

Barter with oneself

An analytic approach

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Abstract

This paper offers a piece of conceptual analysis in the field of economics. Its focus is the structure of exchange, approached through a simple but telling phrase: “you cannot barter with yourself.” The claim points to the logical conditions that make exchange possible. Where there is only one will, no comparison of valuations can take place, and market exchange is excluded. This is a conceptual point, not an empirical one.

The analysis develops in three steps. First, it sorts out different kinds of distinctions—metaphysical, epistemological, semantic—following Haack, and shows that the issue here concerns the grammar of action. Second, it introduces a notation that marks the gap between relational actions (ϕxy) and attitudinal states ($W_x p$), which helps avoid category mistakes. Third, it revisits Terence W. Hutchison’s challenge and the later rejection of praxeology, showing how much of the critique stems from blurring conceptual and empirical levels.

The aim is not to defend the doctrinal figure of Mises, but to clarify what is at stake from a methodological point of view. Conceptual analysis reveals that what grounds economic reasoning is not knowledge of particular facts, but the logical form that makes talk of exchange, cost, and co-operation intelligible. This opens a space where Austrian insights can be read in dialogue with the traditions of analytic philosophy, especially the philosophy of language and of action.

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