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It is only a matter of time, when these transactions will seem to appear 'legitimate' when we become familiar with their prevalence. People living in a developed society in the 1960's would have been aghast to hear of surrogate wombs or kidneys for sale, but is present-day society bristling with indignation? No.

Market-forces led logic would consider the moral rightness or wrongness of this argument meaningless. To the market-place, including all those 'financial' entities like hospitals, "private" universities or immigration departments of governments of rich countries, these types of transactions would by now seem to represent efficient arrangements where the economics of scarcity, supply and demand are operating smoothly.

Those marketing terms like 'incentive' used with economic terms like 'availability' (supply) and 'willingness to pay' (affordability) then merge with sociological terms like "improving social utility" to form statements like "making well-priced goods and services available with incentive for those most willing to pay for them, thus improving social utility". The questions not being asked are: "Is it fair or right to buy and sell this good or service?" "Will doing so, degrade the status of a human being to an unacceptable level?" Regularly, even in an environment more accustomed to moral perfidy, responses should be "No" and "Yes" respectively.

At risk of being ridiculed by the marketing community, I would argue that moral values must never be replaced with market prices. The market must invariably be made to fail against social norms and values. Civic duty must be affordable enough to be more powerful than money.

Let us take the case of a hospital, where people have historically sought the mercy and benevolence of doctors and nurses, to bring them back to health and well-being in mind, body and spirit. Would the health system be fulfilling its purpose if medical attention is prioritised for a wealthy patient who has a superficial flesh wound while a poor patient with heart failure is struggling to live?

In our market-led society, it would seem logical and financially efficient to first attend to the rich patient, satisfying that "customer's" need and ensuring profit-maximisation. However, the gullible public is not allowed to see this aspect for comparative purposes, as the luxury hospitals, by their very nature, will deny access to the poor patient with heart failure in the first place.

Does this mean that social values and civic duty have been effectively hijacked by market forces (greed)? Is there any attempt to balance the two? Not likely. Take the concept of education. For Sri Lanka, figures like CWW Kannangara come to mind. Consider developments from its beginnings in the Guru Kula system where students visit their teachers and live with them while learning their master's skills to the present day where numerous colleges and institutes with "international" (Western) sounding names and "fashionable" sounding qualifications are offered.

Are the purpose and intention, and indeed the function of these present-day institutes of "higher" education to impart knowledge and educate students to see them grow into wonderful human beings worthy of respect, for the pure pleasure of having discharged a master's civic duty to teach the young protégé or disciple? Not by a long shot!

The current thinking is that our moral duty, civic responsibility and fiduciary obligation can be sacrificed for personal monetary gain, where the entity with the highest capacity to profit will be allowed to do so,



# WILL MARKETS EVENTUALLY DESTROY HUMAN VALUE SYSTEMS?

regardless of consequences to society. So, repairing people's bodies or expanding their knowledge and mind are similar to making consumer goods or providing legal consultation services.

Is there a moral argument as to whether all social phenomena can be commodified for profit, or is the argument about whether a hospital should sell its services to the highest bidders, those poorest of persons should sell one of their kidneys, one good eye, rent their womb or sell their eggs?

Take the practice of US companies taking out life insurance policies for their staff,

often unknown to the staff members themselves. The companies do so, not out of compassion for the employee's future widow or widower but for the financial interest in the event of death of their employee. According to the law of market forces, wouldn't it be logical that it would be in the best financial interests of the company if employees die before they retire? Think about it.

Our market society will discourage this sort of discussion. In the estimation of the leaders of this framework, people must only think about consumption, biological impulses and survival within the mechanisms provided (for their convenience?) within this seriously degenerating framework, at their own peril.

The beginning of the twenty-first century can probably be defined as a time when almost everything could be commoditised to be bought and sold. During the latter part of the twentieth century, many countries abandoned the theories of philosophers who encouraged ethical interactions aimed at the welfare of the community at large, and drifted towards 'market' economies which depended on the benevolence of rich capitalists to provide sustenance to the workers.

It has taken surprisingly little time for the market economies to be over-run by the joint endeavours of industrialists and politicians working in tandem, resulting in market economies morphing into market societies. In this environment, social phenomena including human dilemmas do not look to moral debate for solutions, but seem to allow market forces to determine outcomes.

The assumption here is that the laws of the marketplace will resolve issues that were hitherto decided by established moral standards. Monetary incentives have been allowed to 'arbitrate' as the appropriate mechanism by which the best choices are made. Thus, almost every engagement of human activity comes with a price tag as a commodity, where value judgments submit to the quantum of money necessary.

We might argue that paying a child to tidy his room 'encourages' good habits, or offering a reward for reading a school book at home helps develop necessary skills in a child. When these children become adults, they are already familiar with 'paying' for privileges such as jumping a queue (a bribe?) or getting someone who needs the money, to stand in the queue for you, to paying a policeman for the privilege of driving faster than is allowed by law.

Some third world governments offer 'cash incentives' to enlist men for voluntary sterilisation so that population may be controlled, where he forfeits his 'birth right' to procreate, in exchange for money. Rich countries 'sell' their citizenship for large cash payments from migrants in poor countries. Australian "PR" and American "Green Cards" are thus exchanged for money. We are already familiar with these arrangements, and will not see anything unusual in such economic transactions.

So, we can sell our kidneys to transplant recipients, blood donated by civic-minded citizens can be sold to private dialysis patients in luxury hospitals, a place in a woman's womb can be rented for conceiving a baby for couples who might not have this capacity. Note here, that poor people are invariably the 'sellers' and rich people are usually the 'buyers'. Qualifications that we do not actually possess, can be bought over the Internet, with appropriate paper, serial numbers and references that are 'authentic', so we can be PhDs or Doctors of Sorts by 'paying' for it. I can almost visualise the howls of protest, where the reader's sense of morality is outraged, and this 'transaction' condemned.

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- 3 සත් පුරුෂයන්ට ප්‍රිය නොකිරීම
- 4 අසත්කර්මයට කැමති බව
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- 9 කීපෙනසුලු බව
- 10 මවුපියන් පෝෂණය නොකිරීම
- 11 වංචාව
- 12 රස බොජුන් තනියම වැළඳීම
- 13 උඩගු නැයන් පහන් කොට සැලකීම
- 14 සත්‍රී ලොල් බව
- 15 සූරා ලොල් බව
- 16 උ කෙළියෙහි ලොල් බව
- 17 ලද දෑ විනාශ කිරීම
- 18 වෙවෙනා සේවනය
- 19 පාරදර සේවනය
- 20 මහලු වියෙහි සිට නරුණියක සරණපාවා ගැනීම
- 21 අරපෙරස්සම නැති සත්‍රීයක ප්‍රධානත්වයෙහි නැබීම
- 22 අරපෙරස්සම නැති පුරුෂයකු ප්‍රධානත්වයෙහි නැබීම

“ධම්මො භවෙ රතඛනි ධම්මචාරී”  
(දහමෙහි තැඹිලිකරණයක් වන විසින් රක්ෂා ලබයි.)  
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