivated by money or success—that's what the American dream is all about, after all. They have no general conviction that markets are a bad thing. Rather, they usually don't want to be pinned down to some specific set of selfish motives. Even when they are acting out of self-interest they generally do not want to appear *calculating,* especially with regard to friends or relatives. But people don't want to seem too saintly either, so they avoid accounting for their actions in altruistic terms, even when such accounts would be plausible. Instead, they tell stories, often built around chains of contingencies, about how they ended up volunteering their time or doing a particular job, or spending so much time at work. When they do appeal to more general standards, they often rely on language produced and refined by organizations specializing in voluntary work. I argue for an approach that focuses first on the institutions that organize exchange, rather than the self-interested or altruistic motives of individuals. This does not mean we do away with individuals and incentives, or with reasons for giving. We have a good social psychology of altruism that explains a great deal about how people choose to give and how they come to think of themselves as the sort of person who volunteers their time, contributes their money, or donates their blood.[44] But a social-psychological view is not enough to account for the variation we see over time, across organizations, and between countries. Individual motives play out within social contexts organized around particular conceptions of the relationship between donors and recipients—the gift relationship.

Gifts and Markets

What is a gift? What does a gift relationship entail? The classic answers to these questions were given by Marcel Mauss and Bronislaw Malinowski.[45] A long tradition of scholarship and empirical study in anthropology pursues these questions in great detail.[46] Here I will focus on the Maussian insight that a gift is something much more general than a present wrapped up and given on a special occasion. Rather, gift exchange can involve “any object or service, utilitarian or superfluous. . . . ‘Gift’ does not identify either the object or service itself, or the forms and ceremonies of giving and getting. Instead, what makes a gift is the relationship within which the transaction occurs.”[47] In gift exchange, transactions are *obligatory,* the goods exchanged are unique or *inalienable,* and the exchange partners are *related* in some way beyond the specific transaction.[48] Contrast this with an archetypal market relationship. In the market, exchanges are voluntary or formally free (no one is forced to buy or sell), the goods exchanged are fungible, and exchange partners are linked only by the contract governing that particular transaction.

Gift exchange is obligatory in two senses. There is a general expectation that everyone (in the relevant group) ought to participate in the transaction, and in particular cases the exchange of gifts recreates the expectation of future participation. This kind of exchange can be thought of in utilitarian terms, with individuals always assessing how much they owe to others and finding ways to place people in their debt. This was Malinowski's view: "sooner or later an equivalent repayment or counter-service" would always be demanded by the giver.[49] Mauss acknowledged this aspect of giving, noting that "the unreciprocated gift . . . makes the person who has accepted it inferior, particularly when it has been accepted with no thought of returning it."[50] But this obligation to reciprocate also expresses the continuing existence of a particular relationship between the parties, and, as James Carrier puts it, this is not just a matter of profit and loss within the exchange:

> Doubtless, if one party to a gift relationship feels regularly and unjustly slighted, he or she will consider ending the relationship. But this does not mean that the transactor is calculating debts and credits, emotional or material. . . . Instead, the repeated imbalance itself marks a repeated violation of the obligation to give, receive and repay in that relationship, and hence marks the end of that relationship as it had been.[51]

The other two dimensions of gift exchange reinforce this point. Gifts are not fungible or anonymous items but rather are inalienable, in the sense that they carry the identity of the giver with them. Gifts are "followed around by their former owner, and they follow him also," in Mauss's phrase.[52] This of course is not some magical quality that gifts mysteriously have. Mauss means that gifts are particular objects rather than anonymous items and that their particularity comes from their tie to a specific person.[53] The third dimension of gift exchange highlights these persistent social ties between exchange partners. Giver and receiver are aware of this relationship during and after the transaction. We can see that each aspect of the gift relationship is implicated in the others: obligations presuppose social relationships; exchanges within relationships express the social identities of the partners and re-create the obligations; gifts renew social ties between individuals and further develop their relationship to one another. This is what Mauss means when he says that gift exchange is a "total" social phenomenon, where "all kinds of institutions are given expression at one and the same time."[54]

Putting gift and market exchange side by side is a good way to bring out the distinctive qualities of each. They work on different principles, but we should be clear about what this will mean in practice. Although Mauss himself saw gift and commodity exchange as belonging to different social worlds, it is more useful to think of them as tendencies that can be found together to greater or lesser degrees in the same society. For instance, we should not think that the presence of money automatically means that gift exchange is impossible or has been driven out by the market. (This is one of the main lessons of the recent economic sociology discussed in the previous section.) Circuits of gift giving persist and thrive alongside the market. Moreover, long-term relationships *within* the market may have many of the features of gift exchange, despite the fact that its transactions are nominally governed by contracts.

In important ways, exchange in human goods does not fit well into the classical account of the gift relationship. The key difference is that it cannot be a face-to-face transaction. Blood and organs must be collected and distributed by complex organizations. And yet, in part because of the powerful potential of human goods to express social solidarity, the "gift template" still governs the exchange, and each dimension of the gift relationship is present in the practice of blood and organ donation. The coordinating organizations work to elicit donations from donors, to elaborate the meaning of the donation, and to specify the nature of the gift and the obligations that flow from it. This work involves both logistical and cultural effort. The result is a practical system of procurement and distribution but also a moral order of exchange. How successful these organizations are at managing each aspect of this process—and whether the varying demands they face are reconcilable—is the subject of the rest of the book.

