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Response to Susana Narotzky
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Responding to Professor Narotzky's comments on my essay poses a challenge: I find very little serious disagreement between us. I do, however, appreciate the opportunity to clarify and expand on some of the issues she raises, and to note a few points at which we do seem to diverge.

To start with her opening remarks, yes, perhaps the basic perspective my essay takes won't surprise many economic anthropologists. However, I am not aware of any work explicitly linking economics either to ethnographies of social interaction or to the so-called "ethical turn." Be that as it may, I took my task as addressing non-anthropologists—something my discipline hasn't been very successful at in recent times. The strong grip that rational choice models and, more generally, universalizing assumptions about individual agency and freedom, have on the public and some academic fields—especially on my side of the Atlantic—should make this obvious.

Do moral economies involve struggles over contending systems of value, as Professor Narotzky says? Of course they do. Indeed, every time an anthropologist addresses the ideologues of neoliberalism, he or she is engaged in just such a struggle (unequal though it may be). But it doesn't follow from this that the struggles are best understood as taking place between wholly consensual, internally consistent systems of value. Even the society where I carried out my first fieldwork, which could easily have stepped right out of Marcel Mauss's *The Gift* (1990) was fraught with long standing internal contradictions, apart from its historically recent confrontations with the processes of commodification (Keane 2001).

Professor Narotzky remarks that "society is more than interaction among and between living individuals: it is about past histories, future imaginations, and creatures of many kinds." Nothing I've written should suggest otherwise. The question, however, is how those histories, imagination, and creatures become real for people in their concrete practices—and how practices can transform them. We need to show how histories and imaginations *motivate* and *serve* people's actions without simply *directing* them as if they were following a cultural rule book. Here I can only gesture toward an argument that required several chapters of my book, *Ethical Life* (2016) to lay out. At the heart of that argument are three ideas: recognition, evaluation, and affordance. People's capacities to act, and to evaluate one another's actions, depend on their actions being recognizable to themselves and to others. Actors find one another's actions recognizable to the extent they share, in Narotzky's words, past histories and future imaginations. For instance, to evaluate a transaction as a gift, and thus as an extension of the giver, in the classic anthropological formulation, or as a component of the partible person, in Marilyn

Strathern's more recent version (1988), can only occur when the participants in that transaction share a repertoire of possible kinds of transactions, and means of identifying and judging them. But this doesn't mean that the nature of an action is given in advance or indisputable—rather, the possibilities available in any given historical context are affordances that can be taken up in a variety of ways, with different consequences. Hence the interest of examples like kidney exchange, where these categories are under pressure. Traditions are not just matters of rote reproduction—something with which I'm sure Professor Narotzky agrees. The challenge is to work out what follows empirically from this rather general assertion.

What Narotzky calls “struggles around category making” is, in fact, the topic of several chapters of *Ethical Life*. These struggles play out at many scales. One chapter looks at one individual's efforts to control his own commitments which are being pulled apart within the conflict between agrarian and commercial values dominant in his indigenous community in Mexico. Other chapters look at larger social fields, including entire communities undergoing religious conversion or embracing piety movements (drawing on Robbins 2004 and Hirschkind 2006 respectively), as well as efforts to reformulate the terms of Confucian, Marxist, and liberal moral thought among the first generation of Vietnamese nationalists, revolutionaries, and the emergent, albeit less politicized, middle class. And, I hasten to add, there's nothing in principal dyadic about social interactions, aside from the heuristic ease of exposition. One example that book examines is the way in which American feminist consciousness-raising groups in the sixties and seventies found themselves collectively developing new categories of moral judgment and political action.

Where I think Professor Narotzky and I part company, perhaps, is in two issues. The first concerns the long period of dependence of young children on others for survival compared to other primates. No doubt evolutionary processes have endowed human infants with a propensity for orientation toward other persons. But the workings of natural selection are of a quite different order than those of instrumental rationality. In my view, the teleological concept of instrumentality simply doesn't apply to the blind mechanisms of evolution. If infants are oriented to others *because* their survival depends others, it doesn't follow that they value others *in order* to assure their survival.

The second point of partial difference concerns our readings of Strathern on distributed personhood. The dynamics of social interaction and distributed cognition are, in my view, consistent with the basic idea of “distributed personhood” and “partible persons.” But, as I understand it, Strathern's account of Melanesian partible persons is a theory (Strathern's) of a theory (Melanesians') of the person, both of which work on distinct analytical planes from the practices and ways of life that they are theorizing. If this is right, then as long as we don't ontologize them, these Strathernian and Melanesian concepts are not fundamentally at odds with the account I offer. Indeed, I would argue that the dynamics of social interaction are a condition of possibility for the theories of both Melanesians, and their ethnographers. And, incidentally, this also means that different moral economies should not be equated with different “ontologies”—otherwise, there would be no shared field of struggle on which moral economies

could even confront one another. Surely anthropology would stand on firmer ground if it could demonstrate how ethnographic research articulates with the world described in other social sciences, rather than insisting on the incommensurable exceptionalism of our sphere of knowledge or the incommunicability among different social realities.

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