An Overview of the Book

Organizations procuring blood and organs create and sustain their donor pools by providing opportunities to give and by producing and popularizing accounts of what giving means. This means that the structure and practices of these organizations play a larger role in our understanding of blood and organ donation than much of the debate on the relative merits of self-interest and altruism would lead us to believe. Procurement organizations do their work in different ways and with different resources to hand. As a result, some are more successful than others. There is substantial variation in procurement rates for both blood and organs, and while some of this variation comes from the individual qualities of donors or features of the social environment much of it has its source in the structure, scope, and strategies of the organizations in charge of the supply. Organizations do not simply manipulate donors more or less effectively: they are themselves affected by the exchange relations they institutionalize, and this can have important consequences. The conception of the gift relationship promoted by procurement organizations affects how the organizations themselves understand their own interests and, as we shall see, how they respond to crises in the supply.

When I say organizations produce and sustain altruism I mean that they have large effects on the volume of blood and the number of organs procured each year, but also that they shape our *ideas* about altruism and donation by producing accounts of what it means to be a donor. Chapter 2 traces the emergence of the cultural account of organ donation in the United States from the late 1970s to the 1990s. As organ donation became more common, transplant advocates worked to convince the public that it was a morally worthwhile idea. By publicizing a specific set of arguments for donation, lobbying politically, and working to placate or sideline their critics, they helped make donation a socially acceptable choice in the face of sudden bereavement. I show how this process resembles the historical debate over the growth of the life insurance market, another good that was initially controversial. If we follow the course of the public debate about transplants over a twenty-five-year period, we will see that the range of responses to the new technology narrows over time. The standard account of organ donation represents a consensus produced through the professional efforts of transplant advocates.

This consensus was not fixed, however. As the demand for organs continued to grow, serious discussion of financial incentives for organ donors became more and more common. I trace the rise of "market talk" about organ donation and show how it has gradually become more acceptable to talk about organ procurement in this way. But there is a large gap between the straightforwardly profit-oriented proposals to introduce a market for organs and the more sophisticated payment systems thought by many to be practical solutions. Simple "cash for organs" markets of the kind most feared and criticized in standard accounts of commodification are not widely advocated today (though they were the first proposals to be articulated). When it comes to making policy, the most successful market advocates are also the ones most sensitive to sociological questions about the expressiveness of payment tokens and the meaning of the exchange relations they imply, even though they usually do not draw attention to this fact themselves.

Organizations produce cultural accounts of donation, but mostly they do the hard work of procuring blood and organs from donors, often in difficult circumstances. Inevitably they tackle the problem of finding donors in different ways, and this leads to variation in the rates of donation that we observe. Chapters 3 and 4 explore the effects that organizations have, both on the size of the blood and organ supply and on the characteristics of the donors who provide the goods.

Chapter 3 asks why some organ procurement organizations (OPOs) manage to collect more organs than others. Many things affect organ procurement rates, from individual decisions to sign a donor card, to county mortality rates, to state road-safety laws. Sorting them out with the available data is difficult. This chapter quantifies the structural and organizational forces at work in the procurement process. On the structural side, I show how differences between the service populations of OPOs affect their procurement rates. The characteristics of these populations—such as their density, racial composition, and poverty rate—have strong effects. In terms of organization, I measure the role played by the size and operating budget of OPOs, their logistical scope, and their procurement policies and strategies. This analysis takes us away from the image of the individual donor motivated by generosity, an image that these organizations have themselves done much to create and popularize. It does not do away with that image or render it meaningless. But it does show that it would be impossible for individuals to act so generously in the absence of these organizations and that, in spite of the variety of individual motives and choices, structural and institutional patterns explain most of the variation in procurement rates.

An important difference between blood and organ donation is that blood is relatively easy to donate and can be given regularly. Nevertheless, very few eligible donors ever give. Is this because there are not many altruists in the world or because blood collection organizations could be doing a better job? Chapter 4 tackles this issue from a comparative, cross-national perspective. The empirical question is, how does the social organization of the blood supply affect the quantity of blood collected and the character of the donors who give it? As with the organ supply within the United States, I begin with the observation that the amount of blood collected in Europe varies a great deal across different countries. If altruism was a strictly individual characteristic, we should not expect donation rates to differ between countries as much as they do. Drawing on data about the organization of the European Union's blood supply and patterns of donation across Europe, I show that different "collection regimes" not only affect the size and shape of the donor pool (i.e., the volume collected and the sociodemographic makeup of the donor population) but also shape the *character* of donation, determining in part what sort of an activity it is and what it means. For instance, students are less likely than average to have ever given blood, except in countries where the Red Cross is in charge of the supply. In those countries, students are significantly more likely to have given. The explanation is organizational: the Red Cross effectively recruits students, while state-run or independent bloodbanking systems do not seems to do so as effectively. Again, the more general argument is that our understanding of altruistic action is greatly improved by taking a comparative, organizational perspective.

Chapters 2 through 4 treat the altruism involved in the procurement and exchange of blood and organs as an outcome. Variation in the size and composition of the donor pool is the result of differences between the organizations that manage the supply of blood or organs. Chapter 5 takes the argument a step further. There I argue that, in some circumstances, the exchange relations that organizations sustain through their public accounts of donation can have important effects on decision making by the organizations themselves. As the moral expectations associated with different kinds of exchange relation become institutionalized, they can affect how organizations respond to new information in their environment. Chapter 5 examines what happened to the U.S. blood supply when a new disease was discovered within it. Why did the organizations in control of different parts of the blood supply react as they did to the emergence of HIV in the early 1980s? They did not all respond in the same way to the crisis, even though they all had the same information about it and, in retrospect, there were some steps all of them should have taken. I argue that the exchange relationships linking blood suppliers and recipients to collection organizations shaped what these organizations did. The obligations attached to these relationships affected the way blood collection organizations understood their interests and, as a consequence, how they reacted to uncertainty about HIV. I also show that the effects of gift-based and profit-based relationships were not what the conventional wisdom predicted.

In the concluding chapter, I draw together these empirical findings and ask what they can tell us about the future of exchange in human goods. As demand for organs increases and new secondary markets for human tissues emerge, the ultimate source of almost all these goods remains freely given gifts. I ask whether changes in the logistics of procurement—increasing efforts to procure donors efficiently, the pathway followed by donated tissues, the multiple uses to which whole blood is immediately put—are undermining the moral order of exchange, encapsulated in the idea of the "gift of life," that procurement organizations have worked so hard to establish. The gift exchange of blood and organs has proved surprisingly robust, but I argue that the short-run logistical demands placed on procurement organizations are in tension with the cultural account of donation that they have produced over the long run. The public conception of exchange in human goods, and especially organ donation, is at odds with rapidly growing and increasingly lucrative secondary markets in human tissues.

When arguing about the ethics of blood or organ sales, it is tempting to believe that we know what the outcome would be if a market for kidneys was created. Perhaps it would run smoothly along lines prescribed by a straightforward account of the economics of a commodity market. Or we might be instinctively horrified at the prospect and feel that profitable exchange in kidneys is neither morally nor socially viable. Commodification is often presented as a semiautomatic process of debasement or deterioration. Voluntary giving becomes, by implication, a safer, less exploitative way to exchange goods that should not be priced by the market. Contemporary bioethical debate about blood and organ donation focuses overwhelmingly on the moment of individual choice, the decision to give or sell, and its moral implications are measured in terms of the amount of autonomy possessed by the donor and the degree to which their consent is informed.[55] Sometimes the absence of money is taken as the best indicator of an absence of coercion, even though gift exchanges are often a conduit for power. Studies of how goods are measured, compared, and transferred in practice—the sociology of commensuration—provide a corrective to this tendency by asking where standards for choice and comparison come from. Commensuration is "the expression or measurement of characteristics normally represented by different units according to a common metric."[56] Two things are incommensurable, roughly, when they "cannot be aligned along a single metric without doing violence to our considered judgments about how these goods are best characterized."[57] Of central interest from a sociological point of view are the "social technologies" of measurement and comparison that take unique or heterogenous items and make them comparable according to some metric.[58] In parallel fashion, a clear understanding of the organizational efforts that keep items *out* of the market is central to understanding the structure of exchange in human goods. "Donation" suggests a system where gifts are unconditionally given and gratefully received. But research on markets and actual systems of gift exchange shows a more complex reality than the stylized versions often found in public debates about commodification and altruism.

Organizations produce logistical opportunities to give, thereby finding and recruiting donors. Accounts of this process are put together informally by participants and more systematically by organizations with people to motivate. Donors, doctors, and beneficiaries write books, publish articles, and give talks to help spread their message. Similarly, the organizations have problems that their staffs must deal with, so they invent schemes, lobby lawmakers, and write professional guidelines to help solve them. But because stories propagate as accounts and solutions establish themselves as institutionalized scripts, they may grow beyond their origins and can begin to shape the exchanges they describe. The study of altruism generally, and the case of human goods in particular, has neglected these processes and focused instead on heroic individual altruists.[59] Research framed in this way can offer effective counterexamples to the strongest claims about all-pervasive selfishness, but in the process it accepts too much of the received wisdom about the nature of giving behavior and the dangers money poses to it.

Students of cross-national variation in economic institutions have repeatedly shown that different countries and regions institutionalize their own distinctive varieties of capitalism, and that what people mean by "self-interest, rightly understood" varies with these institutions. The institutional basis of altruism has been less closely examined, and the active production both of opportunities for altruism and the social identities that go along with them is a neglected topic. The voluntary donation of human goods is an organizational accomplishment. Procurement organizations with resource problems to solve must first find donors as effectively as they can, then manage them by elaborating and institutionalizing a conception of gift exchange that makes individual donations meaningful, while making large-scale procurement possible.